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**DENVER AND THE WEST**

## Pilot's glider skills lauded

Hero of Hudson was elite at AFA  
 By Howard Pankratz  
*The Denver Post*

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POSTED: 01/18/2009 12:30:00 AM MST  
 UPDATED: 01/18/2009 01:44:46 AM MST

They were among the elite at the Air Force Academy — the cadet glider pilot instructors.

And Friday, they reveled that one of their band of Air Force brothers — 57-year-old Chesley B. "Sully" Sullenberger III — made a perfect gliderlike landing of a huge Airbus A320 jetliner in the middle of the Hudson River on Thursday between Manhattan and Weehawken, N.J.

"There were only about 12 of us in a class of 840-plus that were soaring instructors," recalled John Barry, the Aurora school superintendent who was in the Air Force Academy class of 1973 with Sullenberger. "He and I have landed a lot of gliders over the years when we were younger, but I think that is the first one he's done in the water."

Barry, who was a two-star general in charge of strategic planning for the Air Force and at the Pentagon on Sept. 11, 2001, was in Phoenix on Thursday when he heard about the ditching in the Hudson.

When he heard the pilot's name, Barry was "delighted."

"I was kidding this morning that as good a glider pilot as he was, I figured he'd just land in the water and pull up to one of the docks and just rest one of the wings on the dock," said Barry, laughing.

"Sully was one of those exceptional pilots. Cool-headed. Even then he was identified as a quality pilot," Barry said. "He had the makings of a hero even then."

Barry said Sully's flight plan was ironic.

"I grew up in the Bronx, so his flight path flew right over my house. When I looked at the track, I said Sully flew right over my house and put it down," Barry said.

Both Barry and John Eisenhart, who was in that select group of glider instructors, have no doubt that their academy training paid off.

"Part of being a glider pilot is that you are trained to land off-field," Barry said.

"So, one of the things you are taught is how to make a quick decision on whether you are making it back or not. And if you don't make it back, you don't hesitate — you pick your site and you make your landing."

Eisenhart, now a captain with United Airlines, said it was an honor at the academy to be a cadet glider instructor.

"We were all cut out of the same cloth," Eisenhart said. "We had a lot of camaraderie. We had a lot of great experiences. I tell you there is no doubt in my mind that the experience that we received flying gliders came into play (Thursday)."

Eisenhart said that when a glider is turned loose, the altitude is the pilot's energy and his friend.

The higher they are, the more distance they have to "roam."

"You have to keep the airplane headed downhill, so to speak, to keep flying," Eisenhart said. "The big liability in a ditching is the breaking up of the airplane. What he was able to do was keep that airplane nice and flat and skimming right above the water — bleeding airspeed down.

"That kept the airplane intact, which ultimately kept people alive," Eisenhart said.

Both men said they weren't surprised that Sullenberger walked the length of his sinking plane twice to make sure that no one was still on board.

"As the captain, as the boss, we are required to make sure everyone is off that airplane before we exit the airplane ourselves," Eisenhart said.

"It's the old adage that you never leave anyone behind," Barry said.

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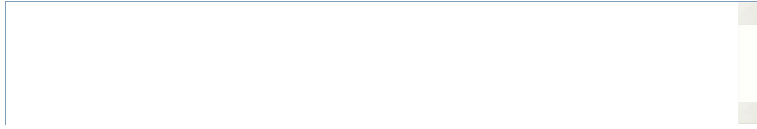
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