

# Plane-truck crash at LaGuardia Airport kills 2 pilots

Patrick Martin  
23 March 2026

An Air Canada Express passenger jet with 76 people on board crashed into a firefighting truck that was crossing the runway as the plane landed late Sunday night. The pilot and co-pilot were killed when the cockpit of the plane, a Bombardier CRJ-900, sheared off under the impact of the collision. One pilot has been identified by relatives as Antoine Forest. The name of the other pilot has not yet been released, but both were based in Montreal, Quebec.

Remarkably, the two firemen in the truck survived, as did all 72 passengers and two flight attendants. The forward flight attendant, Solange Tremblay, was strapped into a seat that was ejected from the plane on impact and travelled some 300 feet. She suffered a broken leg and other injuries, but survived.

The two firemen, identified as Sgt. Michael Orsillo and Officer Adrian Baez, were also hospitalized with non-life-threatening injuries. Of the passengers, 41 were taken to the hospital for treatment, and all but nine, some with serious injuries, had been released by Monday evening.

It appears from preliminary reports of communications between the control tower, two planes and the firetruck, that a single controller was handling both takeoff and landing and ground traffic along and across the runways. Normal practice is to separate the duties of directing planes in the air and overseeing the movement of ground vehicles, but late at night, with the acute shortage of air traffic controllers, one controller may be doing both jobs.

A recording of the communications posted on LiveATC.com and widely reported in the media, found that the Air Canada plane was cleared to land at Runway 4 at about 11:35 p.m. Two minutes later the firetruck requested permission to cross Runway 4 to answer an emergency request from another jet, and this

was granted. Then the controller instructed a Frontier jet taxiing and preparing to take off to stop. Seconds later, the controller told the firetruck to stop. But at 11:40 p.m., the Air Canada jet, just after touching down, collided with the firetruck and sent it tumbling.

The impact of the collision broke the cockpit off, killing the two pilots. Without the nose, what was left of the front of the plane tilted sharply up, while the rear of the jet was held down by its own weight. Fortunately, the jet came to a stop without pinwheeling or any damage to its fuel tanks, which could have endangered the lives of everyone on board.

LaGuardia Airport was shut down immediately, with more than 500 flights canceled Monday before one runway was finally reopened that afternoon. The airport is one of the busiest in the United States, with 30 million passengers a year passing through it.

Secretary of Transportation Sean Duffy sought to downplay the shortage of air traffic controllers. “As our airports go, LaGuardia is a very well-staffed airport,” he said. “We are a couple controllers short in total but it is a very well-staffed airport.”

Actually, press reports said that LaGuardia has four vacancies out of 37 ATC positions, a shortfall of more than 10 percent. Seven graduates of the Federal Aviation Administration’s air traffic control academy in Oklahoma City are receiving training at La Guardia, but are not yet prepared to handle the job on their own.

The flight from Montreal to LaGuardia was operated by Jazz Aviation LP, which is an Air Canada subcontractor and the second-largest regional air carrier in Canada. There is no indication of malfunction in the plane, although one passenger told the *New York Times* that flight attendants had warned of a possible emergency landing as the plane was descending. The passengers escaped by climbing onto the wings of the

plane and then jumping down to the tarmac.

Several passengers interviewed by local media called the two pilots heroes and credited their efforts with limiting the crash. “They did everything they can to save us and they didn’t save themselves and they couldn’t save themselves,” Rebecca Liquori, a nurse said. Another passenger, Clément Lelièvre, credited the pilots’ “incredible reflexes” for saving the lives of the passengers, saying that the pilots braked forcefully just as the plane’s wheels touched down.



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