

Following the rules to the death.

After every accident or serious incident we often find that the fault tree hasn't had roots that go all the way to ground. In 1974 I was an Ops officer at RAF Mildenhall. We were flying RC-135s from Omaha (Offutt, AFB) and it was a pretty tough schedule. Take off from Omaha was about 2300 and the flight refueled over Canada. By dawn it was over the UK for another refueling and then a scenic tour of the Baltic. A bunch of back to back flights with minimum crew rest and the last flight was air refueled after its scenic tour of the Baltic and sent back to Omaha.

On one of these flights the very tired A/C bounced the landing, punched the rotate-go around button and pulled the nose up following the autopilot bug. However, since he had hit the Weight on Wheels switch the bug wasn't 7 degrees nose up but it added the 7 degrees to the already steep deck angle, giving them something way above a stall. The third pilot in the jump seat saw the situation and pushed the throttles to the fire wall. What saved them was the fact that the fiberglass boom pod fairing was riding on the runway so the nose wouldn't get any higher. The TF-33 engines finally spooled up to full power and they climbed out for another try. When they did the post flight walk around they realized that death was only a fiberglass fairing away.

Next crew to come over had two copilots VS an Alternate Aircraft Commander (qualified in both seats) and an AC. When the crew came in for their last go the AC said he was really tired. Thought he could do the mission safely but not the return leg. I opened AF Regulation 60-16 and showed him that he was the ultimate authority for safety and he could land whenever he was ready. He was launched and I was back on duty 11 hours later when he sent the message that he wouldn't need the tanker and would be landing to crew rest. I called the Colonel and the flight surgeon to meet the crew. Flight surgeon said he looked tired but SAC was fit to be tied and wanted to Courts Martial him. Took a while for things to settle out and SAC to connect the almost loss of an RC-135 with the fact that the AC did the right thing. They also figured out that recovering at Mildenhall and crew resting saved a tanker sortie so it was a wash and much safer.

That's my story and I'm sticking to it.

Zot Barazzotto