

A young Lieutenant learns the value of dependability while observing laxity of inattentive Ground Crews while preparing for a night time combat operations over Laos.

BACKGROUND:

During the early days of my career I was a Forward Air Controller (FAC) assigned to combat duty in the Vietnam War. I was flying counterinsurgency missions to interdict enemy traffic on the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos. The night missions were of long duration and often in inclement weather while evading enemy anti-air defenses. The mission was fraught with anxiety and fear, but my anxiety always seemed worst during ground preparations and just prior to takeoff. From that point, every sense was laser focused on completing the mission ahead and returning safely.

With the burden of a particularly challenging mission ahead of us, a fellow crew member and I left the tactical operations center just before midnight for a six hour flight. As we entered the secure parking ramp I noticed several inattentive mechanics and a crew chief in their shelter, drinking coffee and laughing over a Playboy magazine. Beyond them in another shelter a Crew Chief was sound asleep. On the opposite side a ground support crew lounging in the rain while waiting for a refueling truck, with neither chocks nor ground lines securing their aircraft.

As I approached our assigned airplane, I noticed, however, that it was fully chocked, ground lines were secure, windows were closed and taped to repel rain, and the all black airplane was cleaned to perfection. As we approached the O-2, number 495 (I still remember the number to this day), my crew chief who had been resting **underneath** the airplane was waiting. The Airman came to attention and presented the Form 781 logs to me for my inspection. He then proceeded to remove the chocks and sealing tape, then opened the crew doors for access. After a complete preflight with the Crew Chief respectfully at my heels, I found no discrepancies.

Everything was in order.

I knew then that I could **depend** upon this Airman to be both disciplined, capable, and fully attentive to his duty, my life would depend on it. His professional presence made a huge difference in my personal confidence. I knew that at least one person on the flight line could be depended upon to do his job to perfection, and thus my chances of returning home were greatly increased. I would have no other crew chief work on my airplane as long as he was available! I determined to follow his example in my life. It made a difference. It still does!

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