

by Lt. Bill Avery

Keflavik, Iceland, was once on the front line between the Soviet military and the free world. Today, day-to-day operations center more on being the one and only gas station in the North Atlantic, handy for aircraft that can't make a straight shot from North America to Europe. Recently, a foreign aircrew stopped here with tragic results.

The aircrew arrived from Europe in their twin-engine, medium cargo plane. There isn't much to do in these parts, so after a night in billeting, they were back on the ramp first thing in the morning for their next leg to Canada. The day was unusually calm for the winter: the temperature a balmy 39 degrees F, with only 6 knots of wind. It was just after 8 a.m., but the sun wasn't due up for another hour.

The rest of the aircrew completed their before-start checks while the pilots filed and got the weather brief. Then they all manned up, and the pilots started the engines. A lineman wasn't present, since the aircrew hadn't requested one. They were just about to call for taxi clearance when one of the aircrew told the loadmaster that the battery door might still be open. Usually, a member of the aircrew makes sure this door is closed during preflight. Once you get in the aircraft, you can't see if it's closed.

The loadmaster put on an ICS headset to go outside the aircraft to check the battery door. The main cabin door is just forward of the No. 1 engine on the port side. The battery door is on the aft end of the sponson that houses the port main landing gear. Egressing

# Still Deadly Aft



Small yellow signs mark the horrific results of a body meeting a spinning prop.



# er All These Years

the aircraft isn't a problem, provided the crewman walks a 45-degree angle between the wing and the nose of the aircraft. We aren't sure what happened, since there were no eyewitnesses, but the result was both tragic and gruesome.

The loadmaster walked into the No. 1 propeller. The spinning blades killed him instantly, throwing body parts more than 100 feet. The chaplain had to administer the last rites to his flight boots. Firefighters used fire hoses to clean the aircraft and the ramp. All members of the emergency-response teams spent time with the base psychologist to help deal with the trauma. I was devastated by meeting the wife and two children of the loadmaster when they came to Iceland to recover the body.

A safety commission from the loadmaster's home country is investigating the mishap. During their visit, I learned that they hadn't had a similar mishap in their country in more than 50 years.

As I write this article, the commission has not yet published its conclusions. I do know that, for some reason, the loadmaster didn't follow standard operating procedures for being near a spinning propeller. Please let this tragedy serve as a reminder the next time you or one of your shipmates is near a propeller, whether on a flight deck or on an airfield ramp. Your SA must be flawless while you're completing your last check, doing maintenance, loading weapons, escorting passengers, or just checking a battery door. 

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