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20/20

February 9, 1990

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BARBARA WALTERS Host

Too Old Too Soon

ESTHER ZUCKER Producer
STONE PHILLIPS Correspondent

Danger on the Half Shell

SHARON YOUNG Producer
LYNN SHERR Correspondent

Missing a Chance to Live?

ROGER SERGEL Producer
Dr. TIMOTHY JOHNSON Correspondent

The Drug War Status Report

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February 9, 1990

HUGH DOWNS: Good evening. I'm Hugh Downs.

BARBARA WALTERS: And I'm Barbara Walters. And this is 20/20.

ANNOUNCER: From ABC News, around the world and into your home, the stories that touch your life. With Hugh Downs and Barbara Walters, this is 20/20. Tonight, shellfish. If you're eating them raw, you're taking a risk. They may have come from polluted waters, from beds fouled by sewage.

Dr. CHARLES SANDERS, Department of Medicine, Louisiana State University: It's like playing Russian roulette.

ANNOUNCER: It can mean hepatitis, cholera. This list goes on. It's a delicacy that millions enjoy, but what are the odds that you'll get sick? Lynn Sherr warns of "Danger on the Half Shell."

Plus, for some cancer victims, new hope from chemotherapy. Extreme side effects frighten patients, but do some doctors cut the dosage when they really should be boosting it?

Dr. VINCENT DeVITA, Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center: There are clearly people who are losing their lives because they're not getting adequate chemotherapy.

ANNOUNCER: Dr. Timothy Johnson with something unexpected in the war on cancer. Are some patients, "Missing a Chance to Live?"

And safety in the cockpit. Older pilots. They've done it all, maybe even survived it all. Both of these pilots are heroes, but once they reach 60, they're finished.

ROBERT BOS, Airline Pilot: There's no ands, ifs or buts. That's it.

ANNOUNCER: When veteran pilots get pushed out, does the flying public lose out?

STONE PHILLIPS: Do you think you're as good a pilot today?

Capt. BOS: In some respects, maybe a little better.

ANNOUNCER: Stone Phillips investigates. The pilots make their case, "Too Old Too Soon." Those stories tonight, February 9, 1990.

Too Old Too Soon

WALTERS: When you hear the pilot say, "This is your captain speaking," do you ever wonder how old he is? Think about that on your next flight and ask yourself at what age should a pilot be considered too old to fly? If he's nearing 60 years old, he's mature and, most important, experienced, would you even give his age a second thought?

DOWNS: And Barbara, many older pilots and others feel that the question should not be how old is the pilot, but how good is the pilot. After all, what's so special about the age of 60? Why not 58 or 62? The debate on this is intensifying, in part because of the heroic actions of pilots in two recent air accidents. Stone Phillips has been investigating whether government rule is arbitrary in making pilots "Too Old Too Soon."

STONE PHILLIPS: [voice-over] The runway is lit for takeoff. At the controls, Captain Robert Bos, a veteran of 37 years. His skills are about to be put to the test. This aborted takeoff was actually just a demonstration for 20/20, the cockpit a 747 Flight Simulator where Captain Bos avoided a possible dis-

aster with precision thinking, steady nerves and quick reactions. But with more than one million Americans taking off and landing in commercial airliners every day, real emergencies happen. Your life might have just been saved by the exceptional skills and reflexes of an experienced captain like Robert Bos.

But what most passengers don't realize is that in three months' time, Bos will become one of 700 airline captains forced to leave the cockpit this year. Next year, the number will soar to nearly 800 and by 1992, we will lost another 1,000 of our most experienced, competent and seasoned airline captains, all ejected in the name of safety by a government rule. Some are happy to go, but many, including Captain Bos, are not.

[interviewing] When is your birthday?

ROBERT BOS, Airline Pilot: May 18th.

PHILLIPS: And what happens then?

Capt. BOS: May 18th I'll have to discontinue flying the airplane either as a Captain or a First Officer. No longer will I be able to function as a pilot in command and that's it. There's no ands, ifs or buts. That's it.

PHILLIPS: The rule that will force Bob Bos to retire from the captain's seat this spring is a 30-year-old regulation that's known as the "Age 60 Rule," which has been challenged and debated for years. It prohibits anyone 60 years or older from sitting here in the front of the cockpit as pilot or co-pilot on any commercial airliner carrying more than 30 passengers.

The rationale is safety. The assumption is that when pilots reach the age of 60, the FAA can no longer guarantee their health or their competence.

[interviewing] Do you think you're as good a pilot today as you were, say, ten years ago?

Capt. BOS: In some respects, maybe a little better. It's almost a paradox because I feel I'm reaching the peak of my professional capabilities and physically, I'm working probably as hard if not harder than I even did 10 years ago to maintain a good physical profile.

PHILLIPS: And yet, you are facing retirement?

Capt. BOS: Absolutely. It's not too good. I personally don't like it.

PHILLIPS: *[voice-over]* Captain Bos's claim that he is a better, safer pilot today is reinforced by his last in-flight evaluation. His marks were outstanding and a letter by a company manager said his airline was extremely fortunate to have captains with his talent out in the field.

Bos isn't asking that the Age 60 Rule be abolished. He just wants the FAA to make some exceptions when pilots are still healthy and competent.

Capt. BOS: We know, Mr. FAA, that you allow many pilots to fly with one eye, one ear, cardiovascular bypasses, hypertension, all kinds of waivers and exemptions given to pilots that are a lot less than 60 and, in the FAA's opinion, they feel even recovering alcoholics are continued to safely fly an aircraft. There are many more other pilots out there that are in good health and they're turning a deaf ear to it entirely, just because they're 60 years of age.

ANTHONY BRODERICK, Associate Administrator, Federal Aviation Administration: You must draw the line somewhere for safety and you must apply it fairly across the board.

PHILLIPS: *[voice-over]* Anthony Broderick is an associate FAA Administrator. Dr. John Jordan is with the FAA's Office of Aviation Medicine.

[interviewing] Why would a younger pilot with a history of alcoholism, drug abuse or heart problems be allowed to continue flying when a healthy

60-year-old is told he has to leave the cockpit?

Mr. BRODERICK: Because we have determined and found and, in fact, verified that we can do this safely.

Dr. JOHN JORDAN, Deputy Federal Air Surgeon: If we understand the disease or the condition, we can make an informed decision. We simply don't have those data with regard to age 60-related issues.

Dr. STANLEY MOHLER, Professor of Aerospace Medicine: They think of aging as a disease which it is not. It's a normal process.

PHILLIPS: *[voice-over]* Dr. Stanley Mohler spent 17 years with the FAA as director of Aeromedical Research. He's one of many experts in flight medicine who've been telling the FAA for years that pilots don't lose their skills just because they grow. Age isn't the problem, disease is. And disease can be detected as easily in a 60-year-old as a 40-year-old. Dr. Mohler believes it's the Age 60 Rule, not the pilots, that should be retired.

Dr. MOHLER: Age 60 Rule is an antiquated relic. It's equivalent to using the field of astrology to take the date of birth of a person and have that show whether that adult is capable of safely flying an airplane.

PHILLIPS: *[voice-over]* Two heroic landings last year by pilots close to retirement seemed to prove Dr. Mohler's point. In Iowa, 58-year-old Al Haynes miraculously landed his DC-10 despite a catastrophic loss of all hydraulic controls. The aircraft was nearly demolished, but the pilot's skill saved 185 lives. In Hawaii, Captain Dave Cronin, age 59, landed this badly crippled 747. His expertise saved 346 lives and yet Cronin was forced to retire after his next flight.

Mr. BRODERICK: You can't look at one truly commendable, nearly heroic act and say, "On the basis of that unique performance we should change the way the FAA deals with 60,000 airline pilots and 400 million airline passengers every year."

PHILLIPS: But aren't you depriving the traveling public of some of the most experienced, some of the most seasoned airline pilots in the fleet?

Mr. BRODERICK: That is an argument that we've looked at. We've looked at it very carefully and the data that we have suggests very clearly that the additional experience doesn't outweigh the increased risk that these pilots see over the age of 60.

PHILLIPS: *[voice-over]* The data the FAA points to time and again to defend the Age 60 Rule comes primarily from this seven-year-old study. The study found that pilots in their 40's and 50's have a much lower accident rate than pilots in their 60's. The problem with the study is that it had nothing to do with airline pilots. It focussed on private pilots flying much smaller planes with a lot less training and critics say comparing the two is outrageous.

Rep. JIM LIGHTFOOT, (R) Iowa: That's not even apples and oranges. That's apples and billy goats. I mean, they're just totally unrelated.

PHILLIPS: *[voice-over]* Congressman Jim Lightfoot is a private pilot and flight instructor himself.

Rep. LIGHTFOOT: It'd be like comparing a professional truck driver to, you know, my aunt that drives two miles to work. There's no comparison.

Mr. BRODERICK: What we're looking for is not to have an exact comparison and an exact predictor. What we're looking for is the best scientific evidence that tells us whether or not it is reasonable to expect that pilots who are over age 60 have a higher accident tendency than those under age 60.

PHILLIPS: But the accident rate study the FAA points to as the best scientific evidence was, in fact, never published and never intended to address the Age

60 issue. And critics say it's not only irrelevant, it's incorrect because statistically the study was stacked against the older pilots to begin with.

Here's why. When the accidents rates for pilots under 60 were figured, the statistician included more than 95 million hours of flying by commercial airline pilots without including a single airline accident. He left those accidents out, ignored them completely, so naturally, the younger pilots appeared to be flying more with fewer accidents than pilots in their 60's. The older pilots had no airline flying hours to count because the Age 60 Rule won't allow it.

[voice-over] We asked the author of the study what would happen if all those additional airline hours were not included.

RICHARD GOLASZEWSKI, Author of Study: What you'd find is that the age-based difference in accident rates going from 50 to 60 would be less pronounced. And I have to grant you that. However, they'd probably still be a bit higher.

PHILLIPS: *[voice-over]* Actually, just the opposite is true. When pilots challenging the Age 60 Rule had Golaszewski's accident rates recalculated without all those airline flying hours, the accident rate for active pilots in their 40's and 50's was higher than for pilots in their 60's. And pilots in their '70's had the lowest accident rate of all.

Mr. GOLASZEWSKI: I'll be the first one to admit that it's not the last word on the subject, that more research needs to be done. But you have to realize, in fairness, that I never set out to answer this question about the performance of airline pilots.

PHILLIPS: *[voice-over]* One of the few options available to 60-year-old captains who want to stay in the cockpit is to fly corporate or commuter planes because for some reason, the Age 60 Rule doesn't apply there.

[interviewing] If there's a significant risk with pilots over the age of 60, why is anyone allowed to fly over the age of 60?

Mr. BRODERICK: Well, of course, for private pilots, that question isn't relevant because you're talking about a private exercise of duty, not a common carrier transportation.

PHILLIPS: Well, I'm talking about pilots who are carrying commuter passengers — 25, 29 passengers — or a corporate jet pilot who's carrying 10 business executives to a business meeting. Are those passengers and their safety any less of a concern to the FAA than an airline passenger?

Mr. BRODERICK: No, they're not. And one of the things that this recent spate of interest in the Age 60 Rule has done is to motivate us to initiate a series of studies to see is there room to change the Age 60 Rule. Right now, today, we do not have evidence which will allow us to do that with confidence that we would be doing something that is safe.

PHILLIPS: *[voice-over]* For the 60-year-old pilots who choose not to leave the airlines, the only option is to take a back seat as Flight Engineer. That's the only seat the FAA will allow a 60-year-old to occupy in a big commercial aircraft.

LEE LIPSKY, Flight Engineer: To have been forced to step back to a job that I did 31 years is really— it does a trip on you. It's really hard to do.

PHILLIPS: *[voice-over]* Former Continental Captain Lee Lipsky moved back to Flight Engineer a year and a half ago.

Capt. LIPSKY: Now my responsibility is the mechanical aspects of the aircraft. I make sure that all the systems on the airplane have been serviced, but I'm really unhappy with my status. I feel that I should be flying the aircraft and should be back in the left seat as the captain. I've got the capability to do

it.

PHILLIPS: *[voice-over]* Continental Airlines has assured Lee Lipsky that if the Age 60 Rule were changed or an exemption granted, they would be open to reinstating him as captain and allow him to continue flying. So to prove that he's still healthy and competent, Lipsky put himself through a series of physical and psychological tests far more extensive than the FAA requires for younger pilots. Twenty-nine other captains did the same, among them Captain Bos, and they were all certified as fit to fly by a panel of experts, including Dr. Mohler.

Dr. MOHLER: If that's pilot's free of disease, he's a low accident risk pilot from that angle. And if that pilot demonstrates ability to handle all kinds of emergencies in these complex simulators and in flight checks, he's a low-risk pilot. It's time to let them fly past 60 when they're healthy and able.

PHILLIPS: *[voice-over]* So far, the FAA has refused to make a single exception to the Age 60 Rule, although the agency routinely uses medical tests and flight simulator checks to evaluate pilots up to the age 59 and a half. As soon as an airline pilot reaches 60, the FAA says the tests are no longer reliable.

But if the emergency is real and you are on board, who would you want at the controls? Some one with 37 years of experience, an excellent flight record and a clean bill of health would be hard to beat.

[interviewing] What's your last flight as a commercial airline pilot going to be like?

Capt. BOS: There is a feeling of leaving a good part of you there. It's going to be akin to losing a close member of one's family. I'm sure there'll be some feelings of grief about the fact that I have to give up a profession that I've loved for all these years and feel that I can continue on doing. It makes you feel like it shouldn't happen.

DOWNES: Yeah, but the government's stance on this, Stone, is not only ironic, it's irritating. When you consider that the space shuttle— there's no age limit on the space shuttle to fly it.

PHILLIPS: That's right, Hugh. You can be a commander or a pilot on the shuttle, take it into space, but a 60-year-old airline captain can't take a jet from Pittsburgh to Cleveland.

DOWNES: Preposterous. Where do the airlines stand on this?

PHILLIPS: Hugh, we talked to several of them who say they support the rule and they cite safety as the concern. But critics point out that retiring 60-year-old pilots means eliminating some of the biggest six-figure salaries in the air. At one airline, for example, senior captains earn an average of \$180,000 a year. Newly promoted pilots earn about \$60,000 less.

DOWNES: That may tell something. If they'd just test, test everybody, leave age out of it as an issue. Thank you, Stone.

WALTERS: He flies. Later, are certain cancer patients dying because their doctors are afraid of strong medicine? And next, did the raw shellfish you eat today sleep last night in the polluted bay? Lynn Sherr tells us of "Danger on the Half Shell," right after this.

[Commercial break]

Danger on the Half Shell

WALTERS: They're never listed in the menu as "Danger on the Half Shell," and why should they? Millions of Americans love to wine and dine over raw