

Hale Burge: And one time we had a B-24 in there and this almost cost me my life. We had a fuel leak between the interconnecting tanks on the right wing. So we drained the aircraft of all the fuel and had the panel off. It was about 2 foot by 18 inches and I had to go up there and check on that. Nobody told me, nobody had proper equipment for somebody to go into a gas tank. But I got up there in that tank and, boy, I was getting dizzy headed. I had a work stand under the opening where I went in and I crawled myself back there just barely got back there in time. And I breathed some fresh air and eventually fell out on the work stand – not completely but I had my hand on the rail. And that was my opinion of how close I come to dying in that aircraft.

Now later on in the military while I was back in Fairbanks, Alaska on the F-89 -- I'm just saying this because it's what happened there. A young man with ... had a nose fuel tank on the F-89 plus all the wing tanks and he was changing the fuel pump down in there. And in the next hangar – we had a hangar, a big hangar -- had a railroad tracks like with a big doors that divided the hangar in the middle and we had one section of it and we'd get 12 airplanes in ... no 9 airplanes. They could get 9 in and they could work on one right back of where I had the same thing going on on one of our 89s.

But I had ... we didn't have a regular pump affair but I had the guy in there with a gas ... a gas mask on with a hose hanging out of the fuel tank. There was an air hose blowing in there with fresh air and you don't want to leave him in there [more than] 15 minutes at a time with the best equipment. But that poor kid, Corporal or private, I forget which, died that morning, the same day I was working on one.

Well, you know, they never punished anybody for that. All they did was they sent a letter to the folks telling them he died and they paid their way to come up to see where he'd been working. But they didn't really explain why he died. I say the line Chief and the Flight Chief over there and the Crew Chief in charge should have been in trouble too. But nobody got punished for that poor guy dying.