

Hale Burge: Then I flew with these C-45s [Beech Expeditor], mostly as a co-pilot. Once in a while they'd have two pilots on but most of the time it was one and the Crew Chief. So I got a lot of time in there.

One morning ... one Friday afternoon a Captain come in and he says, "I been on leave for 30 days almost and I need four hours so I can get my flying pay. How about you taking a ride with me in the morning, on a Saturday." [I was not an officer but, just an enlisted man] I said, "I'd love it!" So off we went and I flew that thing for four hours all around Richmond, Virginia, Louisville, Kentucky and around back to Langley. So, I enjoyed that very much.

Another time I was with a Lieutenant Colonel who hadn't been in our organization very long when we flew over to Dayton, Ohio and Cleveland and back. And then coming back, headed towards Richmond, Virginia and we flew out too much east and we run out of lights on the ground – this was at 9:30 at night – and he didn't know what in the world he was doing. And I said, "Colonel," I said, "If you make a right turn here, and go about a half an hour or so we should see a beacon at Langley Field." And he just hesitated to do it, but he did and sure enough there we were about a half an hour later we see the beacon – they always have a beacon light rotating at Langley – and landed safely there.

One other time on a B-25 I flew from Kelly Field, Texas to Washington DC. It's normally about a 6 hour flight. So I watched everything going on as far as the instruments, the flight instruments and what have you, because I had a little seat, step stool I made, to sit right behind the pilot. And I'd look out the windows to see everything. So we left ... flew right on across to Mobile, Alabama and we kind of went a little too much east, I thought, before heading north.

Later on, the co-pilot says, "How accurate are these fuel gauges, Sergeant Burge?" I says, "Well, when I take the airplane for a 100 hour inspection some civilians help me with, I had to set those tanks empty when we had 10 gallons of gas in each one of them." I said, "so they're pretty low."

When I was watching the gauges, I says, "Where are we?" He says, "Oh, we're right down here at Langley Field, I mean James River Bridge [between Newport News and Suffolk Virginia] should be showing up pretty soon." And I looked at him and I thought, "Well, sir, I think it'd be a little bit off right there because we're still in North Carolina. And I still think you'd be better off to land at Langley Field for a little information – like you got business – instead of crashing up there on the river on the way to Washington DC." "Oh," he said, "we'll make it." We'll fly over the river in case we run out of gas we'll land in the water.

Ok. Thanks a lot. So I'm up there between the pilot and co-pilot the whole time watching gauges and making sure, switching tanks and helping him make decisions on fuel. So, in we come. And while up there I'd had a trailing antennae for the R-27 radio and you'd get stations all over the place and I got a little excited there and I forgot to pull the trailing antennae in. The lead ball weighed about a pound and all the copper wire wheeled out.

So, anyway, we come on in and landed at Bolling Air Force Base, Washington DC. And we come ... the two Colonels could park up in front of operations – especially the Inspector General. So I get down and I open the hatch, step down and I saw that big coil of wire there

because the outlet was right beside the entryway. And I grabbed my pliers ... dikes and I cut that big spool of wire off and got the baggage out of the ... we had a baggage rack built in the bomb bay – got the baggage out of there and set it on the ground. And this little Lieutenant come out in his staff car and the staff car driver. I set the bags down beside the engine and he said, “Sergeant put those bags in that carry-all.” I says, “Sir, my job is to put those bags out on the runway. The Colonel doesn’t expect me to be a bell-boy. If you want those bags in there, I suggest you put them in.” He looked at me like, “Who are you?” About that time the two Colonels stepped down beside their briefcases. He grabbed those bags and put them in there real quick.

So, I had ... after they left I had to fire up the engines and taxi to a parking space. It was about a mile away. I had the headset on and everything talking to the tower, and they told me what to do. So I started down the runway and I was doing about 50 miles an hour and about that time, number 2 engine quit. Oh, boy, I drove her on down on one engine and parked and called the fuel truck. The airplane normally held, with the bomb bay, 200 gallon bomb bay tank, hold 1174 gallons of gas. I put in 1135 gallons of gas in that airplane.

The next day when the pilots come out ready to leave they were astonished to think that they almost crashed in the Washington DC area.