

Hale Burge: But it's dangerous work, working on airplanes, especially those big airplanes. They catch fire so quick and what have you.

I remember one time before we ever moved up to the big hangar we were outside working on the airplane in the outdoors and the engineers filled sand bags along the runway. Well, we had a P-40 that we had rebuilt, put a new wing on and everything and we sent it back to the squadron. It had been test hopped and everything else but that squadron didn't trust anybody so they messed with it.

And anyway, they've got on the P-40 outside the firewall there's a bell crank you can hit the throttle on up one way and it'd be at idle or shut off. The other way it'd be wide open. So somebody made a mistake and that engine you never saw one fire up so quick like it did. But when it did, it run forward so fast the nose ... the prop hit the runway and tore the prop up and had to replace the engine again.

And another time I was out there working these guys along the runway with the sand bags and this P-40 come in and the right brake locked up on him. So, to keep from ... he pulled off the side of the runway in the sand and to keep from running clear off the edge he put on the other brake and the airplane tilted right over on the nose and was upside down and fuel was leaking out of the tank right behind the pilot. And these engineers were over there before I got there. I was about a block away. Before I got there they were pounding on the side of the fuselage of the hatch that slid backwards to try to get it all the way open. And I got there in time to stop that because they could have made a spark and that poor pilot could have burned up right there. So, anyway, I got them away from it and I got the hatch open and the seat belt was so tight we couldn't get it open and hanging upside down like it was. So I took a knife and cut it and the pilot fell out -- not too far when you're upside down in a P-40. But he fell down about 2 foot, 2 ½ feet into the sand. I rolled him out of there and he thanked me to beat heck. And that afternoon he come down in a jeep with a fifth of whiskey and told that maintenance officer Major Tracey that he was to have the afternoon off of that Sergeant that saved his life. Well, that was fine with me but we didn't get real drunk but we did have a few drinks.

But I never got anything for that. That was part of your job. You just do your job, you get no recognition, no extra livings of any kind. But I did pride myself in doing what I did when I was in the Service during World War II up there on Shemya.