

Hale Burge: I saw many things that went bad and we lost one guy one time from our squadron. I was talking about the engine ... the wing boxes for the P-40s, a huge thing. And one afternoon, the green hornet [so named because of his dark glasses and snoopy ways] was tired of this big box sitting up there so we had a crane like thing on a about a D-6 cat chassis and it had a big boom on the front of it and a weight right over the driver's seat. And all this stuff was heavy duty.

So the guy picked it up, the big box with that, and put it on a flat bed trailer and they took it somewhere. And I didn't go with them that day because I'm not the operator of that rig so. It went over there and the guy parked the crane right on the angle on the side of the ... kind of on the side of a hill – a little hill, not much. But anyway, he picked up the box and the wind blew and whipped it around and lo and behold it turned the whole thing over and he fell out of his seat and that heavy block of steel hit him on the lower part of his torso and legs. And they got him to the hospital but he died that night about midnight. So, it was very dangerous work when you had that wind blowing like it did on Shemya. You had to be extremely careful.

One other time I had a friend that was Jim Grider. I told him that ... when we got to the big hangar he was complaining of his stomach one day and kept complaining. So one day after dinner, they had a little dispensary along the way. We had to walk about a half a mile to our work area. And I said, "Jim we're gonna stop in here." "Oh no, I can't" [he says]. "We're gonna stop in here." So I forced him into this place and they checked him out and he had appendicitis. They shipped him over to the hospital and cut him open that afternoon. That saved his life because if that thing had ruptured who knows where Jim would have been today. Of course, he is dead now, later on he died in 1981. I kept track of him over in Knox, Indiana.

I went back in the Service in 1946, June of '46, and got assigned to the Inspector General in Langley Field, Virginia. And they had a small airport over there. I was always concerned about flying and I had flying status on a C-45, B-25 and C-47s as a Crew Chief/Flight Engineer. So I went to this little airport and learned to fly over there. And the first solo I flew the engine quit on me and I was up in a position where I got it to start again by jerking the throttle back and forth. But anyway, that was my first time learning to fly an aircraft.



Hale Burge and his airplane, Danville, Illinois, 2003. Suffering an engine out while in flight training didn't deter young Hale, he continued to fly after retiring from the service.