Flying with the Chief of Staff

While stationed at Andrews AFB, Maryland and working at HQ Systems Command, I was attached to the 89th MAW, which had a fleet of executive jets to fly generals and government VIPs to appointments around the U.S. I was always the copilot with a permanent-party wing guy being aircraft commander.

The mission on one occasion was to take the USAF Chief of Staff to the Naval War College at Newport, Rhode Island to give a speech. I did not figure to sit in the left seat that day, but I was surprised when the Chief climbed the stairs into the plane, turned left into the cockpit and bumped the captain AC to the right seat, consequently sending me to passenger seating in the rear. In the air I poked my nose up front every now and then.

The flight to Newport was uneventful; and upon landing the four star went off in a waiting staff car. The AC and I were not forgotten, however, as a Navy seaman graciously took us on a road tour of magnificent mansions by the sea. We returned to the plane in about an hour.

The flight back to DC had the same seat assignments. But, it was not clear sailing because after cruising a little while, the number one engine lost power.

The Chief turned to the AC and asked, “What do you think we should do?”

“Well sir,” he answered, “I don’t have a busy schedule today, I think we should put down for repairs.”

The general immediately retorted, “Well, I do have a busy schedule today.”

Sheepishly, the AC replied, “Sir, I think we can make it back on one.”

I don’t recall if the sick engine was shut down or throttled back to idle, nor did I read the Form 781 entry. But, I do remember it was a very slow flight home!