



Personality Column

AVIATION VISIONARY EXTRAORDINARY

By Henry M. Holden

SALUTE WILLIAM Edward Boeing, an American businessman who built an airplane company that has lasted 100 years this month.

Boeing was born in Detroit, Michigan, on October 1, 1881, to Wilhelm and Marie Boeing. His father, who emigrated to the United States, from Germany, in 1868, became wealthy selling Michigan pine forests and iron-ore properties. He died of influenza in 1890 when he was only 42 years old, leaving his wife, three children from a previous marriage, and eight-year-old William.

Marie eventually remarried and William, who did not get along with his stepfather, was sent to school in Switzerland. There he developed an exactness that persevered for the rest of his life.

In 1903, a year before he was to graduate from Yale University, Boeing left Yale, a decision probably influenced by his mother's remarriage.

At 22, Boeing headed for Washington State to make his fortune in Washington spruce. He wanted to take advantage of the opportunities in the risky and cyclical but financially rewarding, Northwest timber industry. Within two years Boeing had a flourishing business.

According to his son, William Boeing, Jr., Boeing was a perfectionist. While visiting his airplane factory at the Heath shipyard he had purchased in



1910, Boeing saw a set of improperly cut spruce ribs. He pushed them to the floor and crushed them until they were unusable.

Another time, a frayed aileron cable caused him to remark, "I, for one, will close up shop rather than send out work of this kind."

Boeing was a visionary, and a stickler for the facts. The wall of his outer office bore a placard that read: "2329 Hippocrates said: 1. There is no authority except facts. 2. Facts are obtained by accurate observation. 3. Deductions are to be made only from facts. 4. Experience has proved the truth of these rules."

BOEING'S FIRST PARTNER

One day in 1914, while Boeing was sitting in Seattle's University Club, Thomas Hamilton, later founder of Hamilton Metalplane Co. (acquired by Boeing in 1929), introduced Boeing to an Annapolis graduate engineer, US Navy Lieutenant G. Conrad Westervelt. Westervelt knew how to design and build boats, and Boeing asked him to help him build a yacht. Both Westervelt and Boeing shared a love for sailing and became close friends. When aviator Terah Maroney flew a Curtiss hydroplane to Seattle later that year, the pair took turns flying above Lake Washington. After a few flights, Boeing and Westervelt decided they could build a better airplane.

Since Boeing had financial resources far beyond Westervelt's navy salary, he went to Los Angeles and learned to fly at the Glenn Martin plant. He returned to Seattle with a \$10 000 Martin TA seaplane

"The machine was delivered to me in October of 1915," said Boeing. "I was convinced that there was a definite future in aviation, and I became interested

in the construction, as well as flying the aircraft."

Hiring a small group of engineers, Boeing began work on designing his first aircraft. At that time, Boeing's factory was a building they called the Red Barn on the shores of Lake Union. "It was from there that I made the initial test flight of the first Boeing plane," he said. That was June 1916. The seaplane was the B&W Model 1, (for Boeing and Westervelt). It was 9,5 metres long and flew 83,6 metres. From it grew the largest aerospace company in the world.

On July 15, 1916, Boeing incorporated Pacific Aero Products and consolidated the company's work at the Heath shipyard.

On April 8, 1917, US President Woodrow Wilson declared war on Germany, and on May 17, the company was renamed the Boeing Airplane Company. Boeing enrolled in the US Navy Reserve in July.

POST WAR ECONOMY

After the war, Boeing's company struggled. It made furniture and flat bottomed speed boats called Sea Sleds to make ends meet. The company started to show a profit from repairing military aircraft, and building biplane fighters designed by another company. By 1921, Boeing had re-established the company, and he married Bertha Potter Paschall, and brought her two young sons from a previous marriage into his home. Later, another son, William Boeing, Jr., was born to the couple.

Boeing demonstrated an ability to see the "big picture". He decided to use air-cooled engines rather than the traditional water-cooled engines on the Model 40A Mailplane, which was competing for the

Chicago to San Francisco airmail route. With it he won the bid.

Boeing had to underwrite a \$500 000 bond with his own money to compete on the airmail contract. Bertha Boeing was asked to launch the first Model 40A, but because of Prohibition, champagne was not allowed. She objected and a legend was born. In one version, she christened the plane with orange juice and soda. In another, she secretly used real champagne. In either case, this jump-started the company toward the mass production of commercial air transports.

In 1928, Boeing told an interviewer: "It is a matter of great pride and satisfaction to me to realize that within the short space of 12 years, an infant company with less than a dozen men, has grown to be the largest plant in America, devoted solely to the manufacture of aircraft presently employing 1 000 men."

On February 1, 1929, Boeing Airplane and Transport Corporation became United

awarded the Daniel Guggenheim Medal for the Model 247, the first modern commercial airplane, and its "aeronautical achievement." He said of the medal it "was a real climax of my life."

Boeing kept his promise to stay in touch with friends and colleagues. He returned to work as an advisor during World War II.

THE JET AGE

On May 14, 1954, seventy-two-year-old William Boeing was his former company's Guest Of Honour when the company's Dash-80, the prototype for the 707 passenger jet rolled out. It was an incredible leap in technology from the B&W he had built just 38 years earlier.

This time, Bertha was able to use real champagne. "I christen thee the airplane of tomorrow," she declared, and she was right; the 707 would change the face of aviation worldwide. It was the first of the famous Boeing jetliners.

" 1 - There is no authority except facts. 2 - Facts are obtained by accurate observation. 3 - Deductions are to be made only from facts. 4 - Experience has proved the truth of these rules. "

Hippocrates 2329

Aircraft and Transport Corp (UATC). It included several airlines, aircraft manufacturers, engine and propeller manufacturers.

In 1934, the Government enacted antitrust laws, and UATC was split into different companies. Boeing resigned as chairman, sold his stock, and began raising thoroughbred horses. However, he continued to remain on the sidelines as a keen observer.

On June 20, 1934, he was

William Boeing died September 28, 1956, aboard his yacht. He did not have a formal funeral, and his family scattered his ashes into the sea off the coast of British Columbia.

On December 15, 1966, William Boeing was remembered in the Aviation Hall of Fame, in Dayton, Ohio, "for outstanding contributions to aviation by his successful organisation of a network of airline routes and the production of vitally important military and commercial aircraft." →