

Bell, 40 Years in Aviation, Lauded for His Achievements

By BOB WATSON

A former Indiana farmboy who heads one of the nation's major aircraft companies was honored here Sunday evening as the dean of what an Air Force three-star general called "a small and select group" responsible for the growth of American air power.

He is Buffalo's Lawrence D. Bell, president and a founder of Bell Aircraft Corporation, whose achievements time and again have brought aviation fame to the Niagara Frontier.

He was honored at a dinner in the 174th Armory attended by nearly 1150 persons, nearly all of them members of the management of Bell Aircraft. The occasion was Mr. Bell's 40th anniversary in aviation, a record of service which makes him the country's senior active aircraft executive.

Cast Lot With Frontier

The principal speaker, Lieut. Gen. Lawrence C. Craigie, an Air Force deputy chief-of-staff, asserted that "a very real race" for air superiority is going on "and it is a race we have to win."

Had it not been for his preference for the Niagara Frontier, Mr. Bell might have been observing this milestone in his career in a more glamorous California setting.

He was vice president and general manager of Consolidated Aircraft Company when Consolidated moved from Buffalo to the West Coast in the 1930s. He could have moved with it. But he elected to stay behind and cast his lot with the Frontier.

Maj. Reuben Fleet, retired head of Consolidated who moved that company to California, still ribs Mr. Bell about his attachment to the Niagara Frontier. In a telegram read at the testimonial dinner, Maj. Fleet said:

"They fall hard who buck the trend by preferring Niagara Falls to California sunshine. Seriously, congratulations on a long and hard job well done."

Started in \$30 Offices

Two other old Consolidated executives also stayed in Buffalo back in the '30s—Ray P. Whitman, now Bell's first vice president, and Robert J. Wood, a Bell engineering executive whose aircraft designing has made aviation history. Those two and Mr. Bell incorporated Bell Aircraft in 1935.

The company started in \$30-a-month offices on Elmwood Ave., equipped with borrowed furniture. There were three employees, Mr. Bell, Mr. Wood and Mrs. Irene Bernhardt Hogue, then as now Mr. Bell's secretary.

The early struggles of Mr. Bell to sell stock and raise money to start his business are now almost legendary.

He rang doorbells. He did push-ups in the office of one prominent Buffalo businessman to show that he was in sound health and a good investment risk. But weeks went by in which he failed to raise a dime. He was so ashamed to face his associates that he avoided going to the office.

Bandwagon Rush Begins

Then the break came. Mr. Bell gives credit to the late Shelton Weed for "breaking the ice" in the stock-selling campaign that started Bell Aircraft.

This hardware merchant, a prominent Buffalonian, wrote his check and it hadn't even taken much salesmanship to sell him on the idea of a Bell Aircraft Corporation. Word of this got around and others jumped on the bandwagon.

It often was tough sledding, even after the first money-raising hurdle was cleared. Several times, a payroll was scraped together hours before payday. There was a period in 1940 when Bell Aircraft's back almost was to the wall when it had a new plane so hot that the U. S. couldn't use it yet and that the Government wouldn't let the company sell it to any other country, either.

But the way was opened in the nick of time for the sale of this plane, the Airacobra. Mr. Bell, always a super-salesman, nailed down orders for 1533 Airacobras to the U. S., the French and the British between April and August 1940.

Airacuda Its First Plane

Bell Aircraft started as a \$150,000 company. Today, it is a \$40,000,000 concern. What it has done since 1935 has made aviation history.

Its first plane was the pusher-type Airacuda, of which Mr. Bell speaks with loving affection and which he still is inclined to regard as his favorite Bell plane. In the design competition for this plane, Bell won over Lockheed by the narrowest of margins. Had it lost, the Buffalo company probably would have closed.

Bell's most famous plane in World War II was the Airacobra, which saw duty every theater of war. Its Airacomet was the first U. S. jet plane and its X-1 the first supersonic airplane. Today, Bell's emphasis is on helicopters, ultra-high-speed research aircraft and perhaps most important, guided missiles.

Came Here in '28

The head of the company since its beginning started in aviation in 1912 as a mechanic for an exhibition flying team. A few months later he went to work for the Glenn L. Martin Company, when it was listed in the telephone book under "amusements."

He rose to vice president and general manager of Martin, then came to Buffalo to join Consolidated in 1928.

As Bell Aircraft head, Mr. Bell has received the Daniel Guggenheim Medal, a Presidential citation, the University of Buffalo's Chancellor's Medal, an Air Force Association citation, the French Legion of Honor and the Collier Trophy.

At the Sunday evening's testimonial dinner, Ellery C. Huntington Jr., chairman of the Equity Corporation and a Bell director, referred to Mr. Bell's career as "a saga of American enterprise."

Bell Soon Will Fly Anti-Sub Helicopter

The Bell Aircraft Corporation is about to conduct the first flight of a new anti-submarine helicopter, the XHSL-1.

This was disclosed Sunday evening by Admiral Dewitt C. Ramsey, president of the Aircraft Industries Association, who spoke at the testimonial dinner for President Lawrence D. Bell of Bell Aircraft, marking his 40th anniversary in aviation.

"This model helicopter, contracted for in June 1950, will soon be followed by production aircraft," said Admiral Ramsey.

The admiral said that he was quoting from a statement given him by the Navy Bureau of Aeronautics chief in the Dallas area.

Calls Him 40 Years Ahead

"Larry is fortunate. He was born and reared at a time when his kind of accomplishment has been possible; when there was a premium on enterprise and risk-taking," he continued.

"The great issue today is whether we have that atmosphere. Are we preserving the sort of conditions in which Larry Bells can be developed?"

Executive Vice President Charles C. Fichtner of the Buffalo Chamber of Commerce quoted a high-ranking Air Force general as telling him that "Buffalo should be proud of Larry Bell as a pioneer in developing the U. S. Air Force by building aircraft and weapons consistently about ten years in advance of the readiness of the Air Force to use them."

Dewitt C. Ramsey, retired Navy admiral who formerly commanded the Pacific Fleet and heads the Aircraft Industries Association, paid tribute to Mr. Bell's accomplishments thus:

"In the military services over the years there has been a form of commendation cherished by those to whom it is addressed. I tender to you, Larry, that accolade, which says so little and means so much: 'Well done.'"

Cites Arms Revolution

Noting that the country's strength is in its industrial strength, Maj. Gen. George Olmsted of the Department of Defense lauded Bell's industrial progress and aeronautical innovations.

Gen. Craigie said that a revolution in arms, centered on atomic power, is placing on air power the key responsibility for the defense of the free world and the hopes of that world that atomic war can be averted.

"In the future with which we have to deal, atomic power and air power are inextricably combined," he asserted.

"The rise in the importance of air power to the Western world has, of course, been accelerated by two outside forces. One is the growth of communism as a world force. The other is the remarkable rise of Soviet air power."

Says Reds Mean to Learn Why

The Soviets, he said, are using Korea as a testing ground where they can pit their armament

against ours without committing Soviet forces.

"As long as the MIGs are being destroyed by our F-86s at a ratio of 9 to 1," he commented, the Soviets apparently don't intend to close their laboratory without learning why.

"There is an old saying that the best defense is a good offense. But for us, a democracy dedicated to peace, preventive war is unthinkable. On the other hand, by creating a strong defense and maintaining the readiness to launch a devastating air counterattack, we use air power as a deterrent to war."

Gen. Craigie said that the growth of American air power and of the American aviation industry is due to "a small and select group of which Larry Bell is dean."

Receives Camera, Album

"Dynamic is an overworked word," he continued, "but dynamic is the right word to describe Larry Bell."

The Bell management group presented a camera and a leather-bound album containing the signatures of 1150 management men to Mr. Bell.

Mr. Bell replied humbly: "Working with you has been a wonderful and thrilling experience. I wish you all good luck. I'll stay with you and make this a bigger and better corporation."

Replying to the glowing tributes paid to him, he added:

"I've listened to all the nice things you've had to say about me. I appreciate them, but I don't believe them."

At the speaker's table with Mr. Bell were:

Gens. Craigie and Olmsted, Admiral Ramsey; Mr. Fichtner; Mr. Whitman, Leston P. Faneuf, Julius J. Domanos, Harvey Gaylord and Roy J. Sandstrom, all officers of the company; Mr. Huntington, W. B. Todd, Walter A. Yates, J. F. Schoellkopf Jr., Frederick F. Robinson and David M. Milton, Bell Aircraft directors.

Bell's Challenge Led To Helicopter Record

A chance remark by President Lawrence D. Bell of Bell Aircraft Corporation was responsible for the 1234-mile helicopter distance record set by Bell Test Pilot Elton J. Smith Sept. 17.

On a visit to the company's Helicopter Division in Ft. Worth, Tex., Mr. Bell pointed to a parked helicopter and asked the 31-year-old test pilot: "How far can you fly that thing?"

"I can fly it to Niagara Falls," Mr. Smith replied.

"Go ahead," Mr. Bell countered.

Three weeks later the 5-year-old "eggbeater" alighted at Bell's Town of Wheatfield plant, smashing the world's distance record for helicopters. The flight took about 13 hours.