

Lawrence D. Bell

1894-1956



Shown at his desk at the beginning of his career as a builder of record-shattering airplanes.

" Show me a man who cannot bother to do little things and I'll show you a man who cannot be trusted to do big things."

--Lawrence D. Bell

Lawrence Dale Bell was born in Mentone on April 5, 1894, the youngest son of Isaac and Harriet Sarber Bell. Known to everyone as Larry, he attended school in Mentone until 1907 when he moved to Santa Monica, California, with his family.

In January, 1910, Larry and an older brother, Grover, attended the first major U.S. airshow at Dominguez Field, near Los Angeles. They were so impressed, they returned home and built a plane of their own. It was only a model, but it flew and it changed the lives of both Bell brothers.

In 1912, a month before Larry was to graduate from high school, Grover, who had recently learned to fly, asked him to join the great stunt pilot Lincoln Beachey and himself as a mechanic. Larry easily passed the final examinations that ended his formal education and joined the pilots, completely enjoying his work. When Beachey temporarily quit, the Bell brothers continued attending air shows. In 1913, Grover was killed in a crash and Larry vowed to quit aviation. In a short time, however, friends convinced him to return to the

field and he went to work for Glenn L. Martin.

By the time he was 20, Larry was shop foreman and within a few years was vice-president and general manager of the Martin Co. In 1928, he left to join Consolidated Aircraft in Buffalo, New York.

Seven years later, Consolidated moved to California and Larry decided to form his own corporation, often ring-

ing doorbells to help raise the money.

The company, Bell Aircraft Corporation, had a slow beginning, but its engineers were undaunted, continuing to perfect new designs. In the first 20 years of its existence, the company recorded 20 firsts, shown in the adjoining box.

For these firsts, Larry was honored with the Daniel Guggenheim Medal, the Collier Trophy, a presidential

citation, the French Legion of Honor, honorary degrees and many others in addition to having schools and parks named in his honor.

At his death in 1956, Larry Bell was dean of American aviation, having served the industry 44 years.

His will directed \$20,000 be given the town of Mentone to build a suitable memorial for his parents and his personal collection of aviation and space related artifacts was sent to the town. The money was used to build Bell Memorial Public Library. Some of the collection was displayed there; the rest was stored. This is the first time any of the stored items have been uncrated for display.

The historical significance of this display cannot be denied. However, the Mentone Chamber of Commerce would like to hear your views on its future. There is no grant from the Bell Foundation to house this material. Any future display will be up to the town. Mark your preference on the enclosed slip of paper and return it to the Chamber of Commerce or deposit it in the box at the door.

These Are The Famous Bell 'FIRSTS'

In its 20-year history Bell Aircraft established an industry-wide reputation as an aircraft pioneer. These are a few in the imposing list of aviation "firsts" developed by the Company.

- FIRST twin-engine escort fighter (Airacuda).
- FIRST aircraft to mount 37 mm. cannon and flexible gun turrets (Airacuda).
- FIRST modern multi-place fighter, establishing a new type for the Army Air Force (Airacuda).
- FIRST American fighter airplane designed around its armament (P-39 Airacobra).
- FIRST use of tricycle landing gear on modern military aircraft (P-39).
- FIRST satisfactory .50 caliber machine gun shock dampener which became standard for both Army and Navy.
- FIRST modern all-wood military fighter (XP-77).
- FIRST helicopter with automatic stabilizing control.
- FIRST jet-propelled fighter airplane in the United States (P-59).
- FIRST commercial helicopter.
- FIRST supersonic airplane (X-1).
- FIRST commercial helicopter with 200 hp. engine and skid landing gear.
- FIRST airplane able to vary degree of wing sweepback during flight (X-5).
- FIRST radio-guided bomb (Tarzon).
- FIRST helicopter designed specifically for anti-submarine warfare (HSL-1).
- FIRST airplane able to fly at speeds two and a half times the speed of sound and at altitudes of 90,000 feet (X-1A).
- FIRST turbine-powered helicopter (XH-13F).
- FIRST jet-propelled vertical take-off and landing airplane (VTOL).
- FIRST automatic carrier landing system.
- FIRST convertiplane incorporating tilting-rotor system (XV-3).