

Daniel Guggenheim Medal

MEDALIST FOR 1944

For achievement in design and construction of military air craft and for outstanding contributions to the methods of production.



LAWRENCE DALE BELL

Lawrence Dale Bell's first employment in aeronautics was as a mechanic for two well-known exhibition pilots: his brother, Grover E. Bell, killed in an accident in 1913, and Lincoln Beachy. He lived to become known all over the world for his own notable contributions to aircraft progress.

Born on April 5, 1895, at Mentone, Indiana, he was eighteen when he first became associated with aviation. Less than a year later he made his first plane: a bomber constructed for Mexico's famous Pancho Villa out of a converted Martin exhibition plane.

After his brother's death Bell began work as a factory hand for Glenn L. Martin. When the superintendent quit one day, young Bell suggested that he be given the job. In this manner, at 20, Bell became superintendent of an aircraft factory.

He left Martin in the late 20's to join Consolidated Aircraft Corporation in Buffalo, New York, becoming Vice-President and General Manager of that company in 1929. When the company was moved to San Diego, Bell decided to stay in Buffalo and organize his own enterprise. The Bell Aircraft Corporation was formed there in 1935.

During the company's early days payrolls were met by taking surplus contracts from established companies. Bell's ideas, however, soon turned towards research, development and production. His concept of a new military plane was incorporated in the Airacuda, a twin-engine multi-place long range fighter with pusher-type engines, carrying two flexible 37 mm cannons. This experimental airplane was followed within a year by the P-39 Airacobra, a smaller, faster fighter. Bell was soon engaged in a large plant expansion to produce World War II fighter aircraft, including the Airacobra; the P-63 Kingcobra; the P-59 Airacomet, first jet-propelled plane produced in the United States; and the RP-63 armored airplane.

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For years Bell had been an ardent advocate of rotary-wing aircraft. In 1941 Arthur M. Young, who had devoted a dozen years to helicopter research, visited him in Buffalo. Bell set him up in a shop near Buffalo, and spent hours with him developing the plans. Subsequently, Bell helicopters operated in many parts of the world, and performed yeoman service in the Korean war.

When Bell subsequently was requested to submit a proposal for an experimental airplane to attack the “sound barrier,” he cautioned his engineers to “throw the books away.” In this experiment, he insisted, no previous aircraft ideas or practices should be allowed to hamper creative imagination. The resulting X-1, the Air Force’s first rocket-propelled airplane to be built for flight research by the NACA, was the first man-carrying vehicle to exceed the speed of sound.

Bell died in Buffalo, New York, on October 20, 1956.