

Daniel Guggenheim Medal

MEDALIST FOR 1980

For his outstanding contributions to the management concepts for the development of complex aerospace systems, and for his significant personal accomplishments in the design and production of a long line of the world's most famous commercial and military aircraft.



EDWARD C. WELLS

In Harold Mansfield's history of Boeing's Vision, the name of Ed Wells is mentioned no fewer than 51 times.

The first reference involves the day he was working on the flap design for Boeing's first four-engine bomber, the B-299. A fellow engineer suggested that maybe the big plane didn't need flaps—it would have excellent brakes. Wells produced data showing that with flaps, the bomber could carry a one-ton greater load on takeoffs and landings—the flaps stayed on, and the 299 evolved into the famed B-17.

He was merely an assistant project engineer at the time, only a few years out of Stanford University. But even then, the work of this quiet, studious aeronautical engineer was known throughout the company for its thoroughness and objectivity; the incident Mansfield described was typical of the way he approached any problem—with cool logic and facts.

Wells was an instigator and innovator as well as a researcher. He first conceived the idea for the jet bomber that became the B-47, and he was largely responsible for the B-307 Stratoliner, the world's first pressurized airliner. The 707 was Ed Wells's baby, too, as he climbed the company's executive ladder into a succession of vice presidential posts that involved civil transports, military projects and space activities.

He was named vice president of Product Development in 1966 but took a leave of absence in the 1969-70 academic year to serve as visiting professor in Stanford's Department of Aeronautics and Astronautics. When he returned to Boeing, he was named senior vice president-Technical and stayed in that capacity until his retirement January 1, 1972.

This native son of Boise, Idaho, who went to work for Boeing part-time when he was still in college served Boeing as a consultant until 1986, with the 757 and 767 transports carrying the input of his vast experience and sagacity.

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The “Elder Statesman of Aviation,” a title bestowed on him by the national Aeronautic Association, died in 1986 in Bellevue, Washington.