



Austin Builds a Fortress for Boeing's Flying Fortress

In 1926, The Austin Company of Cleveland, Ohio, was already a proven partner in the aviation industry, having designed and built the largest factory building in the world for the Curtiss Aeroplane and Motor Co. in Buffalo, NY in 1916 — and by doing it in a remarkable 90 days.

The Austin Company had found vast success as a one-stop shop, combining design, engineering and construction in a single firm, and marketing it as **The Austin Method**®. By the early 1920s, the company was looking to open sales offices in industrial centers across the country. And in 1926, such an office was opened

near Seattle, WA, a location that proved fortuitous — and historical — when, 10 years later, the company was hired to design and construct The Boeing Company's legendary "Plant 2" in nearby Renton, WA.



Boeing had just received its first production contract to build the B-17 Flying Fortress, but its existing Plant 1 wasn't equipped with the metal stamping equipment necessary to build the big bombers. It needed a huge, modern assembly line to fulfill the contract.

Residents in the area were anxious to keep the company in Renton, so a local immigrant farmer, Giuseppe Desimone, sold a large tract of his land near Plant 1 to The Boeing Company for one dollar. And by May 15, 1936, The Austin Company had begun construction of the 60,000-square-foot plant that cost \$250,000. Just a few months later, raw materials and parts were being barged up the Duwamish Waterway



The B-17.

to the plant's back door, and Boeing's then-1,000 employees had started assembling the B-17s.

In May of 1940, another 600,000 square feet were added to support production of the 380 Douglas DB-7 light bomber, too. And a few months later — by the time the Japanese attacked Pearl

The Boeing Company's legendary "Plant 2" near Renton, WA.



Hiding in Plain Sight

The Boeing Company's Plant 2, constructed in just a few months in 1937 by The Austin Company, became so important to the war effort that there was great concern by the government that the plant would be targeted by enemy aircraft. In an effort to hide the massive facility from aerial view, an impressive display of camouflage was built.

The 35-acre roof of the plant, under which 30,000 employees were cranking out as many as 300 bombers a month, was camouflaged to look like a normal suburban neighborhood of Seattle.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, under the guidance of Hollywood set designer John Stewart Detlie, built fake clapboard and fabric houses and installed fake streets, sidewalks and "trees" made of board and mesh, which were fastened to the roof with wires. A bogus street sign on one corner read "Synthetic Street and Burlap Blvd."



Boeing celebrates the 5000th B-17.



Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941 — the plant had been expanded to almost 1.8-million square feet.

Ultimately, at its peak production during World War II, the plant's staff had grown to 30,000 employees working in three shifts. In a single day in April 1944, Plant 2 assembled 16 B-17s — an astonishing feat.

All together, the facility built 6,981 of the mammoth B-17s during the war. The Flying Fortress was a heavy bomber used primarily in strategic precision bombing raids of German industrial and military targets. Used to a lesser extent in the Pacific campaign, the B-17 was

nonetheless instrumental in raids on Japanese shipping and airfields after the Pearl Harbor attack.

In addition to the versatile B-17, Plant 2 also was responsible for the production of the B-29 Superfortress, and eventually the first two B-47 Stratojets, 278 B-52 Stratofortresses, and 58 Boeing 377 airliners.

Plant 2's significance in the war effort is indisputable. In May of 1940, when the country's aircraft industry was producing about 2,000 airplanes annually, President Franklin D. Roosevelt made a pronouncement that the industry needed to increase its production to 4,000 planes

each month in order to meet the demands of the U.S. military and its allies, France and Great Britain.

The Boeing Company's Plant 2, thanks to its unique design and quick construction on the part of The Austin Company, was able to rise to that occasion and do more than its part.

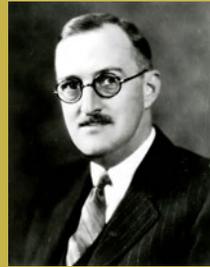
After World War II, Plant 2 continued to be a vital manufacturing facility for The Boeing Company well into the 1970s, producing Boeing 737s, and serving as a restoration facility for the National Air and Space Museum.



William Boeing

While the Boeing name is immediately recognized in American aviation history, its namesake started his career in the timber industry in the Pacific Northwest. It was that career, though, that led William Boeing to his fascination and passion for aviation — and the creation of The Boeing Corporation.

In 1909, Boeing served as president of Greenwood Timber Company and had been experimenting with boat design. He traveled to Seattle, WA, and attended the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition, where he saw a manned flying machine for the first time and became fascinated with aviation. Boeing purchased an airplane



from the Glenn L. Martin Company and received flying lessons from the aviation pioneer himself.

When the plane needed repair, Boeing was told that replacement parts would not become available for months. He told his friend Cdr. George Conrad Westervelt (U.S. Navy), "We could build a better plane ourselves and build it faster." Westervelt agreed and they collaborated on the development of the B&W Seaplane, an amphibian biplane that performed exceptionally well.

Boeing decided to go into the aircraft business and started the Pacific Aero Products Co. in an old boat works on the Duwamish River near Seattle.

When America entered World War I in April 1917, Boeing changed the name of his company to the Boeing Airplane Company and

obtained orders from the U.S. Navy for 50 planes. Following the first world war, the company focused on commercial aircraft, securing contracts to supply airmail service and built a successful airmail operation and later passenger service that evolved into United Airlines.

Through Boeing's guidance, the small airplane manufacturing company grew into a significant corporation of related industries. In the mid-1930s, Boeing sold his interests in The Boeing Airplane Co. and worked on other business ventures. His interest in aviation continued, though, and he volunteered as a consultant to The Boeing Airplane Co. during World War II.

Boeing died in 1956, living long enough to see the growth of the aviation industry from biplanes to jets.

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