

# Those magnificent men...

*A 1910 air show found Bill Boeing looking for a ride in the sky—  
and discovering a passion* **by Mike Lombardi**



**F**or Bill Boeing, it began with an air show near Los Angeles and the discovery of a passion for aviation—the hallmark of the company that he founded six years later and that still bears his name.

The year was 1910, and Boeing's first exposure to airplanes was at the Los Angeles International Air Meet, the first of its kind in the United States. Held at Dominguez Field, near present-day Compton, it featured some of the day's pioneering aviators, including Glenn Curtiss and France's Louis Paulhan.

The 11-day event, which began Jan. 10, attracted over 20,000 people each day, with more than 250,000 tickets sold, including several to 29-year-old William "Bill" Boeing. Impressed by Paulhan and his Farman biplane, Boeing tried to get a ride with the French aviator. But it was not to be, and Boeing left disappointed. Paulhan probably left Los Angeles feeling worse—receiving news he was being sued by the Wright Brothers for patent infringement.

“There isn’t much  
to that machine...  
I think we could  
build a better one.”

– William E. Boeing, founder, The Boeing Company

**PHOTO:** Aviators who participated in the Los Angeles Air Meet. In the center is French Aviator Louis Paulhan, from whom Bill Boeing unsuccessfully tried to get a flight. BOEING ARCHIVES



Nine months after the air meet, at a similar event held on the other side of the country in Belmont Park, N.Y., U.S. Navy Lt. Conrad Westervelt discovered the same urge to fly. Their paths would soon cross when Westervelt was introduced to Boeing at Seattle's University Club. The two men found they shared a number of interests, including a passion for aviation.

Boeing and Westervelt began to look for any opportunity to fly, and on July 4, 1914, their quest was realized when pilot Terah Maroney brought his Curtiss floatplane to Seattle's Lake Washington. After a flight, Boeing told Westervelt: "There isn't much to that

machine of Maroney's. I think we could build a better one." To that, Westervelt replied: "Of course we could."

Together, Boeing and Westervelt did build a better one, a plane named with their initials—the B&W. It was the first in a line of innovative, pioneering commercial, military and space vehicles that have defined aerospace and helped change the world. ■

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**PHOTOS: (Clockwise, from top left)**

Large crowds came daily to see the Los Angeles air show; Conrad Westervelt, co-designer of the first Boeing plane; a Martin TA (shown here taxiing on Lake Washington in Seattle) purchased by Bill Boeing—the plane inspired the design of the first Boeing airplane, the B&W; William Boeing. BOEING ARCHIVES