



Al Seifert, who marks his 65th anniversary with Boeing this year, began his career by rigging controls on B-17s like this one, which were widely used during World War II. Volunteers with Seattle's Museum of Flight currently are restoring the "Flying Fortress" in the Plant 2 factory building where the airplanes originally were produced.

ED TURNER PHOTO

Making it work for 65 years

Al Seifert's Boeing career spans from the B-17 to the 787

By CHRISTINE HILL

Rigging B-17 controls is a job that possibly just one current Boeing worker—tool-and-die maker Al Seifert—can claim to have done.

Seifert, who recently marked his 65th anniversary with Boeing, recalled that when he joined the company in 1942, he and his co-workers at the Plant 2 factory in Seattle were producing one of the "Flying Fortress" bombers every hour to meet the demands of World War II.

Two years later Seifert joined the U.S. Army's 9th Armored Infantry Division in England, where he watched B-17s fly overhead from a vantage point in a half-track vehicle. The end of the war permitted Seifert's return to Boeing, where he recalled that assembly of the new B-47 swept-wing bomber relied mostly on wooden fixtures and tools.

"It took a long time just to set up the

tools," he said. "We had to make sure everything was lined up right using transits and levels, relying on our eyesight. And it took quite a few hours to pull fittings off a spar when we were finished. Now, with automated tools, all of that is just a few minutes' work."

"He's always willing to move outside his comfort zone."

—Suzanne Wassil, a former supervisor of 65-year employee Al Seifert, on Seifert's interest in new technologies

Seifert's long-term interest in tool design and production has resulted in contributions to every 700-series model that Boeing has produced, as well as several patents. Those patents are among many achievements Seifert modestly declines to discuss, saying only, "I enjoy figuring out how to make things work."

As an employee in the Auburn, Wash., Tooling Services group, part of Boeing Commercial Airplanes Fabrication, Seifert has helped to develop tools that range from simple, 2-inch brackets to room-sized parts washers.

Renowned for his ability to take a concept for a problem-solving tool from paper to fully realized product, Seifert's co-workers view him as an invaluable resource.

"You give him a challenging part to make, and he'll either just go do it himself or figure out a good way to get it done," said David Kozy of Material and Process Technology. With an essential role in continuously improving Boeing Commercial Airplanes products and manufacturing processes, Kozy and his co-workers have been collaborating with Seifert for more than 15 years.

"I'm fortunate that Al is willing to work on my projects," Kozy said. "His product is always exactly what we need. He's technically extremely proficient—arguably the best there is—and also very easy to work with."

"He has a thirst for knowledge," said Suzanne Wassil, a former supervisor of Seifert's. "As new technologies and techniques have been introduced over the years, Al will step right up to learn how to use them. He's always willing to move outside his comfort zone."

"He seems to associate himself with people who are at the top of their fields, so he can learn from them—whether they're brand-new employees who came out of school understanding the latest technology or they've developed expertise over years on the job," noted Butch Loney, an electrician who has collaborated with Seifert for nearly 20 years.

"He's constantly training people, too," Loney added. "He'll watch people work, then maybe step in and show them how they could do it faster or better. He's trained a lot of engineers who came out of school with good degrees but didn't have practical experience. After working with Al a couple of times, their drawings seem to get better."

With no retirement plans on the near horizon, Seifert will continue to support Boeing in the ongoing quest for better ways to build the world's most popular commercial airplanes. ■

christine.m.hill@boeing.com