

1,400

By DAN IVANIS

It's difficult to say exactly what Leonard White, Steve Bowman, Don Smith and Lou Forbush were doing when Boeing delivered its 1,400th 747 to AirBridgeCargo Airlines on a sunny morning in late February.

Likely as not, each of them was working on the 1,401st 747. Or the 1,402nd. Or planning for the 1,450th. That's what they do: They work on 747s. And it's what they've been doing since before the first 747 rolled out of the Everett, Wash., factory on Sept. 30, 1968.

White, a senior quality manager, Bowman, a quality manager, Smith, a production manager, and Forbush, a quality inspector, have

White, Bowman, Smith and Forbush are part of that foundation. They were all working on the 747 even before construction of the Everett, Wash., factory was completed.

"The thing I remember most is how cold it was because the walls weren't finished," Bowman said. "We came in wearing coats and long johns, and we were crawling inside the wings. We were working 12 hours a day, seven days a week. There were people who would just sleep here at night and then go back to work in the morning."

Smith began his Boeing career in Renton, Wash., on the 727 program. He joined the 747 team as an interior mechanic in final assembly. "We basically helped the engineers de-

ployee engagement," White said. "Even now, we have some really good initiatives going on in 747, and we're probably getting further into Lean than I've seen us go before."

While Forbush plans to retire later this year or in early 2009, the other three men plan to still be working on 747s when the airplane's next chapter—the 747-8—makes its way through the factory for rollout, first flight and first delivery in 2009. The Volga-Dnepr Group, the customer for the 1,400th 747, has five 747-8 freighters on order.

"It's been a good journey," White said. "I'm very glad to be on the 747. We're still on top and I think the 747-8 is going to help keep us there."

and counting

The 747—and four of its original teammates—are still going strong

taken diverse paths over the years. All of them are a bit surprised to still be working on the 747 program 1,400 planes later.

"I remember going to change board meetings when we were working on planes in the 300s," White said. "I'd ask about implementing a process change, and they'd tell me that we weren't going to build enough of these to make the change worthwhile."

The 1,400th airplane was a 747-400 Extended Range Freighter being leased to AirBridgeCargo Airlines, a subsidiary of the Volga-Dnepr Group, by GE Commercial Aviation Services. It's the seventh 747 freighter in the AirBridgeCargo Airlines fleet, joining five 747-200/300 Freighters and a 747-400ERF.

"This milestone speaks to the strong foundation laid at the very beginning of the 747 program," said Ross R. Bogue, vice president and general manager, 747 program and Everett site.

sign the plane," he said. "They had the ideas, but they hadn't done all the final drawings. We were experimenting and building our own parts as we went. It was quite a bit of fun."

Forbush started working for Boeing on the 707 program and joined the 747 program in 1967. He's left Boeing—by choice or layoff—and returned five or six times before staying permanently since 1985. "I just think working on the largest airplane in the fleet and in the largest building in the world is exhilarating," he said.

White keeps a photo close at hand that shows him among a "tiger team" of tool fabricators who followed the first 747 through the factory and worked issues as it went along. He's spent about half of his 42-plus Boeing years on the 747, including the last three as the senior quality manager for the program.

"When I came back to the program in 2005, it was like coming back to work with an old friend," he said.

White has witnessed first-hand the improvements made in the plane and the way it is assembled.

"Productivity and safety have dramatically improved with programs like Lean and em-

"I'm really looking forward to the 747-8 and I wouldn't miss the first flight for anything," Bowman said. "I've been on several working-together transition teams trying to get everyone up to speed. New tools, new designs ... it's like starting over again in some respects."

And who would know better than four men who were there at the beginning. ■

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Photo

Lou Forbush (from left), Steve Bowman, Leonard White and Don Smith all worked on the first 747—and are part of the program after 1,400 planes.

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