

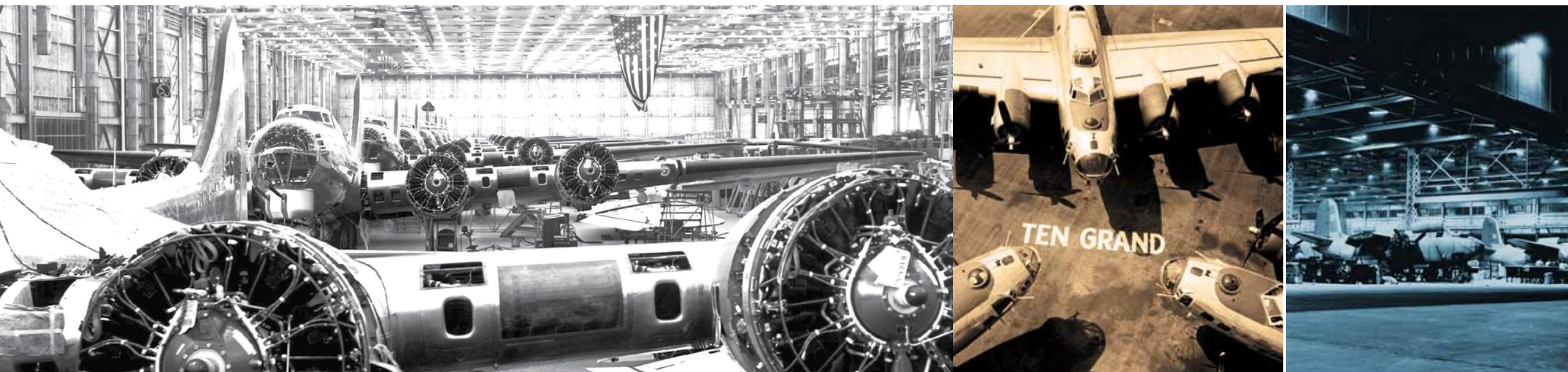
# Past is prologue

In the early days of World War II, rivals Boeing and Douglas took a one-team approach to mass-produce combat aircraft

By Mike Lombardi

“The most significant example of the ability of the American aircraft industry to cooperate in the interest of national defense.”

– Douglas *Airview* magazine



It was 1940. Europe was at war.

The besieged Allies turned to aircraft manufacturers in the United States for desperately needed combat aircraft. Two companies, Boeing and Douglas, negotiated an agreement to work together on what the Douglas *Airview* magazine called “the most significant example of the ability of the American aircraft industry to cooperate in the interest of national defense.”

While the heritage of Boeing has a number of inspiring examples of working together, this one story stands out: When the Allies needed help for the war effort, two rival corporations broke down barriers to collaborate on the mass production of military airplanes.

At the time, U.S. President Franklin D.

Roosevelt’s “Arsenal of Democracy” was only beginning to gear up, and when Douglas received a request from the French government for nearly 500 attack airplanes, the capacity to build those planes was not yet available.

To fulfill the order, Douglas and Boeing negotiated their agreement.

In a joint statement in May 1940, Donald Douglas Sr., president of Douglas Aircraft, and Boeing President Philip Johnson announced that Boeing would manufacture, under license, 240 Douglas DB-7s (similar to the A-20A built for the U.S. Army) at Boeing Plant 2 in Seattle. It would be part of a joint Boeing and Douglas effort to build 480 of the airplanes for France.

Johnson and Douglas expressed confidence in the production and license-sharing arrangement.

“The aircraft industry’s new opportunity to concentrate on a few advanced models in large quantities,” the companies said in a joint press release, “will give to the industry and to our national defense a great backlog of technical skill and resources, and will make it possible to build our own airplanes better, faster and more economically than we have in the past.”

Those words proved prophetic. The joint Boeing-Douglas DB-7 program became a forerunner of successful joint production programs that were widely used throughout the United States during World War II.

Boeing and Douglas followed up with an even more ambitious collaborative program, teaming with Vega Aircraft, a subsidiary of Lockheed, to mass-produce “F” and “G” models of the Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress.

The Boeing, Douglas, Vega Cooperative Production Committee was formed in May 1941 to manage three B-17 production lines—in Seattle and in Long Beach and Burbank, Calif.—as if they belonged to one corporation. The committee took on many responsibilities, including coordination of tooling, coordination of design and production changes, distribution of drawings, standardization of procedures, purchase of materials, and the management of subcontractors.

The complexity and size of this effort can be illustrated by the single task of coordinating subcontractors. Boeing had 250 in 80 different cities and Douglas and Vega added another 350 subcontractors. In many instances there were multiple subcontractors making similar parts that the committee had to ensure were 100 percent interchangeable.

Ultimately, the Boeing, Douglas, Vega Cooperative Production Committee accomplished the joint production of 12,085 B-17F and G Flying Fortresses in just three years.

It was a working-together effort by rival corporations that produced amazing results and helped win a global war. And it underscores all that can be accomplished

today by a “One Boeing” team, working together seamlessly to provide customers with the best products at the best value. ■

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**PHOTOS: (From far left)** Boeing B-17Gs assembled at the Douglas Aircraft plant in Long Beach, Calif.; delivery of the 10,000th B-17 built since America’s entry into World War II was celebrated by bringing together an airplane built by Douglas in Long Beach, Calif., Boeing in Seattle and Vega (Lockheed) in Burbank, Calif.; and Douglas DB-7s on the assembly line at Boeing Plant 2 in Seattle. BOEING ARCHIVES