Army Aviation Hall of Fame 1986 Induction

In 1941 Bell Aircraft Corporation was producing 400 fighter planes a month in Buffalo, New York; numerous B-29 bombers in Marietta, Georgia; and large quantities of machine gun mounts and mortar shells at its Ordnance Division in Vermont.

Despite the overwhelming duties involved in coordinating those activities, Larry Bell took time that year to launch development work on the first Bell helicopter. In 1945 Bell announced that his company would enter the helicopter field, a bold step to take when no helicopter had yet achieved a commercial license. Only six months later, Bell's Model 47 was licensed under the CAA, designated NC-1H.

Further demonstrating his commitment to the new concept, Bell separated helicopter operations from Bell Buffalo by building a new plant at Ft. Worth, Texas, for the helicopter division.

From its earliest days Bell's helicopter operations were closely tied to Army Aviation - the company delivering its first production-line aircraft near the end of 1946. The Army's utilization of the helicopter in Korea helped prove the concept of helicopters being used for reconnaissance, aerial supply, and medical evacuation. In 1955 Bell won the industry competition for the Army's first production turbine-powered utility helicopter, the famous UH-1 Iroquois.

A measure of the man: under Bell's leadership, his company produced the first U.S.-designed jet fighter, the P-59 Aero-comet; the world's first aircraft to exceed the speed of sound, the X-1; the first airplane to vary the sweep of its wings in flight, the X-5; and the world's first commercial helicopter.

In 1944 Lawrence Bell received the Daniel Guggenheim Medal for "achievement in design and construction of military aircraft and for outstanding contributions to the method of construction". In 1948 he was co-recipient of the coveted Collier Trophy for the design, development, and production of the X-1, the world's first supersonic airplane. In 1977, he was installed in the Aviation Hall of Fame in Dayton, Ohio. Lawrence D. Bell died October 20, 1956, but his legacy remains.