R. B. Beisel **General Manager** **1943 to 1949**

Rex B. Beisel was General Manager of Chance Vought Aircraft from 1943 to December 1949. He got into the aircraft industry as a $4 per day draftsman almost by accident. Yet in later years, he said that the "accident" was the finest thing that could have happened to him. He participated in the industry's progress from "wood, wire, and canvas" airplanes of the first World War to the speed-of-sound combat airplanes of the present day, and enjoyed every day of it.

In 1914, Beisel was working in a coal mine, studying to be a mechanical engineer, and didn't have the remotest idea that one day he might be general manager of an aircraft factory.

The only son of a coal miner, Beisel in his childhood lived in a tent near a mine in Cumberland, Washington. Later, the family moved into an unpainted wooden house, and Beisel developed a flair for carpentry which earned him his first dollar. After constructing a picket fence around their home, for which he cut and split the logs, Beisel heard that a cook-house in the neighborhood needed a new set of shingles. He applied for and got the job. So, life as a wage earner began at age 14 for Beisel. He received $25.00 for the job - a task that took him all summer.

The next year, in 1908, Beisel became a salesman. Working behind the counter of the country store, he sold everything from needles to bales of hay. His salary was $2.50 a week.

After a brief stint as a surveyor's helper at $2.00 per day, Beisel at the age of 16 got a job in the local coal mine and continued this job during the summer for 5 years. He went to work for the coal mine as a breaker boy at $2.60 a day. With another breaker boy, he daily picked the rocks from 150 tons of coal by pushing it over a table with a shovel. Then the coal was loaded into railroad cars. The next year, Beisel became a mule driver at the mine at a wage of $3.25 a day. In successive years, he was a coal washer and driver of a gasoline locomotive which hauled the coal in and out of the mine.

Most of Beisel's work was done in the summers, since he was still in school, but during the winters, he worked in the school cafeteria handing out food and washing dishes.

By the fall of 1912, with some help from his father, Beisel had saved enough money to put himself through the University of Washington. During his first years at the University, he continued to work at the mine in summer as a general laborer.

Between his sophomore and junior years, he broke away from mining. He heard of a bridge over the Cedar River that needed painting. Equipped with two blankets, he set out for the sparsely populated country where the bridge was located and landed the job. However, there was still the problem of housing. The only shelter available was a large chicken coop. After Beisel cleaned and whitewashed the coop, he found it quite habitable.

That fall, he got a job running a blueprint machine at the university. During his senior year, he worked at the University's power plant as a plumber's helper. He also served as a coal-passer in the Naval Militia.

Even with so much extra-curricular activity, Beisel found time to pile up a good scholastic record and earn his bachelor of science degree and a place in an honorary engineering fraternity. He also passed a civil service examination in mechanical engineering with such a high mark that he was immediately offered a job in the newly formed Navy's Bureau of Aeronautics.

As a draftsman in the Bureau of Aeronautics, he became intensely interested in aviation and started studying to prepare himself for the opportunities ahead.

After leaving the Bureau of Aeronautics in 1923, he worked with Curtiss Aeroplane and Motor Corp. and Spartan Aircraft before joining Chance Vought's engineering department in 1931 as Assistant Chief Engineer. In 1932, Beisel developed the highly successful SBU Scout/Dive Bomber, of which 84 were ordered by the Navy in 1934. This was the first airplane of its type to exceed 200 mph, a speed that was credited to the installation of adjustable engine cowl flaps. Rex Beisel was awarded the Manley Memorial Medal (SAE) and the Wright Brothers Medal in 1934 for co-authoring a technical paper titled "*Cowling and Cooling of Radial Air-Cooled Aircraft Engines*". He was then promoted to Chief Engineer of Chance Vought.

It was while he was Chief Engineer that Beisel headed up the design team that produced the F4U "bent-wing" Corsair, which was the first fighter aircraft to exceed a speed of 400 mph with a full military load. The "bent-wing" Corsair was Beisel's ingenious and efficient design that combined the most powerful engine available with the largest diameter propeller ever built. The Corsair became one of the most famous World War II fighters with its contribution to the winning of the air and ground war in the Pacific. When he assumed the post of General Manager of the Division in 1943, he was qualified, through his step-by-step climb up the ladder, for the stupendous job ahead. His years of experience in the aircraft industry, his natural ability for leadership, and his adherence to the Vought tradition "nothing but the best" enabled him to steer the Division through the tough war years and the hazardous reconversion period that followed.

In 1948 and 1949, Beisel managed the largest industrial move of its kind up to that time when the Chance Vought plant was moved from Stratford, Connecticut to Dallas, Texas. Twenty-seven million pounds of equipment and 1,300 key personnel and their families were moved the 1,700 miles. Beisel served as General Manager until December of 1949 and later became Vice President of United Aircraft Corporation, where he remained until retirement.

Beisel always believed in people. "*Give me the right people*" he would say, "*put them on the right jobs, pay them fair wages, and we will build a team that will lick any problem*." Despite his many other accomplishments, Rex Beisel will always be remembered as the creator of the never-to-be forgotten "bent-wing" Corsair.