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## JOSEPH G. GAVIN JR. AND HIS CONTRIBUTIONS TO AMERICAN AEROSPACE ACHIEVEMENT

**Abstract**

Joseph G. Gavin Jr. had an extraordinary aerospace engineering career in an extraordinary age for American aerospace achievements. His employment coincided exactly with the Cold War era of lofty defense spending and aerospace programs. Following degrees from MIT in 1941 and 1942 and four years as a naval officer in the U.S. Navy's Bureau of Aeronautics, Gavin spent his entire career with the Grumman Corporation, rising from design engineer in 1946 to president and Chief Operating Officer in 1976 before his retirement in 1985. He was directly involved in the development of naval aircraft, a Grumman specialty. He headed development multiple aerospace programs, including the Orbiting Astronomical Observatory as Grumman's chief missile and space engineer, a precursor to the Hubble Space Telescope. Of greatest historical significance, from 1962-72, Gavin oversaw 7,500 employees as director of the Apollo Lunar Module program. NASA awarded him the Distinguished Public Service Medal for his role in saving the Apollo 13 mission; and in 1974 he was elected to the National Academy of Engineering. In retirement, Gavin continued to conduct research on technology and resource policy issues, continuing an interest on alternative energy that he had pursued while an executive at Grumman. He advised the U.S. government and gave presentations to diverse audiences, with a special emphasis on communicating with students from the primary to the doctoral level. Gavin was involved extensively in charitable activities, with core contributions concerning technology, medicine, and education. A life member of the MIT Corporation, he was closely involved with the development of his alma mater throughout his adult life, and attended his last board meeting a month before his death at age 90 in 2010. Gavin's wide range of responsibilities, contacts, and experiences—combined with a penchant for travel that included attendance at virtually every International Astronautical Congress from 1980 to 2005—afforded him unusual insights into the geopolitics, military-technological frontier, and policies of his era. Aside from succinct presentations at a few major venues—such as the 2002 Congress and when receiving the Aero Club of New England's 2010 Cabot Award—however, Gavin's humility and focus on the future prevented him from writing a memoir or otherwise publicizing his experiences. To finally tell this story of an engineer's extraordinary life in an extraordinary age of American aerospace activity, the author will draw on interviews he has conducted with both Gavin and his wife, as well as complete access to his personal records.