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JOSEPH GAVIN AND MIT'S CONTRIBUTION TO AERONAUTICS AND ASTRONAUTICS

**Abstract**

Joseph Gavin Jr's career as a Grumman Aerospace Corporation manager and executive was launched with his education at MIT, from which he received degrees in aeronautics and astronautics in 1941 and 1942, and to which he contributed lifelong association and support. Aeronautical engineering classmate Thomas Connolly, who would ultimately help oversee development of Grumman's F-14 fighter and retire as a three-star admiral and the Deputy Chief of Naval Operations, recruited Gavin for the Navy. At commencement, President Karl Compton presciently foresaw "an unprecedented era of opportunity in the post-war period for men trained as you have in the technological professions." These dynamics indeed defined Gavin's career. Thanks to his recent MIT studies, Gavin enjoyed insights concerning fighter aircraft and jet propulsion unthinkable to the "old salts" surrounding him at the Naval Bureau of Aeronautics in Washington, DC. Gavin was closely involved with the development of his alma mater for the rest of his life, and attended his last MIT Corporation meeting a month before his death at age 90 in 2010. He served on its executive committee from 1984-91, in addition to many visiting committees. He was also a member of the MIT Education Council and MIT's Alumni/ae Association (President, 1986-87). Following his onetime mentor and master's thesis advisor, for whom it was named, he was a director of the Charles Stark Draper Laboratory. In its previous incarnation as the MIT Instrumentation Laboratory (1961-70), it had developed the Apollo Program's guidance, navigation, control, and computer systems. Gavin also supported MIT engineering education directly, often by lecturing in the seminars of such professors as Richard Battin, formerly director of mission development for the MIT Apollo Program. This paper will draw on historical materials from MIT and Gavin's own collection to explore his personal and organizational connections with the institution and how they were deeply intertwined with MIT's location at the center of American aerospace development.