

Yvonne Brill, Distinguished Aerospace Engineer, Passes Away

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Yvonne Brill, one of the nation's top aerospace engineering laureates, died this afternoon from a staph infection. She was 88.

Brill distinguished herself not only as an innovative engineer who spent most of her career in the communications satellite industry, but as a tireless advocate for attracting young people into the field of engineering. She also was committed to ensuring that aerospace and engineering professionals -- women and men, especially women -- received recognition for their accomplishments.

In 2011, Brill was awarded the National Medal of Technology and Innovation by President Barack Obama. A video of the presentation ceremony is on [YouTube](#).



Yvonne Brill receives 2010 National Medal of Technology and Innovation from President Barack Obama at the White House, October 21, 2011. White House photo.

Brill received that and other tributes, including induction into the National Inventors Hall of Fame, for inventing the hydrazine/hydrazine resistojet propulsion system (U.S. Patent #3,807,657) for communications satellites when she worked for RCA AstroElectronics in the 1960s. She left RCA to serve as director of the space shuttle solid rocket motor program at NASA Headquarters from 1981-1983, then returned to RCA for three years before accepting the position of Space Segment Engineer for INMARSAT in London. She became a consultant when she returned to the United States and served as a member of NASA's Aerospace Safety Advisory Panel (ASAP) for several years.

Among her many honors was election to the National Academy of Engineering in 1987 and she was only the second woman to become an Honorary Fellow of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics (AIAA) in 2008. She had been an AIAA Fellow since 1986. She was very active in the Society of Women Engineers (SWE), was elected as an SWE Fellow in 1985, and received its Resnik Challenger Medal in 1993 for her "innovative concepts for satellite propulsion systems which have designated her as a pioneer in expanding space horizons." She also received the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) Resnik Award in 2002 "for innovation in rocket propulsion systems for geosynchronous and low earth orbit communications satellites and the foresight to champion the hybrid electric mono-propellant rocket engine." She was a member of the Space Studies Board of the National Research Council and had been planning to attend its meeting in Washington, D.C. next week.

Brill is survived by her three children, Naomi, Matt and Joe, their spouses and children. At her request, there will be no funeral or public ceremony. The family requests that "you say a prayer for our mom, and reach out and explain the wonders of engineering careers to at least one young person ... that's what mom would want."

Editor's Note: Yvonne was a very dear friend who always offered wise counsel, encouragement, optimism, and stories of what it was like to be a woman engineer in an earlier era. She loved to talk about her very supportive and wonderful husband, Bill, who passed away two years ago, and her amazing children and grandchildren. It may be trite to say that she will be missed, but she really will be. She was one of a kind.