

# Theodore P. Wright

*May 25, 1895 — August 21, 1970*

Theodore P. Wright, retired vice president for research, died in Ithaca on August 21, 1970, after a brief illness. He had been in aeronautics since 1917, when he was graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, enlisted in the Naval Reserve Flying Corps, and was assigned to the Curtiss plant in Buffalo. Later he became general manager and chief engineer of Curtiss-Wright's airplane division. He was director of the Aircraft Resources Control Board of the War Production Board during World War II and then civil aeronautics administrator from 1944 through 1948.

In 1948 Dr. Wright came to Ithaca as Cornell's vice president for research and president of the Cornell Aeronautical Laboratory. The University had accepted the laboratory at the end of 1945 and in 1948 was facing problems of its organization and purposes and its relationships to industry, government, and the University. He solved these problems with characteristic courage, intelligence, and skill. The laboratory prospered, grew, and achieved an enviable worldwide reputation. As vice president for research, he established Cornell's practices and policies for sponsored research; subsequently, the budget for such research grew from \$9 million to more than \$33 million.

Dr. Wright was also president of the Cornell Research Foundation, chairman of the executive committee of the Cornell-Guggenheim Aviation Safety Center, and chairman of the Cornell Committee for Transportation Safety Research. When he retired from the University in 1960, he continued as chairman of the Board of Directors of the Cornell Aeronautical Laboratory, Inc.

For his contributions to aeronautics, Dr. Wright received almost every honor bestowed in that field: the Wright Brothers Medal of the SAE, the Daniel Guggenheim Medal for Aeronautics, the Medal of Freedom, the Presidential Medal for Merit, and the War Department Medal and Commendation for Exceptional Civilian Service. He was a founder of the Institute of the Aeronautical Sciences in 1938 and delivered the Wilbur Wright Lecture to the Royal Aeronautical Society in 1945.

This recitation of Ted Wright's positions and honors reveals only something of his public figure in the aerospace world and higher education. In professional terms he was, we think, the epitome of what an engineer should be: alert, well-informed, precise, and utterly dependable. He was also warm, compassionate, and tactful. He came to Cornell as an outsider—a famous aeronautical engineer, but one who had little background in either the university world or in the humanities or other nonscientific disciplines. But after a decade at Cornell he was universally

loved, respected, and trusted. For a six-month period he was acting president of Cornell (but eager to return to his duties as V.P./Research).

He had incredible energy. He habitually traveled with the varsity football team and became a confidant and counselor to its young men. (His punting and place-kicking, even as a septuagenarian, will long be legend at Cornell, as was his vigor and skill at tennis up to the age of 70.) He was tolerant in only one way: descendant of abolitionists and of Elizur Wright, who successfully fathered life-insurance reform in America, Ted reacted quickly and vigorously against racial and religious bigotry and any other imposition upon the rights of human beings.

While he was generally recognized as a successful engineer and an accomplished administrator, what was less well known was the intensity of his feeling for the natural environment and the plants and animals populating it. His activities as chairman of the Cornell Plantations Committee (1962-68) were generally recognized as being responsible for the remarkable Plantations development during that period.

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