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Co-Inventor of Jet Engine to Donate Draper Prize Medal to UD

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EDITOR'S NOTE: *The presentation is scheduled on Tuesday, June 1, from 4:30 to 5 p.m. in the lobby of Kettering Laboratories on the University of Dayton campus.*

CO-INVENTOR OF JET ENGINE TO DONATE DRAPER PRIZE MEDAL TO UD

DAYTON, Ohio -- The jet age began on August 27, 1939, at Marienhe Airfield near the Baltic Sea when the world's first turbojet-powered aircraft took to the skies. For their co-invention of the jet engine, Hans von Ohain and Sir Frank Whittle in 1991 won the Charles Stark Draper Prize--the world's foremost award for engineering achievement.

On Tuesday, June 1, von Ohain will present the Charles Stark Draper medal to the University of Dayton, where he worked as a senior research scientist in the Research Institute and a professor of mechanical and aerospace engineering in the School of Engineering until his retirement and move to Florida last year.

Awarded biannually by the National Academy of Engineering, the international prize includes a gold medal and a stipend of $375,000. Named after Charles Stark Draper, who evolved and developed the inertial navigation technology that put U.S. astronauts on the moon, the award is engineering's equivalent to the Nobel Prize.

In honor of von Ohain's contributions to aviation and to the University of Dayton, University officials have erected showcases in the lobby of Kettering Laboratories that will pay tribute to von Ohain's accomplishments. A replica of the Charles Stark Draper medal will be displayed permanently in one of the showcases.

As a 21-year-old graduate student at Germany's University of Goettingen, von Ohain envisioned designing a propellerless plane that could fly higher, faster and smoother by using a gas turbine engine. Right before World War II broke out, he turned his vision into reality.

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Struck by the possibilities of jet propulsion and encouraged by his doctoral professor, von Ohain showed a model of one of his early designs to aircraft manufacturer Ernst Heinkel, who immediately sponsored his work. One year later, von Ohain proved his concept in a laboratory demonstration of the world's first turbojet engine.

Less than two years later, the first turbojet-powered aircraft took to the skies--just 35 years after Orville and Wilbur Wright made their famous flight from Kitty Hawk, N.C. Von Ohain was not yet 28 years old.

The Heinkel 178, equipped with von Ohain's engine and piloted by Erich Warsitz, remained airborne for about seven minutes before returning safely to the runway. Warsitz reported that "the aircraft handled excellently, no vibrations, and the very low noise level of the humming turbine engine gave me a wonderful feeling of safety."

One other man shared von Ohain's vision. Working independently in England, Frank Whittle, a Royal Air Force officer, received a patent on a jet engine design in 1930, but the British Air Ministry blocked its development for so long that the engine was not tested until 1941. Although von Ohain is credited with the first flying engine, he and Whittle share honors for its invention. Neither man knew of the work of the other until after each had designed his own engine.

After World War II, the U.S. Army Air Corps recruited von Ohain to work at Wright Field to direct advanced work in propulsion and energy conversion. He retired in 1979, after having been the chief scientist of both the Aerospace Research Laboratories and the Air Force Aero Propulsion Laboratory at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. He then joined the University of Dayton.

A naturalized U.S. citizen, von Ohain has received both national and international recognition for his work. He has been noted in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* for achievement of the world's first turbojet flight. He has served as a professional consultant on numerous committees for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration and the Atomic Energy Commission. From 1984 to 1985, he served as the Charles Lindbergh Professor at the National Air and Space Museum of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.

Von Ohain is a member of the National Academy of Engineering and is an Honorary Fellow of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics. He has been enshrined in the National Aviation Hall of Fame, the Engineering and Science Hall of Fame and the International Hall of Fame.