

1963

Eminent Master of Wind

Dr. Theodore Von Karman, who died this week on a visit to Aachen, Germany, would have been 82 today. And just recently he had been saying "What I can do in the rest of my life I do not know, but so far as I am in good health I will try to be grateful to this country," meaning the United States.

He already had done more than enough to make the whole space age grateful to him.

This little man, who made you think of an old-style vaudeville comic, and had a superlative wit in the bargain, was a genius. His work in aerodynamics was the basis for much that has been accomplished in aviation, in rocketry, in missiles.

"I represented the wind," he quipped one time in telling of a conference of engineers.

He was indeed, a foremost authority in wind research, an engineer of flight, a visionary who foresaw nearly everything that has been developed in the space age — and what is yet to come. Although he never actually designed an aircraft, the fundamentals in which he dealt are the basis of most designs now in use.

Hence, among scientists, he often was called the "father" of the supersonic era. His ideas went into the galloping improvements in helicopters, jets and gliders. He laid down the principles.

He was chairman of an advisory committee to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, former head of the Jet Laboratory at California Tech, founder of the Aerojet Engineering Corp., consultant to the Air Force, and held many other top assignments. And, while his public eminence may not have matched some of the other dramatic figures of the space age, this was the genius who, more than anyone, got the age off the ground.

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