

MEDALIST FOR 1976

For notable achievement in development, production and marketing of many types of aircraft of high performance and outstanding leadership in world aviation.



MARCEL DASSAULT

His contributions to aviation progress began only a decade after Kitty Hawk and by 1971—the year he retired—had spanned 90 percent of the history of heavier-than-air flight.

The ink was scarcely dry on his 1914 engineering diploma when Marcel Dassault was in production of a new propeller of his own design—a product that won the approval of the French test center at Villacoublay. It marked the start of a career that saw him design a successful ambulance plane, a trimotor transport, a twin-engine airliner of exceptional performance, and the 174 fighter-bomber—each of all-metal construction and pre-dating World War II (in which the 174 was probably the only French combat plane which gave the Germans any competition).

But Dassault's greatest achievements came in the jet age. He established Avions Marcel Dassault in 1946 and the new company produced France's first jet, the Ouragon fighter, followed by the Mystere 4 which was the first European plane to break the sound barrier. His Mirage 4 bomber was the first aircraft to sustain Mach 2 flight for more than an hour.

His most famous aircraft was the Mirage III fighter-bomber; more than 1,500 were built—300 for the French Air Force and the rest exported, including 60 sold to Israel where they reaped headlines during the Six-Day war with Egypt. The Mirage III was but one of many in a long line of magnificent combat aircraft, to which Dassault added two successful business jets—Falcon 20 and Falcon 10—plus the Mercure twin-jet transport. In a 25-year period, Dassault developed 25 successful prototypes of high performance aircraft, a record unsurpassed by any other airframe manufacturer in the world.

America's Rand Institute paid Dassault the ultimate of compliments in a 1973 report to the U.S. Air Force. Rand not only praised his products, but added that his company reflected the personality of its founder and called Dassault a legend in his own time. Dassault died on April 16, 1986.