

RUBEN F. METTLER
1924 – 2006

Ruben F. Mettler, a guiding force in the American aerospace program and an advocate of the disadvantaged, died Tuesday, May 23. He was 82.

Mettler was a member of the Caltech Board of Trustees from 1968 to the time of his death, and served as chairman from 1985 to 1993. He was also a life member of the Caltech Associates, the President's Circle, and the Caltech Alumni Association. His many gifts to Caltech included the funding of the Ruben and Donna Mettler Professorship, which is currently held by William L. Johnson.

Born in Shafter, California, on February 23, 1924, Mettler briefly attended Stanford University as a Gamble Scholar before transferring to Caltech, where he earned his bachelor's degree in electrical engineering in 1944. After a stint with the army during World War II, when he specialized in radar systems, he returned to Caltech for his master's and doctoral degrees in 1947 and 1949, respectively.

According to longtime friends and associates at Caltech, Mettler was especially proud of having been a member of the undefeated Caltech football team of

1944. He and other team members had entered Caltech as part of the armed forces' V-12 training program, and their acumen on the football field led to an aggregate point total of 159–0 for the season, against opponents that included USC and UCLA.

Mettler began his career in the aeronautics industry at Hughes Aircraft as associate systems director for systems research and development. He served as special assistant to the assistant secretary of defense in the Eisenhower administration, then went to work at the Ramo-Wooldridge Corporation, later TRW, where he was responsible for technical supervision of the Atlas, Titan, and Minuteman missile programs and later rose to the positions of chairman, CEO, and director. He was responsible for the Pioneer and the Orbiting Geophysical Observatory satellites, as well as the lunar module descent engine used for the moon landings.

Mettler was also widely known for his advocacy of programs for the disabled. In a 1986 article in *E&S*, he spoke of his experiences with his autistic son Daniel, a musical prodigy who had been unable to speak during early childhood. Mettler's own ability to play the piano



led to his initial communication breakthrough with his son, he said.

Mettler also had a keen interest in the welfare of people suffering from the problems associated with economic or ethnic disadvantage. In 1977, he was appointed by President Carter to develop a program to promote the hiring of Vietnam veterans. This program was credited with reducing the unemployment rate of Vietnam vets from 15 percent per year—twice the national average—to less than 8 percent. As chairman of the national campaign for the United Negro College Fund, Mettler was credited with raising \$110 million in two years.

His many honors include the National Human Relations Award of the National

Conference of Christians and Jews in 1979, the Nation's Most Outstanding Electrical Engineer Award in 1954 from Eta Kappa Nu, the One of Ten Outstanding Young Men of America Award from the U.S. Junior Chamber of Commerce in 1955, the Meritorious Civilian Service Award from the Department of Defense in 1969, and the Roy Wilkins Memorial Award in 1981 from the L.A. Chapter of the NAACP.

He is survived by his wife, Donna Jean Smith, and his sons Matthew Frederick Mettler, an engineer at TRW Inc., and Daniel Frederick Mettler, who resides at the Jay Nolan Center in Canyon Country, California. □—RT