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Dr. Joachim Kuettner Receives Officer's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany

May 6, 2010



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Consul General Wolfgang Drautz presents Dr. Kuettner with the Officer's Cross of the Order of Merit as Dr. Kuettner's wife, Monika, looks on.

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On May 4th, Consul General Wolfgang Drautz presented Dr. Joachim Kuettner with the Officer's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany, which was bestowed on him by President Horst Köhler of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Dr. Kuettner was honored with the Officer's Cross of the Order of Merit for his outstanding academic and scientific achievements at an award ceremony held at the UCAR/NCAR (University Corporation for Atmospheric Research/National Center for Atmospheric Research facility in Boulder, Colorado. This is the highest honor given to a civilian.

Dr. Kuettner's remarkable life spans over 100 years. Born in 1909, and raised in Germany, he earned a doctorate in law and economics before switching gears in the 1930's to earn a second doctorate in meteorology. His love of atmospheric research took flight literally, when for his dissertation, he deployed 25 instrument gliders to gather data on lee waves, the newly discovered features forming downwind of mountains.

"The father of the wave," as he is affectionately known, due to his analysis of atmospheric waves, would set two world altitude records as a glider pilot, and his career soared to great heights in the fields of aviation, manned space flight and scientific research.

United States' Manned Space Flight Program

In 1958, the year in which the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) was founded, Dr. Kuettner was invited by Wernher von Braun, the German rocket pioneer, to join him at NASA to develop and direct the United States' manned spaceflight program.

Dr. Kuettner became director of the Mercury Redstone project, working on a rocket and space capsule system, which would lead to putting the the first American (Alan Shepard) into space. Soon after the successful launch on May 5, 1961, President Kennedy agreed to put a man on the moon, and Dr. Kuettner worked on the Apollo program until he left NASA in 1965.



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Dr. Joachim Kuettner (seated) with, from top left, organizer of the event, German meteorologist Rene Heise, Consul General Wolfgang Drautz and UCAR Dr. Richard A. Anthes.

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After leaving NASA, he went on to become Chief Scientist at the National Satellite Center in Washington and in 1967, Director of Advanced Research Projects at NOAA in Boulder, Colorado. In the following decades Dr. Kuettner directed, for the World Meteorological Organization in Geneva, Switzerland, most of the international field projects of the Global Atmospheric Research Program (GARP).

Since 1985, Dr. Kuettner's home base has been UCAR/NCAR, where he has led many national and international field projects. He has held the UCAR Distinguished Chair for Atmospheric Science and International Research since 1994.

Dr. Kuettner was accompanied by his wife of 61 years, Monika, to the event. Among the many guests were representatives from the German Government, UCAR/NCAR, US Air Force Academy, Soaring Society of Boulder, Soaring Society of America, the German Luftwaffe, and the Mountain Wave Project.

The award ceremony was followed by a presentation by Mountain Wave Project pilot and scientist team Klaus Ohlmann (43 world soaring records) and Rene Heise, including exchanges with Dr. Kuettner about the challenges of soaring extreme distances in mountain waves.

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Dr. Joachim Kuettner Honored



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