



# DONALD P. GAVER JR.

1926–2018

Elected in 2009

*“For contributions to reliability, maintainability, and queuing concepts,  
with applications to telecommunications and military systems.”*

BY GERALD G. BROWN

**D**ONALD PAUL GAVER JR., emeritus distinguished professor of operations research at the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, was an internationally noted mathematician specializing in statistics and operations research. He died February 11, 2018, at age 91.

He was born February 16, 1926, in St. Paul, Minnesota, to Donald Paul and Dorothea (née Haman) Gaver. After graduating from the St. Paul Academy, he joined the US Navy and served as an electronics mate (1944–46), a stint that brought him to the Monterey Peninsula for training at the Del Monte Hotel (now the site of the Naval Postgraduate School, NPS) before his deployment to the South Pacific. After World War II he took advantage of the GI Bill to attend the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he earned BS (1950) and MS (1951) degrees in mathematics. This led him to the US Navy Operations Evaluation Group in Washington, DC, and then to Princeton University for a PhD (1956), also in mathematics.

Don met Frances (Fran) Rouse while he was at MIT and she was a student at Wellesley College. They graduated in 1950

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This tribute draws on a “brief biography” posted by INFORMS as well as the obituary published in the *Monterey Herald* February 17, 2018.

and married in 1953 before moving to Princeton together. That was the start of what was to be 65 years of devoted married life.

Don's early professional career spanned the US Navy's Operations Evaluation Group, Westinghouse Research Labs, and Carnegie Mellon University, where he cofounded, with Morris DeGroot, the Department of Statistics. In 1967–68 he took his family for a sabbatical year at the University of California, Berkeley, then returned to Pittsburgh for 2 years before moving back to California to become professor of operations research at NPS. He and Fran settled in Carmel Valley and lived there for almost 45 years.

His work largely focused on operations research in the military, but he touched on other application areas, including problems in transportation and traffic congestion. He published nearly 120 professional papers on a variety of applied and theoretical problems as well as technical reports, book chapters, and classified technical memoranda. He is credited in the Gaver-Stehfest algorithm for inverting Laplace transforms.

His research was funded by entities such as the National Security Agency, Office of Naval Research, and National Science Foundation. During his lengthy tenure at NPS he also consulted with numerous organizations including the RAND Corporation (1987–94), AT&T Bell Laboratories (1986–94), and EPRI (1972–89).

In addition, he served on professional committees of the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission and, for the National Research Council, the Committee on Applied and Theoretical Statistics and its Panel on Modeling and Simulation (as chair of the latter). In 1989 he chaired the joint ORSA/TIMS<sup>1</sup> College of Applied Probability (now the Applied Probability Society), and as a member of the ORSA publications committee was very active in the transportation science section.

Don was well recognized for his research in applied probability modeling and the field of queueing theory. In 2009 he received the Navy Distinguished Civilian Service Medal for

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<sup>1</sup> Operations Research Society of America/The Institute of Management Sciences

both his national security contributions and his positive influence on generations of naval officers, and in 2012 the Military Applications Society of the Institute for Operations Research and the Management Sciences (INFORMS) awarded him the Jacinto Steinhardt Prize for his “substantive contribution to our nation’s military capability” and his continued work in the area. He was also an elected fellow of the American Statistical Association, American Association for the Advancement of Science, INFORMS, and Royal Statistical Society. Of his numerous honors, Don was most proud of his 2009 election as an NAE member.

Don Gaver made quite a life for himself. He was a Navy seaman recruit who used the GI bill and his innate genius to eventually be considered “a national military asset” by those in the Department of Defense who frequently consulted with him on seemingly intractable problems.

He and Fran loved traveling and made many trips to Europe, Asia, and Australia. At home, Don was known as a welcoming, gregarious, sometimes mischievous friend and host.

He is survived by Fran; their children Elizabeth (Hans-Hinrich Thedens), Donald Jr. (Bernice Kaufman), and William (Anne Schlottmann), all of whom earned advanced degrees and achieved professional success; and five grandchildren.