# Tulane Graduate, Bypass Surgery Pioneer Receives Congressional Gold Medal

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Dr. Michael DeBakey, who earned his undergraduate and medical degrees from Tulane University, will receive the Congressional Gold Medal, the highest civilian honor awarded by Congress, at an 11 a.m. ceremony Wednesday in the rotunda of the U.S. Capitol. DeBakey, 99, is being honored as a medical pioneer whose many contributions include inventing, while still a medical student at Tulane, a pump for blood transfusions that was used in the first successful open-heart operation, performing the first successful coronary bypass surgery and helping to establish the concept of mobile army surgical hospitals or MASH units.

By World War II, DeBakey had achieved a national reputation as an authority on vascular disease and had a promising career as a surgeon and teacher. However, he put this career on hold and volunteered for military service, joining the Surgeon General"s staff and rising to the rank of colonel and chief of the Surgical Consultants Division. It was here that DeBakey"s recommendations led to the development of MASH units.

After the war, DeBakey"s proposal to create specialized medical centers to treat wounded veterans evolved into the Veterans Affairs Medical Center System. In 1948, DeBakey joined the Baylor University College of Medicine, where he developed the first surgical residency program in the city of Houston. In 1953, DeBakey performed the first successful procedures to treat patients who suffered stroke-causing aneurysms and later developed a series of innovative surgical techniques for the treatment of aneurysms.

In 1964, DeBakey performed the first successful coronary bypass operation and was named chairman of the President"s Commission on Heart Disease, Cancer and Stroke by President Lyndon Johnson. Two years later, DeBakey was the first to successfully use a partial artificial heart for a patient who could not be weaned from a heart-lung machine following open-heart surgery.

In 1968, DeBakey supervised the first successful multi-organ transplant, in which a heart, both kidneys and lung were transplanted from a single donor into four separate recipients. DeBakey also pioneered the field of telemedicine with the first demonstration of open-heart surgery transmitted overseas by satellite.

In 1969, President Johnson honored DeBakey with the Presidential Medal of Freedom with Distinction and in 1985 President Ronald Reagan conferred on him the National Medal of Science. Remaining active and performing open heart surgery as he entered his 90s, DeBakey also worked with NASA engineers, refining existing technology to create the DeBakey Ventricular Assist Device, which may eliminate the need for heart transplantation in some patients.