

William McElwee Miller, Jr. was born in Iran of missionary parents, graduated from Choate, and then spent six years of active duty in the Naval Air Force. He came to Princeton after spending time at the University of Pennsylvania and Ursinus College while serving with the Naval V-12 Units. He majored in history and was a member of Quadrangle Club. Bill expected to go on to seminary and become a foreign missionary, but it didn't work out that way. He graduated from Biblical Seminary in New York and spent four years working with foreign students in the New York area on the staff of the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship before going on a 20-month research tour of forty countries and returning to spend three years earning a Master's degree in theology at Princeton Seminary. In mid-1966, however, Bill was invited to join the board of Aereon Corporation, a company seeking to advance the development of airship design, and a year later he was elected president of the Corporation. Aereon Corporation had a vision of next-generation, lighter-than-air, hybrid airships to be used in a variety of ways including surveillance and transport. Classmate John McPhee chronicled this work in a New Yorker article and a book titled The Deltoid Pumpkinseed. The AEREON 26 proved its aerodynamic feasibility in manned test flights in 1971, but a risk-averse government staff never provided the funds for Research and Development and the patents expired. In recognition of his pioneering work, Bill was inducted into the Aviation Hall of Fame of New Jersey in 2016. He was continuing to work on related projects when he died on September 17, 2017, in Princeton.

--

Christopher L. Webber