

Colonel Vernon L. Hastings
Inducted 2009



Colonel Vernon L. Hastings was born in Table Rock, Nebraska, on 4 August 1917. He attended school in Table Rock and Lincoln, Nebraska, graduating from Lincoln High School in 1935. He enlisted in the Army Air Corps at Chanute Field, Illinois, on 9 November 1939. After serving as a Machinist Instructor during 1940-1941, he went to the first Army Air Forces Officer Candidate School (OCS) in January 1942 and graduated in May 1942. Serving as a second lieutenant under Major General Frederick L. Martin, who initially led the flight of US Air Service planes around the world in 1924, Hastings assumed his first command position—a training detachment for pre-meteorology cadets at the University of Wisconsin—in July 1942. During the remainder of WWII, he had various other technical training assignments in the Army Air Forces.

As an Air Force reserve officer at the end of WWII, he attended the University of Nebraska and graduated in 1949 with a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering. During 1949-1951, Colonel Hastings served as base engineer at Goose Bay, Labrador, and site support engineer for several arctic weather and radar stations. He then became chief of the Procurement Branch of the US Army Chemical Procurement District in Chicago, Illinois, from January 1952 to April 1954, before being assigned in May 1953 to July 1954 as deputy chief of Air Force Logistics Command's Facilities Maintenance Branch at Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio. In fulfillment of a master's degree in industrial engineering at Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College in 1955, he wrote a thesis titled "A Study of Activities in an Engineering Research Organization."

In August 1955, Colonel Hastings joined General Bernard Schriever's Western Development Division, subsequently renamed as Air Force Ballistic Missile Division, for a four-year stint as chief of the Initial Operation Capability (IOC) Branch. In that capacity, he directed the design of all US operational base facilities for the Atlas intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM). He also led the site selection team for Camp Cooke, subsequently renamed Vandenberg AFB, as the location for construction of the first Atlas ICBM operational launch complex.

General Curtis LeMay, Air Force vice chief of staff, appointed him in 1959 as Site Activation Task Force (SATAF) commander for two of the earliest ICBM operational squadrons-the 566th Strategic Missile Squadron at Offutt AFB, Nebraska, and the 551st Strategic Missile Squadron at Lincoln AFB, Nebraska. During 1959-1962, Colonel Hastings oversaw launch-base construction of Atlas D "coffin" sites in eastern Nebraska and western Iowa. He also supervised installation of ground-support equipment at the launch sites and completed rigid checkout of missiles and other equipment prior to turnover to Strategic Air Command (SAC). Under his leadership, contractors constructed the first Atlas F sites that featured a hardened design-underground "silo" basing.

In consideration of his skillful handling of miner and machinist strikes at Atlas F construction sites in June 1960, Colonel Hastings earned appointment as chairman of the Missile Sites Labor Committee in Omaha, Nebraska, during 1961-1962. President John Kennedy directed its creation to reduce labor conflicts (i.e., grievances, work stoppages, etc.) and, thereby, foster continuous, peaceful work on projects at missile and space sites throughout the United States.

Colonel Hastings began an academic career in 1962 that would extend across a quarter century. From 1962 to 1966 he directed the Civil Engineering Center at the Air Force Institute of Technology (AFIT). Thereafter, he served as assistant to the dean (1966-1969) and assistant dean (1969-1973) of Purdue University's School of Technology. He became director of the construction program at Arizona State University in 1973. That school's vice president of academic research told him it was not an academic subject and "should not be on a university campus." Professor Hastings persevered, and in 1985 received approval for students to pursue a master's degree in the subject. He continued as director of the Division of Construction until retiring with emeritus status in 1987.

By then, construction education had earned legitimacy through accreditation at about 100 colleges and universities, and so-called "C-schools" were producing annually thousands of much-sought-after graduates. More than two decades beyond his official retirement, Professor Hastings continued to travel the country, advising faculty and students on the applicability of the "learn by doing" philosophy in their "C-school" programs. During those visits, he even encouraged professors and students to use information from the Atlas ICBM facilities project as tools for learning generally about large-scale construction.

A life member in the National Society of Professional Engineers, the American Institute of Industrial Engineers, the American Society for Engineering Education, and the Society of American Military Engineers, Colonel Hastings also was accorded the honors of induction to the Order of the Engineer and designation as Fellow in the American Institute of Constructors.