

Lieutenant General Charles H. Terhune Jr.
Inducted 1989



Lieutenant General Charles H. Terhune Jr. was born in Dayton, Ohio, on 7 May 1916, and grew up in Indianapolis, Indiana. He attended Purdue University, where he studied mechanical engineering with an emphasis in aeronautics. In 1938, he earned his Bachelor of Science before attending basic and advanced flying schools and receiving his pilot wings in May 1939 at Kelly Field, Texas. Early assignments included service with the 1st Pursuit Group, Selfridge Field, Michigan, flying P-35s and P-36s and at the Wright Field Materiel Division, Army Air Corps. In May 1940 he entered the California Institute of Technology where he received the Professional Aeronautical Engineering (Ae.E.) degree in June 1941. He then returned to Wright Field in July 1941 where he worked on the development and evaluation of the XP-59 and P-80, the Army Air Forces' first jet aircraft.

After service in Asia General Terhune transferred to Washington D.C., first becoming involved in the Air Force's guided-missile program in April 1947, while Chief, Air to Surface Section, Guided Missile Branch, Headquarters Army Air Forces. In 1950 he became Chief, Guided Missiles Branch, Deputy Chief of Staff Developments, Headquarters U.S. Air Force, and later as the Air Force Assistant to the Director of Guided Missiles in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. He became one of the first five officers working the Air Force ballistic missile program when in August 1954 he took the post of the Deputy Commander of Technical Operations, Western Development Division (WDD). In June 1957 the Western Development Division became the Air Force Ballistic Missile Division (AFBMD) and his title changed to Deputy Commander for Ballistic Missiles. He became Vice Commander, AFBMD, in May 1959. During the six year period from August 1954 to August 1960 he played a key role in the management of the

Air Force's ballistic missile program. He headed the source selection boards for the Thor and Titan ballistic missiles.

He also played an important part in saving the Titan I program from cancellation when officials in the Defense Department advocated such a step in early 1958. To forestall such action, General Schriever, commander of the Ballistic Missile Division (BMD), asked him to lead an effort to brief officials in Washington on the importance of the two-stage Titan. During an eight week period, he briefed the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, the Secretary of the Air Force, the Secretary of Defense and others on the advantages of multi-staged rockets-i.e. lifting capability and range. Finally, he briefed the President's Scientific Advisory Committee (PSAC) and succeeded in persuading them, that multi-staging was an important step forward and the country needed the Titan. Their decision persuaded Secretary of Defense Neil H. McElroy to approve the continuation of the Titan.

General Terhune's contribution to the success of the ballistic missile program was broad. On 12 February 1958 Air Force headquarters directed submission of a fully-defined program for the development of a solid-propellant weapon system as soon as possible. He responded immediately with a thoroughgoing proposal for a solid-propellant ICBM. General Schriever was so convinced that he, in turn, called Lt Gen Donald L. Putt, commander of Air Research and Development Command, to impress upon him the cogency of the proposal. Schriever convinced General Putt that the solid-propulsion missile (later called the Minuteman) best suited the Air Force's needs. Following Schriever's conversation with him, Putt asked Schriever to bring Terhune to Washington immediately to present the proposal to key officials at Air Force headquarters and the Defense Department. The next day the team arrived in the nation's capital. In a short time, they won over officials they were briefing. As a consequence, within one week, the Secretary of Defense approved the start of the Minuteman program.

In August 1960 he left the space program and during the remainder of his career, he served as Commander of the Electronic Systems Division working on command and control projects, as Commander of the Aeronautical Systems Division working on R&D of aircraft and air-launched missiles, and, finally, as vice commander of the Air Force Systems Command. In March 1963 General Schriever, commander of AFSC, assigned General Terhune to manage Project Forecast, which presented a vision of what the Air Force would look like in the mid-seventies and beyond and identified the R&D necessary to accomplish specified goals.

General Terhune retired from the Air Force on 1 September 1969. In July 1971 he became Deputy Director and chief operating official of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL), often considered the world's premier space laboratory. He retired from JPL in December 1983. General Terhune died in August 2006.