

J. Herbert Hollomon



Engineer, scholar, scientist, policymaker – J. Herbert Hollomon was an eclectic mix of all this and more. Energetic, outspoken, sometimes controversial, always brilliant, Hollomon's remarkable ability to initiate change and motivate others earned him international renown.

Born in Norfolk, VA and drawn to science from an early age, Hollomon earned a B.S. degree in physics at MIT. He spent the war years first as an instructor at Harvard University and later as a U.S. Army Major at the Watertown (MA) Arsenal. In 1946, at the time he received his doctorate in metallurgy from MIT, he already had published 24 papers and made significant contributions to the field of nucleation kinetics. For this early work, he received the Rossiter W. Raymond Award in 1946 and the Alfred Nobel Award in 1947.

In 1946, Hollomon joined General Electric Company's Research Laboratory. He became manager of the Metallurgy and Ceramics Research Division in 1952 and built it into the vanguard of materials research that we know today. He also served as an Adjunct Professor of Metallurgical Engineering at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.

In 1954 Hollomon, along with two future U.S. Senators, Robert Kennedy and Fritz Hollings, was named one of the Ten Outstanding Young Men in America. In addition, Fortune Magazine named him one of America's leading young scientists in industry.

In 1960, shortly after his promotion to the head of GE's General Engineering Laboratory, Hollomon gave a speech in which he proclaimed that the time had arrived for engineers to consider the establishment of a national academy of engineering. A summary of the speech, published in the journal *Science*, attracted the notice of others. In 1964 their labors paid off when the National Academy of Engineering came into being.

In 1963, at the suggestion of Science Advisor Jerome Wiesner, President John F. Kennedy asked Hollomon to come to Washington as the first Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Science and Technology. His task was to advance industrial technology and serve as a focal point for the many scientific and technical programs carried out by the Department of Commerce. He left Washington in 1968 to become President of the University of Oklahoma.

In 1970, Hollomon returned to MIT, as consultant to the President and the Provost. In 1972, he founded and directed the Center for Policy Alternatives, an interdisciplinary research institute dedicated to the analysis of policy issues involving technology and society. He also cofounded and codirected MIT's graduate program in management of technology, a reflection of his long-standing conviction that humane and nurturing management could enrich the technological enterprise. In 1983, he joined the faculty of Boston University and directed its Center for Technology and Policy.

During his long career, Hollomon was the recipient of many honors and awards, including six honorary doctorates, and was elected a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and a Foreign Member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Engineering Sciences. He was the editor of several technical journals and was, throughout his life, active in a variety of civic, professional, and scholarly organizations.

In his later years, Hollomon's courageous recovery from a debilitating stroke was an inspiration to many around him. Though confined to a wheelchair, he continued to work, publish, and testify frequently before Congress. He died in 1985 at the age of 66, leaving behind his wife Nancy, their son, and his four children by his first wife, Margaret.

Hollomon was a rare breed – a renaissance man whose intellectual restlessness compelled him to initiate, build, and consolidate. To remember J. Herbert Hollomon is to recall a man of indomitable spirit and unstinting energy and commitment who enriched the engineering profession and the lives of all who knew him.