

Meanwhile in Room 112

Changing of the guard

Photographed by Robert E. Fields, Jr.

On Monday, July 1, John Herbert Hollomon became President of the University of Oklahoma. Since Sept. 1, 1967 the 49-year-old former Undersecretary of Commerce of the United States had been President-Designate, spending the ten months before officially succeeding George L. Cross in learning about the University, the state, and the region.

Such a transition was unusual if not unique—President Hollomon calls it an “innovation in higher education”—and the men on whom it depended

for success, Hollomon and Cross, made it work smoothly. Both agree, both publicly and privately, that it turned out to be a good idea. There was communication, not competition, between the two men, and the year's experience proved to be enormously beneficial to the new President, just as it was intended.

President Hollomon wanted to make himself as available as he could to as many people of the state and region, as well as to the students and faculty of the University, so that all

parties might know each other. It's doubtful that anyone could have done a more thorough job than did Hollomon. He visited fifty towns and cities of Oklahoma, making between four hundred and five hundred talks to some 200,000 persons. More than 30,000 of these were high-school juniors and seniors in fifty schools in Oklahoma and Texas (which now has to worry about J. Herbert Hollomon's recruiting as well as that of Charles Fairbanks). He has met and listened to many of the students, most of the faculty, and all of the administrators at the University, entertaining a sizeable number in his home. And he has traveled to the campuses of the nation, from Boston and South Bend to Los Angeles and Berkeley, talking with deans and presidents, professors and students about the problems of higher education.

A comparison of styles is inevitable in discussing Cross and Hollomon, and the new President often talks about “style” in his speeches, carefully pointing out that his way of doing things will necessarily differ from that of his predecessor.

As a President, Cross was a man of tremendous reserve, distant at times, rather formal, quiet, a careful, slowly cadenced speaker. Hollomon's manner is more informal. As has been described in this magazine, he works in his shirtsleeves, tie loosened, soft drink on his desk. He is a more gregarious, more direct person than Cross. He strikes one as being indefatigable, with an unquenchable curiosity. He is impressive in large groups and small, public and private, with his incisiveness, his honesty, his sincerity, and his imagination.

Says Cross: “Hollomon is one of the most able, energetic, competent men I've ever met. He has a mind like a steel trap. He retains and is able to analyze quickly. He's going to make a superlative President.”

Strips of masking tape cover “Designate” in the sign over the door to Hollomon's temporary offices and signal the transition to a new University administration.



His energy drives him in his work to 14- and 16-hour days. It is common to see his black Volvo parked outside his office until well after six each night and for long stretches on the weekends. Cross again: "Hollomon works harder than he can stand to work for very long. When I was young, I used to come to the office at 7:30 in the morning and leave at six, but after awhile, you become so tense you can't sleep. You simply exhaust your supply of energy. An 8-hour day plus a 2-hour evening is enough. If you get tired, your judgment suffers."

Hollomon has good rapport with the students. He has made it a point to make himself accessible to them, individually or in groups. Whenever any want to see him, he's *always* available. He has entertained many in his home, and there are already mutual respect and trust between him and the student body. It is obvious that he really likes young people, does not put them down or patronize them, does not bombard them with middle-aged platitudes, and even understands them. He communicates.

Hollomon says there are three things he hopes will characterize his style. The first is an insistence on quality. "Whatever someone does, he should do it the best he knows how." The second is an openness. "People should be honest with each other and as the young people say, 'Tell it like it is.' Therefore, each individual is treated with respect regardless of who he is or where he comes from." The third thing is the belief that the life of a person is best spent doing things for others. "Without service to others, life doesn't mean anything to me. There's no sacrifice when you do something for others because that's what you were put here for."

The new President is aware that the transferrance of loyalties from a greatly respected President of twenty-five years to his successor is difficult for some. He is also aware that because he is totally new to Oklahoma, a man from outside the region, he will be met with suspicion and apprehension by others. By exposing himself to the people, he has dissolved most of the doubts, and he will continue

to erase any misconceptions, as time passes.

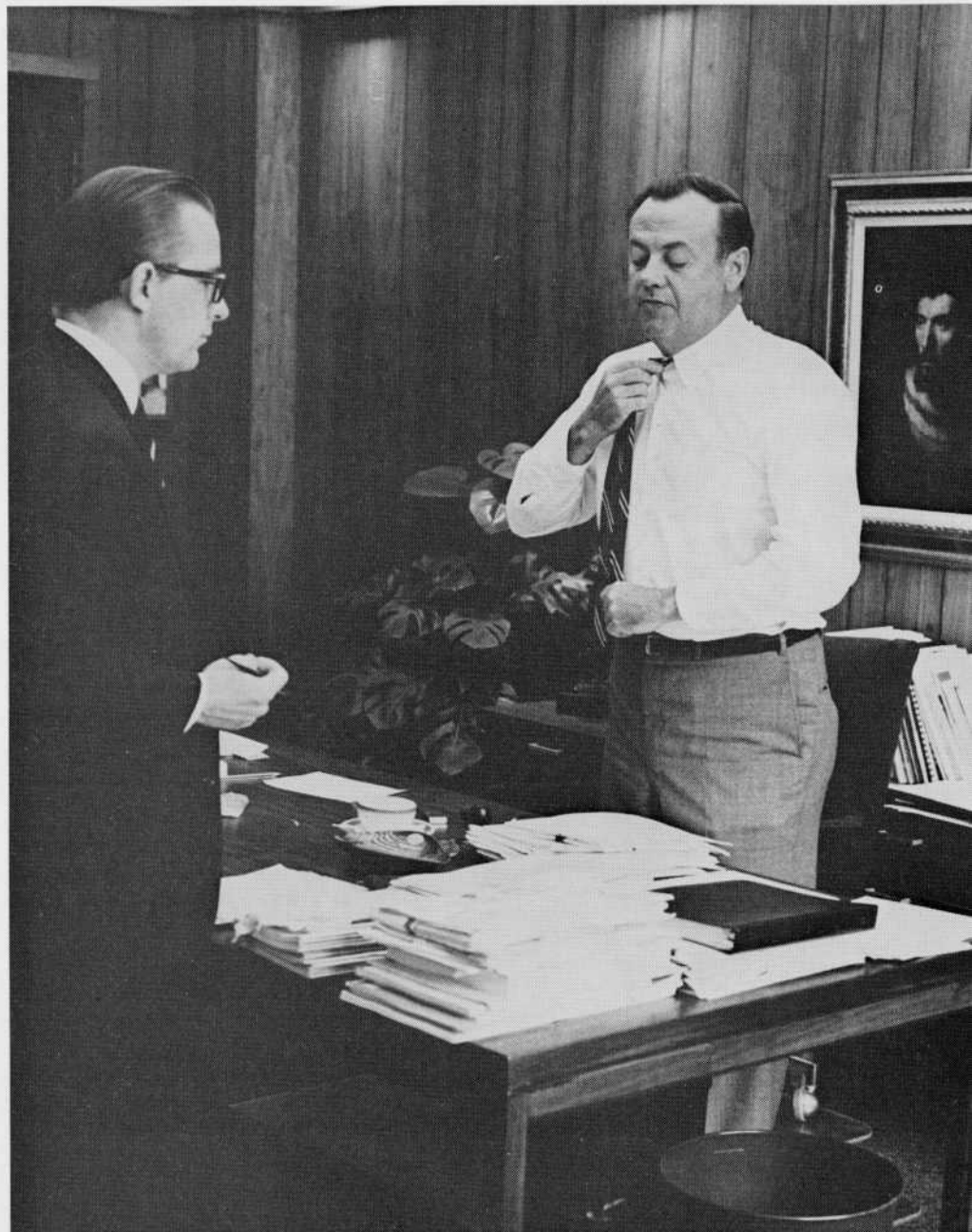
In all of his talks and in many of his conversations, Hollomon emphasizes the "excitement" of a college campus. It *is* an exciting place, and it promises to be particularly exciting under the leadership of Hollomon. In the coming year—and years—a new man will sit in the President's Office in Evans Hall, and his philosophy and style will have a lot to do with the direction the University of Oklahoma will take. The man in that office has already shown himself to be capable and resourceful; there is little doubt but that the future of the University will be both promising and productive.

From a statement by President Hollomon to the OU Board of Regents upon be-

ing named President of the University of Oklahoma.

On July 1, 1968, by your action last year I will become the eighth President of the University of Oklahoma. It is thus fitting that I comment on the year's activities and experience. This innovation in American higher education of a year's overlap between the retiring President and the President-Designate with time for planning and learning will prove to have been a wise choice for the University and for me personally. The Regents made the decision for this experiment. Together, you and I, with the help of Dr. George Cross and the faculty, have initiated planning for the future. Only through joint efforts can our planning be brought to fruition, for it is your policy we are implementing.

We have used this time you have given us to open our minds and our hearts to the University and to the people of Oklahoma. You already know how open the door to my office and my home has been—how students and faculty have sat with me in



Assistant Christenson waits as the Hollomon tie is raised for a luncheon appointment. It is not altogether unlikely that the datted thing will be lowered by day's end.



The accessibility of Hollomon to students is part of the new president's style. He believes strongly in keeping his door—and his mind—open to his student constituents.

my living room or across a desk or table and discussed the future of the University. You know how widely I have traveled and spoken throughout the state and how searchingly I have talked in many places and on many campuses. You know already how intensively we have asked and how extensively we have planned. Through our ambitious planning effort beginning last January, we have involved about six hundred faculty members, community leaders, administrators, and alumni on twenty-four committees and panels to plan for the future of the University. Tens of thousands of hours of personal time have been invested in this public service by people of good will from the campus, state, and nation. Creative energies are producing many ideas that we can act on. The effort has truly been much more than I had expected. The year's investment in the future will yield a return many fold in the years ahead.

For ten months I have seen Oklahoma first hand: its people, its institutions, its system of higher education, its resources, and its potential. At the same time you and the people of Oklahoma have seen me and my family. Sometimes there has been jesting, and at other times we have been serious. It has been a time when the University community and the people of the state have had a chance to see me as I am and to hear some of my dreams and share some of my beliefs. It has been a time when my family and I in turn have had time to hear and share the hopes and aspirations of the people of the state. We have seen each other for the better part of a year. My wife and I have wanted the people of the state and in the University to know us first hand as we are, rather than as someone may have thought we are. We have been direct and curious. Openly we have listened and asked to learn. Occasionally, we have misunderstood or been misunderstood, as happens among all good friends.

We have come to love the people of this state. Especially we have come to love the young people—the students—whose potential makes it worthwhile to work with them and through them for a future world. There is hope and vitality in this state, in its youth, and in its youthful pioneering spirit. I trust our young. My faith is with them to build a society better than the one they entered. And I feel young enough to help them. It has been enough by itself to have spent this year here in a young state with young people looking to the future.

The year has brought its share of anxiety. It could be expected that some tensions might rise to the boiling point from the



The President's secretary is Mrs. Bill Gover, more frequently known as "Margaret" or "Maggie," which is perfectly in keeping with the more informal Hollomon style.

uncertainties inherent in change. National events have not lessened the tension. We must understand that change and uncertainty will increase or at least continue in our society and that they will be with higher education for some time to come, bringing creative opportunities as well as further anxieties. We must recognize that although change and uncertainty are the ways of human progress, they affect the personal security of people in ways that often result in hatred for and fear of the symbols of change. The stranger in our midst, the renegade, the outsider, the non-conforming student, or visitor may be attacked for that reason. Violence sometimes happens, but more often there is rejection, ostracism, personal maliciousness or discrimination. Dissent itself may become a symbol of change, threatening tradition and bringing measures to force conformity. Non-violent civil disobedience likewise may be repressed, and the civil disobedience itself may turn to violence, as we have seen recently. Conformity may be mistaken for security; sameness for goodness; uniformity for certainty; anonymity for identity. When violence occurs for whatever reason, we can be sure that it leads only to further distress and anarchy. It is a solution that scorns an open democratic process.

Universities must learn to accept the necessity and potential goodness of change and uncertainty and to deal with them through an open process. We must, even more, seek those inner strengths of love, understanding, tolerance, and personal discipline on which rest both personal security and freedom.

We in universities must demonstrate that excellence and action are compatible, that human values and high standards are more important than anarchy and barbarism. If we are to be effective in these ends here, we must be prepared for the opportunities as well as the attacks that will come. I believe Oklahomans will welcome a spirit on campus that is vigorous and just, with a thousand different good works in support of peaceful change. Consider how much change has already been compressed in the 60-year history of this young state.

The people in a just and open society do not have only one way of looking at the world. They look to diversity with hope and enthusiasm. Differences in race or belief, speech or dress, manner or style, place of birth or origin need not of themselves threaten secure people. The University must help build strong and secure people. The University must help build strong and secure young people capable of leadership in an open society. It must also speak to those who have not had opportunities to participate fully in the processes of society but who also dream and hope for a better life. In these tasks we must be concerned with the humanities—the nature of man, his surroundings, his language, his art—that are all a part of his culture. For our culture also produces people who care whether or not we take full advantage of what we know and what we can do.

Specifically, I realize that the transition

to a new administration of the University is filled with both hope and uncertainty. My wife Margaret and I have been sensitive to the nature of the changing society and of the University we represent. Mostly we hear reactions that give us hope and courage, but some are borne of understandable apprehension. Both of us have a deep belief that the ability to hear, inquire, and be ourselves is vital to the purpose of helping young people and the University make a full contribution to society. Now that my wife is home and her illness is being treated, I want to assure you that we intend to continue to act with honesty, friendliness, and human understanding.

You are now voting to make me acting President during Dr. Cross' absence until the date of his retirement. I wanted you to have my report on the past year's activities, for a vote on the basis of that experience is an acceptance of the challenges of the future as well as its difficulties. It is a vote that demonstrates our mutual commitment to the future of the University. Without our mutual commitment, I would not wish to devote the vital substance of my family's and my life to this enterprise of such merit and consequence.

My faith and belief is that at this University at this time we shall build a future that will speak to the entire nation saying—our strengths are deep; our youth will not despair of our society nor reject it; our youthful spirit will demand quality of life and excellence and will not tolerate violence or decay, and our University will be a good example for the rest.

From an interview with President Hollomon on "Headliners," a program on radio station KTOK in Oklahoma City.

INTERVIEWER: Dr. Hollomon, in general, part of the university's responsibilities is dealing with questions on how men are to live in society. You and I and all of us have witnessed the problems on campuses across the country and with student unrest. When you accepted the position as OU President, did the idea ever enter your mind that this job might be a great big headache because of this student unrest?

HOLLOMON: I don't think that questions of unrest and difficulties among people necessarily have to be headaches. Human affairs of significance throughout the whole history of man involve disagreements and conflict. What one aims for is a way to arrange your life, your situation, your university, your place so that people can handle their problems with good sense and with love and consideration. The problems at Columbia and at other universities are in part the fault of the universities, too. The universities have tended to become inhumane places. At least in the view of some students, a student is treated like a massive IBM card. There is one course after another; there is a certain curriculum; the classrooms are too large; students are taught often by young people, who though they relate to the students, haven't had any teaching experience. The students as

well as the faculty have not looked at the university as a single community in which the hopes and fears and desires of all people are involved.

INTERVIEWER: What can be done to solve the problem?

HOLLOMON: I think that there is no one thing that can be done. We all need understanding that a university is a very peculiar place which always has a group of teenagers. I have four more or less teenagers of my own, but after awhile they grow up. The difficulty with a university is that its teenagers never grow up, they just keep being replaced by other teenagers. They are struggling to seek their own life and identity, so that first thing that you and I need to have is tolerance for these young people who are trying out their freshly gathered wings. One thing we must do more is to encourage student participation. Students will not run the university, but they have to have a feeling of participation. And we need more humanity and understanding between the administration and the faculty and the students.

INTERVIEWER: Can you as President of the University shape the personality of the institution through selection of certain types of faculty members?

HOLLOMON: No one can do that. The way a university operates is that the faculty itself participates in the selection of professors as well as the deans, the vice presidents, and the President. What a university president can do more than anything else is to set a style and to set standards below which he will not go nor shall the university go. The most important thing is the style he sets, and the standards he holds.

INTERVIEWER: Dr. Hollomon, I've talked with a number of university administrators in many parts of the country and many of them expressed the same attitude: they just do not want to play "big daddy" to the students. In other words, they stress minimum rules and regulations, and they believe whatever the student wants to do with his personal life and his academic choices is largely his decision. Do you agree with this?

HOLLOMON: I wouldn't go all the way. I think like anything else, the question isn't an either-or question. I think that there is a deep responsibility to the faculty of a university to set out certain values and standards of what needs to be learned. I don't think that the university is simply a supermarket where someone goes in and picks out a bunch of goodies and puts them in a basket and decides that this is an education. There are things that the teacher knows which he can share with the student to give him a sense of continuity and connection, and the business of treating the university as a shopping cart is just plain nonsense. It is also true that a university is a place where a young person begins to make his own decisions because when he leaves the university, he is on his own. We have to help this transition.

We must arrange a place where the mistakes are not so great when they are made, because they will be made. I sort of end up half-way in between. I don't believe in complete permissiveness. I also believe that gradually young people need to make their own way and make their own decisions, so I believe in both.

INTERVIEWER: I know that you have had association in the past with students at Harvard, Cornell, MIT, and George Washington University. Did these students really act any differently, have any different thoughts, or behave themselves in any unusual way compared to what you have seen in Oklahoma?

HOLLOMON: I would say that at OU and to some degree in the high schools in this region and state is a great deal more diversity of educational background. There are those who have had very poor backgrounds and those who have had an excellent opportunity. There is a great diversity in preparation, in other words, of the student. I think also that the fraction of students at the other universities that you mentioned who are concerned with national and world problems and ideas is somewhat larger. I would also say that there is a growing sophistication of the students here in the sense that they are more mature and more able and more honest and trying to seek out in a really deeply human way.

INTERVIEWER: Have you had any disillusionments after being in Oklahoma almost a year?

HOLLOMON: How can you be disillusioned if you are looking for the excitement that is to be rather than what was? I haven't had any disillusionment. I like my job, I like what I'm doing, I like the young people, I like the people in the state. Some people have different views than I do on some things and on other matters we completely agree. That doesn't matter. What matters is that it is an exciting and wonderful place to be with a lot of wonderful people. How in the world could you be disillusioned?

President Hollomon's son James thumb-tacked this poem to the bulletin board in his father's office with these words: "For those who would understand or love my father, I offer one likeness, one vision—one of the many visions and likenesses, in any of which he can only be partly expressed."

Escapist—Never

He is no fugitive—escaped, escaping.
No one has seen him stumble looking back.
His fear is not behind him but beside him
On either hand to make his course perhaps
A crooked straightness yet no less a
straightness.

He runs forward. He is a pursuer.
He seeks a seeker who in his turn seeks
Another still, lost far in the distance.
Any who seek him seek in him the seeker.
His life is a pursuit of a pursuit forever.
It is the future that creates his present.
All is an interminable chain of longing.

—Robert Frost from *In the Clearing*