Jack R. Kelble

President, Space and Airborne Systems
Raytheon Co.
BSEE '65

For his outstanding record of leadership in the defense industry

Great Beginnings

The son of one Purdue engineer and the father of another, Jack Kelble calls his relationship with Purdue a family tradition. "I knew Purdue was a great school," he says. "I may have been naïve, but it was the only school I ever applied to."

Growing up in the suburbs of Chicago, Kelble was keenly aware of his father's professional life and revealed his own aptitude for engineering in the fifth grade. It was then that he took an interest in radios, scouring church rummage sales for them, buying them, and then happily tearing them apart and repairing them. Other signs of a future engineer also emerged—high math and science scores, very high—and college-level work during high school, too. "Actually, I decided when I was five years old that I was going to be an engineer. And I never deviated," he says.

Kelble entered Purdue in 1961 and quickly decided that electrical engineering was the most interesting area for him. He tested into the first computer course that Purdue offered, learning programming on a Honeywell RPC 4000. Yet he credits his nonacademic experiences in Triangle fraternity, HKN Society, band and student body politics as essential preparation for the successful business career that lay ahead.

A Twist of Fate

"I was originally planning on going straight to graduate school," Kelble recalls. "But one day, it was snowing really hard, so I cut through the union on my way to class. And I saw all of these ads for jobs! So I decided to sign up for some practice interviews with RCA, Zenith, and IBM. RCA mentioned its graduate-study program and said that I would qualify, and I ended up taking a job with them. That's where I was introduced to radar engineering, and I just loved it."

Kelble stayed at RCA for fourteen years, working in design engineering and project management. "It was during my early years at RCA that I got my MSEE at the University of Pennsylvania and completed the graduate business program at the Wharton School. Early on, one of the program managers picked me to be a project manager, and so I transitioned into doing more management activities. It was a sort of career change, not something I had imagined. But once I got involved in running programs, I found I could have a lot more impact on a project as a manager than as one of the design engineers."

Kelble began working for Raytheon Co. in 1979 and today heads the company's Space and Airborne Systems, producing electronic systems for precision engagement; missile defense; and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) applications. The business, with more than $3 billion in sales, employs more than 10,000 people. Throughout his career at Raytheon, Kelble has been responsible for several breakthrough technologies, including the transformation of ground-based radar into the arrays of the IRIDIUM communications satellite system.

A Vision for Change

Kelble cites changing workforce demographics as a primary issue in the years ahead. "I've been involved in the defense industry my entire career," he says. "What concerns me now is whether the U.S. has the young technical people entering defense to maintain our technological expertise and maintain our world lead. This condition has been created by the cyclic nature of the defense budgets in the United States. The defense workforce is older, with a fairly large bubble of people who are 45 and older. We haven't developed a strong feeder system for higher positions. At Raytheon we have been hiring a large number of engineers. We hired over 2,000 new college engineering graduates in 2001 and 2002.

"I think the new engineers are more prepared to step into industry," Kelble adds. "They have had internships, they have great computer skills, and they have been involved in more project activities. It is our challenge to become an employer of choice."

As the leader of a company, Kelble creates the vision and is responsible for the bottom line, but, he says, "The fact is, I have a lot of help from a lot of people. That is how we perform, how we satisfy our customers, and, ultimately, how we are able to grow our business."

1979–	Raytheon Co.: President, Space & Airborne Systems (SAS) with $3.2 billion in annual sales. Previous positions include: Vice President and General Manager, Surveillance and Reconnaissance; Vice President of Engineering for Raytheon Electronic Systems; Senior Vice President and Deputy General Manager, Sensors and Electronic Systems; Vice President of Integrated Systems, Command, Control and Communications; Director of Engineering, Raytheon Equipment Division; Program Manager, Ballistic Missile Early Warning System; Major programs include Space Tracking and Surveillance System (STSS), Global Hawk Integrated Sensor Suite, ATFLIR Targeting Pod, AN/APG Active Electronically Scanned Array radar. Board of Directors, TelAsic, HRL Research Laboratories, HE Microwave, and Software Productivity Consortium
1995–96	Head, Financial Commission of Sudbury, Massachusetts
1965–79	RCA: Various positions in engineering and program management including design engineering, section leader on Kwajlein Atoll
1977–79	Chairman, Mt. Laurel, New Jersey, Economic Development Committee

BSEE '65, Purdue; MSEE '69, University of Pennsylvania; Graduate Business Program '71, Wharton School