

**AFEHRI File 19-10**

**Research Materials/Source Documents  
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**FILE TITLE: 1st Female CMSgt to retire at 30 years service: CMSgt Dorothy W. Holmes**

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# A CHIEF'S CHIEF

by SSgt. Fred Spriggs, Air Force Academy, Colo.

When CMSgt. Dorothy W. Holmes entered the Air Force in the summer of 1949, she didn't plan to break any records.

In fact, she didn't even plan to make the Air Force a career.

But she has broken a record. Chief Holmes is the first woman chief master sergeant to retire with 30 years' military service, all in the Air Force.

Nothing like that was in the wildest dreams of the young native of Philadelphia when she headed for Lackland AFB, Texas, for basic military training. "I was going to serve my hitch and then go on and do something else," she laughed.

But something happened.

The North Koreans attacked their countrymen in the south, and Holmes and many other airmen found their enlistments extended by presidential order. "After President Truman extended my enlistment," she recalled, "I found myself on the way to Japan where I was assigned as a personnel specialist at the Far

East Air Forces' headquarters in Japan."

But travel, rather than the president's decision, "really changed my mind" about a career, she said. And travel she did. "At one time," she noted, "I had more overseas time than I had in the states."

During her career, Holmes has served in Europe, Puerto Rico, two tours in the Orient, and all across the United States. "I never really made a career decision," she said. "I always said that I'd do this until something better came along."

Chief Holmes' assignment to the Academy was the result of personal interest on the part of the then-Commandant of Cadets, Brig. Gen. Stanley C. Beck. The general, in the process of preparing for the first class with women, had his executive officer call Chief Holmes at her quarters at Ellsworth AFB, S.D. Beck requested Holmes' help in integrating the first women cadets into the previously all-male institution.

"I thought someone was pulling

my leg when I answered the phone," the chief laughed.

"The next morning we were in a briefing with my wing commander at Ellsworth," she said, "when base operations called and said General Beck's aircraft was 'on final.' I quickly told my commander about the phone call the night before and he jokingly said, 'Deny the request to land.'"

Chief Holmes was scheduled to arrive at the academy in June 1976 to help with basic cadet training of the first women cadets. But the Strategic Air Command officials didn't want to let her go.

"It's always the same old story," the veteran said with a touch of airiness. "They never want to let you go."

At the academy Chief Holmes helped the women adapt to cadet and military life and served as a woman senior NCO role model for them. She also served the superintendent as a special assistant for plans, programs, and policies.

When she arrived in Colorado Springs in September 1976 some of the initial problems with women cadets had already been worked out. "But there were still growing pains when I got here," she said. "Going from an all-male institution to one that's coed isn't easy. The change was well-planned, but there were what I call little 'nit-noi' things that occurred."

Chief Holmes strove to make her job one of helping all cadets. "We tried to stay away from 'girlie' issues," she said. The chief viewed herself as a personal counselor—not only for the women, but for the men as well. "We in the office tried to make the impression that anyone could walk through the door with a problem, whether it be personal, academic, or military, and rap with us about it," she said.

Making the cadets feel comfortable worked well because academy graduates often dropped by for a chat when they were in the Colorado Springs area.

Maj. Cynthia H. Little, who worked with the chief, credits Holmes with helping cadets establish social actions and equal opportunity programs at the academy. "She helped the cadets nurture support for equal opportunity," Maj. Little said, "and she reported to the commandant about what's going on in the wing."

Maj. Little said the chief had a special knack for helping cadets with their problems. "She helped cadets who were having difficulty realizing they had potential and were important. This helped them to decide to stay at the academy. A lot of times 'firsties' [seniors] would stop by to

talk. They told me this is one place they could come and get inspired. Chief Holmes was sympathetic with their problems, would listen, and tried to help."

"Cadets would come to us," the chief said, "and we could guide them to many agencies designed to help, but we always left it up to the cadet to choose where the help would come from."

She said time was one of the biggest problems confronting her. "Every minute of a cadet's day is accounted for," she explained. "Sometimes we invited guests here to talk to the cadets about different areas of interest, and it was a real juggling act to get them scheduled for these meetings."

Chief Holmes didn't sit at her desk and wait for cadets to come to her with a problem. She traveled around the campus asking questions and making friends. "Basically," she said, "we were trying to help the cadets decide to make this a career. Some people, from time to time, change their minds. By relating my experiences in the 'real' Air Force—and that's their term—I hoped we could help them relate to their future career."

Chief Holmes didn't limit her travels around campus to the dormitories or cadet area but went into the classroom. "It's surprising the questions these kids will ask about officer and NCO relationships, the NCO evaluation system, and how things really work out there," she noted.

Maj. Don Sullivan, U.S. Army, an assistant professor at the academy and course director in the department of behavioral sciences, said

that Chief Holmes did "an unparalleled job" in the classroom. "The guest lecturer program started about two years ago," the major said, "and Chief Holmes has been a guest lecturer in eight classes. We felt the more cadets know about NCOs, the better officers they can become."

"Chief Holmes came into the classroom and showed the cadets what a senior NCO really is. The talk would start off about the role of a senior NCO as a counselor, but the discussion always ended up on the topic of officer-NCO relationships. Most of the cadets came away with the idea that 'I'd like to have a first sergeant like her.'"

Expanding the role of the non-commissioned officer at the academy was high on the chief's priority list. "Although I'd go into the classroom as a senior NCO," she said, "cadets still have very little contact with the middle-level NCO force—the staffs and techs. I hope some of them can get into the classroom so the cadets can see where these people are coming from."


SMSgt. Bill Sheldon, sergeant major for 10 cadet squadrons, agrees with the others on Chief Holmes' contributions to the cadets.

"They come by my office," he said, "and relate their contacts with Dorothy. She represents—to both men and women—what a senior NCO stationed at the academy is all about. She was also an inspiration to the senior NCOs here."

"Cadets feel she is indispensable. She gives straightforward answers and is not locked into only working with women. She helps as many young men as she does young women. She and Maj. Little work hand-in-glove with the superintendent to help make people aware of things that aren't quite right and how to make things more efficient."

CMSgt. Elmer Wienecke, senior enlisted advisor at the academy since 1975, has worked closely with Chief Holmes on hundreds of projects. "I can truthfully tell you," he said, "that Dorothy Holmes is THE professional noncommissioned officer. If an airman came up to me and said, 'Someday I want to be a Dorothy Holmes,' I would know that he or she wanted to be a chief master sergeant."

"I can go no further than to say she's what every chief master sergeant strives to be."

Academy Superintendent Lt. Gen. K. L. Tallman agreed, and presented Chief Holmes the Legion of Merit. And Colorado Gov. Richard D. Lamm proclaimed a Dottie Holmes Day statewide. 

**CMSgt. Dorothy Holmes accepts a Governor's Proclamation from Lt. Gen. K. L. Tallman (opposite page) after being awarded the Legion of Merit. She worked closely with Maj. Cynthia H. Little (below) to advise the academy superintendent.**

