

Veterans Day Spotlight: A Life Spent Delivering on America's Promise to Veterans

As we commemorate Veterans Day, Consilium Staffing would like to recognize the work of Lisa Holmes, Consilium director of government services, who has dedicated more than thirty years to supporting United States veterans and active duty military. [Read about Holmes' recent trip to Washington, D.C. to advocate for improvements to healthcare at Veterans Affairs facilities.](#)

Photo: This handmade presentation case, sent to Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Post 10454 in Grapevine, Texas, contains an American flag and an Afghan flag flown in Afghanistan in honor of Lisa Holmes. Also included was a note: "Sirs: please present this to Lisa Holmes, from the Soldiers of Camp Phoenix, Afghanistan." The gold inscription reads, "Lisa Holmes, Thank you from the Veterans."



Lisa Holmes means it almost literally when she says that her heart for veterans is just part of her DNA. With her extensive family military history—relatives on each side of Holmes' family have fought in every American war from the Revolution to Vietnam—Holmes has never known a life unaware of the pride, pain, and continuing sacrifice that comprise the aftermath of military service.

That legacy is part of why Veterans Day has been a meaningful, if bittersweet, event as far back as she can remember.



Photo: Holmes' parents in France, 1956. Holmes' father served in the Korean War. His brother—Holmes' uncle—was an Air Force lieutenant colonel who served in World War II, the post-war occupation of Berlin, and the Korean War, in addition to two tours of duty in Vietnam. Both men enlisted in honor of their father's service in the Spanish-American War. Holmes' two brothers served in the Air Force during the Vietnam era.

“Veterans Day has always been a big deal in my household,” Holmes said. “I have parades, big and old stories still the larger-down to the November 11. even be here had World War I not happened.”

Photo: Holmes' maternal grandfather Edgar (1967), 455th WWI Aero Squadron, Army Air

Holmes' grandparents were introduced by her McGee, or “Vin,” when he insisted that his with whom he had been instant friends as he'd hoped, the two hit it off and soon



vivid memories of the flags flying off our house, recounted by my grandfather, than-life paratrooper right boots he still wore on And truthfully, I wouldn't

Shadrack Bradley (1897-Corps

great-uncle John Vincent sister meet the war buddy (Holmes' grandfather). Just became a couple.

Unfortunately, while serving in the trenches during World War I, Vin had been poisoned with mustard gas, a chemical agent that causes severe blisters on the skin and inside the lungs.

“That mustard gas just ate him alive,” Holmes said. “Uncle Vin didn’t live long after the war. He had all these hopes and dreams—including owning his own potato chip company—that he never got the chance to pursue, and he never got the benefits he was promised. I don’t ever want that to happen to another veteran, and I’ll do anything I can to ensure that it doesn’t.”

For Holmes, virtually her entire career has been a means of furthering that goal. From 1983-1993, she served in Germany as a government service contractor for the United States Department of Defense (DoD). Holmes was responsible for ensuring that military units received all the supplies they needed—an especially important job in times of war. Holmes continued traveling between Germany and the United States to support the commands as needed until 2011.



Photo: Holmes accepting an award from Lieutenant General Pagonis in Kaiserslautern, Germany, upon his return from the First Gulf War

In 1998, after moving back to the United States, Holmes was offered a position with the quasi-governmental agency National Industries for the Blind (NIB), which creates federal career opportunities for blind individuals. The NIB is classified as a “mandatory source,” meaning it has legal priority when federal entities determine from which companies to acquire products. Holmes, as national sales manager for the company, would travel to government facilities in her region to secure contracts for products made by NIB employees, ensure compliance with the law, and work to get suppliers on board with their mission.

Holmes recounts the story of meeting a young man whose NIB job was to make the 3M wound tape used by the military. He was 18 years old and had been blinded in a farming accident the year prior when a rock flew up and blinded him in both eyes.

“He gave me a tour of the workshop and proudly showed me their new break room, which was decorated with newspaper clippings about the military going back many decades,” Holmes said. “When I asked him—without thinking—about the stories on the walls, he said, ‘Ma’am, I will never be able to serve my country. But I will help all I can, and this is how I am going to do it.’ All I could think was that this kid was willing to give as much as he could for his country, yet there were people showing reluctance to buy his product? Nope, not on my watch. It was at that moment that my work became a *mission*.”



Photo: Holmes with Barbara Bush in 1998 while working on behalf of the NIB

In 1999, after the NIB underwent a vertical realignment (meaning that each individual would be in charge of a federal agency instead of a geographic territory), Holmes was told she would be tasked with selling to Veterans Affairs facilities exclusively.

“I was so upset at the time,” Holmes said. “I had a long history with the Department of Defense and suddenly I was being shifted to Veterans Affairs, which had a terrible reputation at the time. We had all heard stories of bad things happening at VA facilities, and soon my name was going to be associated with that. But I sucked it up and did my duty despite everything, and I am proud that I was able to make a difference.”

[WordPress set-out quote feature here:] “Every time I walk into a Veterans Affairs hospital, I see evidence of my work.”



Photo: Working with VA officials Cojean Sprouse and Norbert Matyniak on behalf of the NIB, November 2000

Holmes, who believes strongly in selling face to face when working with government agencies, established the very first VA optical shop run by a blind agency. Even more impressive, she eventually brought 75% of Veterans Affairs facilities under one procurement contract, a feat that was nearly unfathomable at the time.

“I rattled a lot of cages back then,” Holmes recalled. “My work was not always embraced because there was just a certain way things were done. All these alliances had already been formed, and here I was upsetting the apple cart. There was one time in San Diego, after I had landed a significant contract, that a woman actually came up to me and spit in my face. It was a tough slog at times, but I just kept pressing on.”

In 2001, Holmes received a call from Corporate Express (now a Staples company) with an offer to work as their federal sales director. After being promised that the company would automatically switch to products made by blind or handicapped workers—and would categorize the government as a prime vendor—Holmes agreed. Her new role allowed her to travel to approximately 75 different divisions and ensure that federally mandated products were stocked and sold in a manner compliant with the law.



Photo: April 2003, with representatives from the Hines VA Hospital and The Chicago Lighthouse, a social service organization that provides Veterans Affairs facilities with assistive technology for individuals who are blind or visually impaired

“I was able to do a lot of good in that position, and I always tried to get people on the same page instead of using the law to bully anyone into doing the right thing,” Holmes said. “I also met a lot of people while I traveled, which enabled me to help get supplies where they were needed in

emergencies, including 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina.”

During Hurricane Katrina, it was Holmes’ company that had the only warehouse—complete with supply trucks—left standing in the area. As a result, they were able to support the entire Gulf with supplies from a procurement cell set up in North Texas. Through her travels, Holmes also happened to have met the man who owned the only warehouse in America with enough towels and blankets that met the strict government requirements for use by FEMA.

However, Holmes said the employee in charge of the warehouse refused to open the doors. With no time to waste, she went right to the top: Holmes made a call to the owner, who just so happened to be a Marine veteran with two Purple Hearts.

“Ken drove down there with a bolt cutter, sliced through the padlock, kicked open the front door, and started loading trucks himself,” Holmes laughed. “And he had that first truck loaded and in Dallas—all the way from Georgia—in about 12 hours. I told my boss we should stage FEMA trailers preemptively so they would already be loaded and ready when the next disaster hit. It took a while to implement because of all the regulatory hoops, but that is a program that still exists today.”



In 2004, Holmes also was asked to run for a board seat with the American Logistics Association (ALA), an organization that was exclusively male at the time and, coincidentally, had strongly discouraged her membership in the 1980s (according to Holmes, the European chapter was quite reluctant to consider including women). When asked what the position would entail, Holmes was told she would go to Congress and lobby incessantly for the MWR (shorthand for the Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation program) benefits that military members were supposed to have earned by virtue of their service.

Photo: 2003, at the Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers Conference, sponsored by the MWR Program, Corporate Express, and the U.S. Army

Holmes won the board position and served from 2005-2008. However, on one of her visits to the capitol, Holmes said she was given very disturbing news.

“One of my associates informed me that the transfer cases—which hold the remains of soldiers killed in action—were being ransacked en route from Iraq to Ramstein Air Force Base in Germany,” Holmes said. “I was horrified, but I also knew there was a fix. I was determined to figure out who was doing this.”

Modern radio-frequency identification (RFID) technology was still relatively new at the time, but Holmes knew that it held the key to determining when the cases were being opened—and thus, by whom. Thanks to that suggestion, and a connection with someone who knew the technology, Holmes said the culprit was apprehended soon thereafter.

“That was personal to me,” Holmes said. “And it wasn’t a business deal or anything that I profited from—nor did I need to. I simply provided a solution and connected people who could work together to implement it.”

To Holmes, her career is best summarized as a quest to find innovative solutions to pressing problems, whatever those may be.

“There was one time in 2005 that I took a very big risk on behalf of the United States Army,” Holmes said.

She had received a call from an Army contracting officer who asked for a large number of toner cartridges, a seemingly innocuous request. However, two commercial planes had been blown up at that airport two days prior, and the military was asking for the equivalent of about \$6 million of printer ink. If she sent planes chock-full of supplies and they were subsequently destroyed, the loss would not be covered by insurance. With that great a loss, her company itself would have been at risk.

“I had to take a step back in my heart and evaluate the impact of my decision,” Holmes said. “It was a huge risk, but they *needed* those supplies and they knew who to call to get them. After a short hesitance, I said, ‘Yes sir, we will have it there—and your boys will protect my plane.’ He replied, ‘Yes ma’am,’ and that’s exactly what happened. I had effectively opened a supply chain from Europe into Iraq in theater, and that was when our guys rolled up and took over that airport.”

After moving on from Corporate Express in 2007, Holmes brought her federal procurement expertise to several other mandated sources, most recently a service disabled veteran-owned small business based in Atlanta. By 2011, however, Holmes felt that her time dealing with products exclusively was coming to a close.

“At some point, I realized that I was just plain tired and decided to take some time off,” Holmes said. “I was developing my patent at the time (*editor’s note: Holmes currently holds the U.S. patent for anti-microbial cards*), but I needed to figure out what else to do with my spare time. I decided to put up a sign at my local VFW and offer assistance for veterans who needed transportation to doctors’ appointments at the VA.”

Holmes soon found herself not only transporting but actually accompanying veterans to their appointments. Several of her passengers had suffered traumatic brain injuries in combat and were unable to remember physician instructions, so Lisa sat in and took notes.

“During that time, I saw things that I had never even imagined as a vendor,” Holmes said. “I was *incensed* about the way our veterans were being treated, and I thought, ‘Boy, this is not what America thinks is going on here.’”

Around that time, Holmes received a call from Consilium Staffing.

“My journey to Consilium was very fortuitous,” Holmes said. “My interest was piqued as soon as I heard they worked with qualified healthcare providers across the country. I realized I could play a small part in protecting veterans by ensuring they get the best healthcare possible.”

Under her direction, a mere six months after being awarded its federal supply schedule, the Consilium Government Services Division won a \$40 million contract to place quality healthcare providers in U.S. Army facilities.

Holmes recently attended a Concerned Veterans for America town hall meeting with Senator Ted Cruz, during which Cruz invited Holmes and Consilium executive vice president Matt Baade to Washington, D.C., to present solutions to existing problems in the delivery of federal healthcare [link to PR] at Veterans Affairs and military medical facilities. While in Washington, Holmes also met with Jan Frye, deputy assistant secretary for acquisitions and logistics at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

“It was an honor to present solutions to problems that have plagued federal healthcare for so long,” Holmes said. “The current level of care that many of our veterans receive—which I see first-hand when my husband requests care at the VA—is truly in violation of the commitment we made to care for them after they came home.”



Photo: Holmes and husband Jon at the 2014 Military Order of the Purple Heart parade in Grapevine, Texas

Holmes and her husband Jon, a Vietnam War veteran, are active in a number of veteran advocacy organizations. Jon currently serves as Senior Vice-Commander for the Department of Texas Military Order of the Purple Heart and as the State Inspector for the Department of Texas Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Photo: Holmes with Staff Sergeant Ty Michael Carter—recipient of the Medal of Honor, the Purple Heart, and numerous other military awards. Holmes wears a replica Purple Heart necklace (pictured right) in honor of her husband’s sacrifice and as a reminder to everyone she meets that “freedom is never free.” The necklace was a birthday gift from Jon, who also presented her with the Purple Heart he received after being wounded in Vietnam.

“I live by one motto, summarized beautifully by John Adams’ assertion that ‘Our obligations never cease but with our lives,’” Holmes said. “That, to me, is what it means to be a patriot, to be an American: you support those who defend our country, and then you protect them when they come home. That is a duty I get to fulfill through my work with Consilium.”

For more information about Consilium’s work in the government sector, [link to Gov page] or to learn more about opportunities to provide healthcare for veterans and active duty military members and their families, visit: <http://www.consiliumstaffing.com/for-providers/government-opportunities/>.

