

# **Robert Hicks Holmes, M.D.**

**Colonel, US Army (Retired)**

**1914 - 2001**

Robert Hicks Holmes, M.D., born 30 November 1914 in Dunn, North Carolina, died 21 July 2001 at Haven House Hospice in Atlanta. He is survived by his wife of 36 years, Malinda, his two sons and their wives, Rob and Kelli and Randy and Christy, his brother Frank and sister-in-law Mary, numerous nephews and nieces, and his newborn grandson, Franklin.

A memorial service will be at St. Luke's Presbyterian, 1978 Mt Vernon Rd, Atlanta, Georgia on Saturday 28 July at 3:00 p.m. The family requests that in lieu of flowers contributions be made to the Memorial Fund at Mt Vernon Presbyterian, 471 Mt Vernon Rd, Atlanta, Georgia 30328.

Bob "Hicks" Holmes grew up in the rural town of Lumberton, North Carolina during the Depression. He delivered produce and newspapers and enlisted at age 15 in the National Guard's Coastal Artillery, only to leave the service when he became 18, having earned enough to attend college. He left for Wake Forest University, where played football and baseball, ran a boarding house, and even once sold his coat to afford travel home for a date. Bob went on to graduate from Tulane Medical School and earn postgraduate degrees from Harvard and Duke. Of note, his high school principal had told young Hicks that he was "not college material."

With WWII's storm clouds brewing, Bob Holmes rejoined the Army, graduated from Officer Candidate School, and was commissioned in the Medical Corps branch. As his brother Frank fought the Japanese with the Flying Tigers in China, Major Bob Holmes prepared for action in Europe. Landing at Normandy in June 1944, he served as an operations officer and commanding officer in the 4<sup>th</sup> Armored Division of General Patton's famed Third US Army. Major Holmes was decorated with the Bronze Star Medal during the Battle of the Bulge and finished the war deep inside Germany near the Bavarian town of Regensburg.

With the outbreak of war in Korea in 1950, Colonel Holmes served with distinction in successful combat and command assignments. Afterward, he was named Chief of the Army-Navy Wound Ballistics team, which developed the first Kevlar "body armor." His research began what has evolved today into protective equipment that shields not only military but also law enforcement personnel around the world. It was also during this time that Colonel Holmes' team made the first detection of cardiovascular disease in the young American male. For his "exceptionally meritorious service to the nation," he was decorated with the Legion of Merit.

In 1954, he was assigned to the US State Department and National Academy of Sciences as Director of the Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission on the Japanese islands of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, studying casualties from the atomic blasts that ended WWII in the Pacific.

In 1958, he became Chief of Bioastronautics for NASA's Able-Baker Project, named for the two monkeys who would become the first mammals launched into space prior to the Mercury Astronauts. For his work, he was cited by the American Medical Association for his "outstanding service to the citizens of the United States in the successful orbital flight of its astronauts in the newest branch of the healing arts."

In 1960, he was assigned to the Defense Atomic Support Agency at the Pentagon as Chief of the Nuclear Reactor Task Force and Project Director of the Armed Forces Radiobiology Research Institute in Bethesda, Maryland. For his service, he received a second Legion of Merit.

In 1965, he married Malinda Deal of Washington, DC, and soon after the couple moved to Tokyo and later to Seoul as Colonel Holmes assumed command of the US Army Medical Command in Japan and Surgeon for the United Nations, US Forces, and Eighth US Army in Korea. For his service, he was decorated with a third Legion of Merit.

In 1966, after thirty years of service, he retired from the Army, just months before his first son Rob was born. With his younger son Randy born two years later, Dr. Holmes went on to a successful civilian career in academic, commercial, and laboratory medicine until age 80.

He worked with Miles Laboratories and the Upjohn Company and served as Senior Vice President of Hahnemann Medical University in Philadelphia. He moved his family to Atlanta in 1977 and ended his career at Northside Hospital practicing his first love of laboratory medicine.

He was a Diplomate of the American Board of Anatomic Pathology, Emeritus Fellow of the College of American Pathologists, member of the Association of Clinical Scientists, and contributing author to the *Journal of the American Medical Association* and *New England Journal of Medicine*. Retiring in 1994, he spent his last years reading, writing, and serving as a Sunday School teacher and elder at Mt. Vernon Presbyterian Church.

Bob had no casual hobbies; if he had interests, he poured himself into them. He loved to read: American and English literature, science and medicine, history and biography, religion and philosophy, Poor Richard's Almanac, Webster's Dictionary, Kipling, Shakespeare, the US Constitution, the Bible, and the box score for the last Braves game.

He was an unwavering enthusiast for his family. He did not just teach his young boys to walk: he perched them on top of fences to give them better balance. He did not just teach his boys to play catch: he taught them to toss eggs back and forth to give them soft hands. He did not teach his boys to swim just by throwing them in the water: he later comforted them and taught them lessons about trust and conquering fear.

His heroes were George Patton, Ted Williams, the Apostle Luke, his grandmother who raised him, and his brother whom he dearly loved. He wrote countless poetry verses scribbled on legal pads tossed around his room. He often said he knew only hard work, and that if he made it to Heaven, he would immediately apply for a library card and volunteer for active duty as the guardian angel for his family.

Robert Hicks Holmes, who heroically served his country in peace and war, who made professional contributions that have impacted generations, and who unconditionally loved his family, passed away this week.

He died a gracious, dignified, brilliant, spiritual, admired, and loved man.

Colonel Holmes will be interred at Arlington National Cemetery with full military honors on a date to be determined. Included with him, as he wished, will be a Bible, an American flag, and copies of his marriage certificate and the birth certificates of his sons and grandson.