

## Croix de Guerre

Carlos Golightly Harris was the seventh of ten children of John Weste Harris and Harriet Caroline “Hattie” Gentry, both of Spartanburg County. He grew up on his family's farm just north of Spartanburg and entered Clemson Agricultural College in 1914.

By all accounts, Harris was an exemplary cadet. According to the College yearbook *Taps*, he was “a hearty supporter of everything that is elevating to him and his fellow students.” C. G., as he was known on the still young campus, captained the basketball team, served as editor-in-chief of *The Chronicle* literary magazine, and won the Orator’s Medal. He was a member of Thalian Dancing Club, served as secretary of the Spartanburg County Club, and as treasurer of the Senior Dancing Club. When the United States declared war on Germany in April of his senior year, Harris and his Class of 1917 comrades famously volunteered *en masse* for military service.



Following graduation, Carlos went straight into Army, reporting first to Ft. Oglethorpe in Georgia. He was commissioned a First Lieutenant and was assigned to the 371<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment at Camp Jackson. The 371<sup>st</sup> was activated in August 1917 and was the first “Colored” Regiment organized for active participation in combat during World War I. The 371<sup>st</sup> was also the only all-draftee regiment in the war.

The regiment shipped to France in April 1918 and was placed under French command. After three months on the line, the 371<sup>st</sup> was allowed to rest and refit. Its respite did not last for long. On September 28, First Lieutenant Harris was leading his company in an assault on Hill 188 during the Meuse-Argonne Campaign. German defenders feigned capitulation, luring the Americans into a carefully planned ambush. Harris was thrown high into the air by a German shell, his right hip shattered. A fellow officer who witnessed the action doubted that anyone could have survived such a direct hit. Harris later recalled that he awoke, naked on a quiet field of battle, scavengers having stolen his possessions. An ambulance driver picking up bodies eventually came to his aid. Harris was wrapped in a blanket and placed on a cot in an ambulance.

Arriving at a Paris hospital, Harris’s luck changed. He was treated by the best orthopedic surgeon in France. Harris’s hip, shattered into five pieces, was replaced with a titanium joint. Still suffering from his wound and from lung damage inflicted by mustard gas, Harris sailed for home and continued treatment at the US Naval Hospital in New York.

He returned home to Spartanburg for a time but continued to suffer from his wound and was unable to work. Instead walking with the assistance of a cane, he returned to school, studying law at Columbia University. Admitted to the New York bar, Harris was uninspired by the practice of law. Instead, he took a position as a manager with the McClellan chain stores in Waterloo, Iowa.

Harris realized that his health was continuing to deteriorate. A new x-ray revealed a chronic infection eating away at the inside of his hip bone. His doctor advised a new round of surgery to “burn out the bone in the hip and down the femur.” The operation might have prolonged Harris’s life, but he had waited too long. When he finally returned to New York for the surgery, he was weak from the infection which had spread throughout his body. The surgery took place at the US Naval Hospital in Brooklyn, New York in March 1926. A septic infection set in and Harris died from complications on March 30.

So many people attended Harris’s funeral at the First Baptist Church in Spartanburg that the Main Street had to be cordoned off by the police.

In his history of African-American participation in the Great War, Emmet J. Scott writes “The percentage of both dead and wounded among the officers was rather greater than among the enlisted men. Realizing their great responsibilities, the wounded officers continued to lead their men until they dropped from exhaustion and lack of blood. The men were devoted to their leaders and as a result stood up against a most grueling fire, bringing the regiment its well-deserved fame.” For his intrepid leadership and heroism, Harris was awarded a Silver Star Citation and the French *Croix de Guerre*.

