

## Across the Beach

He crossed Utah Beach on D-Day, just six months after arriving in England. He would never leave France.

James Mack Harris of Fort Mill demonstrated his leadership ability throughout his time on the Clemson College campus. Arriving in 1932, Jim jumped right into campus life serving as a freshman manager of the football team. He joined the York County Club and, as a senior, served as its president. He was a member of Sigma Epsilon social fraternity, which he also served as president his senior year.

Harris also demonstrated military proficiency. Based on his good record as an underclassman, Jim was appointed a company first sergeant as a junior. As one of the best drilled cadets, he was selected for both the Junior and Senior Platoons. In his senior year, he commanded Company H, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion in the Cadet Regiment. He also completed ROTC summer training at Fort McClellan, Alabama in 1934.

Following graduation, Jim Harris likely put military thoughts behind him. A general science major, he found himself back in the classroom with teaching positions in schools in Fort Mill and Sumter. In March 1942, with America at war, Jim Harris traded his classroom for a uniform.

Harris' training carried him to Georgia's Fort Benning and then Camp Gordon, where he joined the 22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment. The regiment moved to Fort Dix, New Jersey in April 1943. It continued to train for combat, moving on to Camp Gordon Johnston, Florida in September and to Fort Jackson, South Carolina in December. The regiment then got orders to embark for Camp Kilmer, New Jersey and shipped out from the New York Port of Embarkation on January 18, 1944.

The regiment arrived in England on January 29, establishing its billets near Plymouth. Over the next four months, Harris and the rest of E Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion trained intensively in preparation to assault Utah Beach.

The 22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment, as part of the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, landed on Utah Beach at 0630 on D-Day and spent the next several days enlarging the beachhead in the face of determined counterattacks from the Germans. Having secured the build-up area, the regiment was committed to the attack through the hedgerow country around the base of the Cotentin Peninsula. Its objective was to secure the vital port of Cherbourg.



On June 13, a very long week after the initial landings, Harris' regiment attacked toward Quineville. Its objective was to knock the German defenders from high ground nearby and silence the enemy artillery still able to target Utah Beach. Attacking along with its sister regiment, the 39<sup>th</sup>, the 22<sup>nd</sup> was unable to occupy the ridge on the 13<sup>th</sup>. The next day, D-Day plus 8, the two regiments renewed their attack. According to the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions daily report: *Supported by an aerial bombardment, the attack was successful, the fight ending at 2130. The enemy's main line established on the best natural defenses was broken. The capture of Quinéville and the clearing of the coast also ended the troubles of the unloading on Utah Beach.*

The battle helped secure the Allies growing toe-hold in France and helped protect the massive build-up of men and materiel then streaming across Utah Beach. But the victory was not won without sacrifice. One of the fallen was Jim Harris who was killed in action on June 14.

The news of Harris' death reached his parents, Magistrate and Mrs. R. P. Harris, on July 20, just three days after Jim's wife Frances had given birth to their son, James Mack Harris, Junior. First Lieutenant James Mack Harris was awarded the Silver Star for "gallantry in action" as he displayed "initiative and courage" on the battlefield. He also earned the Bronze Star, Purple Heart and Combat Infantryman's Badge.

He is buried at the Normandy American Cemetery, Colleville sur-mer, France.

