

Holton Lane

Dr. Maxwell

Advanced Composition

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### Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Harris: A Heroic Heart

Thomas Harris may no longer serve in the military, but he continues serving his country with a smile. Lieutenant Colonel Harris always remained positive as he balanced his service in the military with being a family man. LTC Harris's affable nature and refined discipline contributed to his several successes throughout his varied career path. After 25 years of service in the United States Army and the Army Reserves, LTC Harris is a highly respected member of The Citadel community, where he serves as our 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion TAC Officer.

On December 9<sup>th</sup>, 1948, LTC Thomas Harris was born in Elbert County, Georgia. Shortly after his birth, he moved just 75 miles to the west where he was raised in Gainesville, Georgia.

While LTC Harris was responsible for being the oldest of four children, he still enjoyed the pleasures of youth. From playing little league baseball to being a member of the high school band, LTC Harris fondly remembers his younger years.

At the age of nine, LTC Harris began taking piano lessons, which continued to be his creative outlet throughout the years. While he primarily played classical and church music, he also formed a Rock and Roll band with his brother, known as The Oxfords. During the musical

revolution in the 1960s, the British Invasion, primarily The Beatles, influenced the band's music. Though The Oxfords parted ways after Harris's freshman year of college, LTC Harris continued to play at the local chapel during his years of service overseas, demonstrating his ongoing love for and appreciation of music.



After graduating from high school in 1966, he went just twenty miles up the road to attend the University of North Georgia, where both civilians and cadets compose the student body. LTC Harris explains that he was raised in a culture of military service: For a Southern boy “coming from a strong conservative background, there was a certain social pressure to do some sort of military service. Besides, at the time we were involved with Vietnam.” Having a great relationship with his father, who was a World War II Navy veteran, LTC Harris recalls that his “strong parents with strong values” were a major influence in his attending North Georgia. Not only did LTC Harris develop leadership skills from enduring the mandatory ROTC training, but he also prepared for a smooth transition from college to the Army. On May 31<sup>st</sup>, 1970, LTC Harris commissioned in the Army as one of the brave volunteers from his graduating class.

Since he attended North Georgia, LTC Harris bypassed living in the barracks for basic training and went straight to schooling for the first half-year of his active duty. As he learned the

ropes of an Infantry officer, he was initially stationed in Fort Benning, Georgia. Soon after, the demands of the Army changed, which brought him to Fort Knox, Kentucky, where his branch became Armor. From his experience at North Georgia, LTC Harris knew he could be successful in any field of service, and he was happy to serve where his capabilities were needed most.

A soon-to-be-married man with aspirations to be a father, LTC Harris requested to be stationed overseas. For more than two years he was stationed in Schweinfurt, Germany in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 64<sup>th</sup> Armor, of the Third Infantry Division. To this day, he wears the regimental crest that represents his battalion. As he made a seamless transition from the Infantry branch to Armor, he once again adapted to changing needs when he became a Support Platoon Leader in charge of 18 five-ton trucks. His continuous development as a leader gave him “exposure to the Tank Battalion without having to be directly involved with it.” Then after a year of observation, he moved into the Tank Company as a Platoon Leader and Executive Officer.



Above is LTC Harris operating a tank while branched as Armor.



To the left is the Regimental crest LTC Harris still wears on his chest each day.

LTC Harris describes how he devoted endless hours to his military family. Three to four times a year, the unit would go out into the field in Grafenwöhr, Germany, for training periods that could last up to a month. In discussing the challenges of being a family man, LTC Harris concedes, “this [absence] was ultimately a strong influence for several young families to discontinue their service in active duty.” Harris, however, was able to serve his military family and have his own family.

As LTC Harris continues to think back on his service, he remembers the people who meant the most to him. He remembers his mentor, a Battalion Commander whose diminutive stature was overshadowed by his “fiery” command. The Commander’s rigid discipline continued to instill leadership qualities that have shaped Lieutenant Colonel Harris through the end of his active duty on to the present day.

Keeping his family in mind as he moved forward into his Reserve career, LTC Harris was given invaluable life lessons on time management from his Company Commander. His Commander stressed the importance of balancing a family with the demands of a military career and how they are not to be mutually exclusive.

LTC Harris says, “the main difference between active duty and reserves is that active duty has one career, whereas the Reserves have two, which can prove to be just as big of a

challenge.” While he was serving as a Reservist, LTC Harris’s first dual career was hatchery manager for Gold Kist Farms, which at the time, was the largest poultry processor in the world. LTC Harris continued to juggle several responsibilities while he lived in Athens, Georgia, pursuing a Master’s Degree. During his studies in Athens, LTC Harris entered the real estate market and quickly learned that he would meet success in that venture as well. After completing his degree, the market began to change, which compelled him to follow his passion for politics.

LTC Harris initially became involved with the Republican Party as a poll worker, and there he managed to develop contacts. His interpersonal skills and his positive outlook on life landed him a job on the United States Senator Mack Mattingly’s staff. From there, he moved on to become an appointee for the Bush/Quayle Administration in 1989; he served as the State Director of Farmers Home Administration in Georgia. The successes of LTC Harris show an adaptability that was honed through his years of military experience.

LTC Harris is now the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion TAC at The Citadel, The Military College of South Carolina. With his charitable smile, LTC Harris continues to give back to this military community by inspiring cadets to pursue excellence in all endeavors. One thing he hopes to impart to the youth of today is that you should “do what you love and love what you do.” LTC Harris’s life’s work illustrates that success— regardless of what you do— comes from following your heart.

