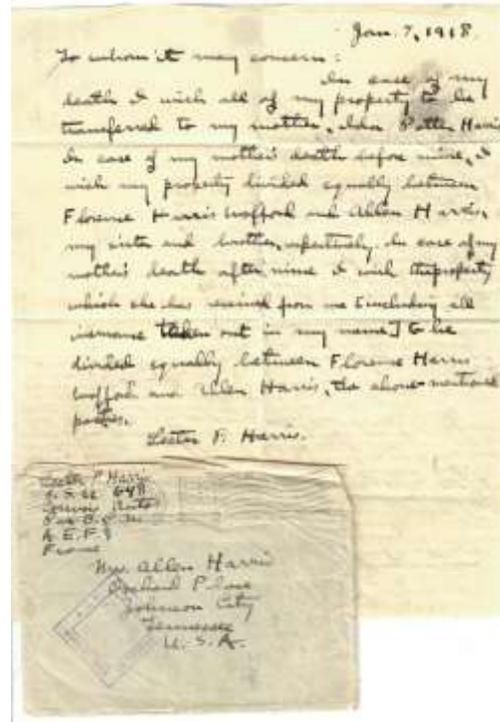


## LESTER HARRIS AND THE GREAT WAR



2018 is the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War I, referred to at the time as “the Great War.” They could not know in 1918 that in just over 20 years a second war would engulf the world. The Great War, being a world war, had an impact on people everywhere, including in Washington County. It seems appropriate to share a document written by one of the many sons of the county who went off to war in 1917-1918, especially since this is also the anniversary of his death in that war. His name was Lester Harris. The document is his will. And this is his story.

Harris was born in Johnson City on December 31, 1893 to William P. Harris and his wife Ida Florence Potter Harris. The Harris family was a prominent local family and owners of Harris Manufacturing Company, the largest hardwood flooring company in the world. Lester attended Columbia University, where he was allowed to graduate early in order to volunteer with the Red Cross and serve in France.

He left for France in July 1917, never to see his home again. In France, he served as a medical corpsman under the French army until American forces entered the war. In October 1917, Lester transferred to the United States Army as a private

serving with Special Services Unit 648 attached to the 67<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, French Third Army. He participated in the Montdidier-Noyon Operation (9-13 June 1918) and at the engagement of Chateau la Folie.

Around midnight on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, a German air raid bombed the crossroads near the village of Catenoy. Lester and three others were sleeping in their ambulances there when his truck was struck by a bomb, trapping him inside. Just after being freed, Harris saw the truck explode into flames. Lester was severely wounded in both legs by the attack and died from those wounds five days later on July 9, 1918 in a French Army field hospital also near Catenoy. He was 24 years old.

Harris was first interred at a nearby military cemetery and later reinterred at the Somme American Cemetery, plot C, row 9, grave 3 in Bony, France at his family's request. A memorial marker was also placed for him in Section 15 of Monte Vista Memorial Gardens in Johnson City. For his actions and bravery in the face of the enemy, the French government awarded him the Croix de Guerre. Johnson City renamed a street in his memory near his family's home as Lester Harris Road.

Sadly, a hundred years on, the "War to End All Wars" failed to accomplish that goal.

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His will written just six months before his death reads:

*Jan. 7, 1918*

*To whom it may concern:*

*In case of my death I wish all of my property to be transferred to my mother, Ida Potter Harris. In case of my mother's death before mine, I wish my property divided equally between Florence Harris Wofford and Allen Harris, my sister and brother, respectively. In case of my mother's death after mine I wish the property which she has received from me [including all insurance taken out in my name] to be divided equally between Florence Harris Wofford and Allen Harris, the above-mentioned parties.*

*Lester P. Harris*