

Harris Jones

- Born 16 September 1892
- 20 April 1917: graduated USMA and promoted to Second Lieutenant in the Corps of Engineers
- Feb 1918-Aug 1918: Commander, Company D, 6th Engineers, attached to British 5th Army and US 3rd Division
- Oct 1918-Aug 1922: Instructor Department of Mathematics, USMA
- Sep 1922-Jun 1923: Student, Massachusetts Institute of Technology
- June 1923-May 1926: assigned to 8th Engineer Battalion, Fort Bliss, Texas
- June 1926-Jan 1928: Assistant Director of Public Buildings and Parks, Washington, D.C.
- Feb 1928-Jun 1931: American Battle Monuments Commission, Paris, France
- Oct 1931-Sep 1947: Professor of Mathematics, Head of the Department, USMA
- Sep 1947-Jul 1956: Dean of the Academic Board, USMA
- Died 2 Jul 1977, age 84

Harris Jones was born in Torrington, Connecticut on 16 September 1892. His father was a woolen mill manager in New York. Harris attended Harvard University on an engineering scholarship from 1911 until 1913. He then decided "...that he would like to find his fortunes as an officer in the U.S. Corps of Engineers" as he received an appointment to USMA in 1913. At the Academy, Cadet Jones was renowned for his ability in mathematics. Soon after entering West Point, he earned the nickname "Prof". Many cadets became indebted to Cadet Jones for the patience and time he spent tutoring them in mathematics. On 20 April 1917, Cadet Harris Jones graduated first in his class, a class that included such famous names as Joseph Lawton Collins, Matthew Ridgway, and Mark Clark. Upon graduation, he was promoted to the rank of Second Lieutenant in the Corps of Engineers.

In early April 1917, due to America's sudden involvement in World War I, the Army hastily organized the 6th Engineering Regiment at Camp American University and Washington Barracks, D.C. Lieutenant Jones was assigned to this regiment. He took command of D Company shortly after his arrival. He was promoted to the ranks of First Lieutenant and Captain on 15 May 1917, less than one month after his graduation from USMA. In December 1917, Captain Jones went to France with his organization, which in February 1918 was attached to the British Fifth Army for bridging operations on the Somme River. In March and April 1918, his engineer company saw combat before Amiens, as part of an improvised force under the command of Major General Carey of the British Army. "Captain Jones and his company found themselves directly in front of the big German thrusts. After several days of strategic withdrawal actions the company dug in and helped to form the line of resistance which halted the last major Reich Army offensive." Captain Jones earned the Distinguished Service Cross for his gallant actions in this campaign as he and his men were among the first United States soldiers to see action with the Allied Forces in France. In June 1918, D Company joined the American Third Division on the Marne River to the east of Chateau Thierry, where Captain Jones and his unit participated in the Second Battle of the Marne and subsequent fighting north to the Vosle River.

After commanding the 2nd Battalion, 6th Engineers during August 1918, Major Jones returned to the United States and was assigned to West Point as an Instructor of Mathematics. He taught at USMA until September 1922 when he attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. While at MIT, he completed the equivalent of his Masters Degrees work while earning a Bachelor of Science degree in Civil Engineering. Upon graduating from MIT in June 1923, Captain Jones would not return to USMA for an additional eight years. From June 1923 until May 1926, Captain Jones served on the staff of the Eighth Engineer Battalion, as an Adjutant and Plans and Training Officer, of the First Cavalry Division at Fort Bliss, Texas. In the summer of 1926, he was transferred to Washington, D.C., where he was Assistant Director of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capitol, Assistant Coordinator of Motor Transport of the District of Columbia, and Executive Officer of the 343rd Engineers. From February 1928 until June 1931, Major Jones was on duty with the American Battle Monuments Commission, under the Chairmanship of General Pershing with station at Paris, France.

Lieutenant Colonel Jones returned to USMA on 1 October 1931 as a Professor of Mathematics, Head of the Mathematics Department. For sixteen years, Colonel Jones served as the Head of the Mathematics Department. A former instructor who served with Colonel Jones described the Colonel's leadership of the department as:

"In general, the qualities which I consider most characteristic of him were mental brilliance, emotional stability, unflinching common sense, and extraordinary precision of expression. He had an unusual talent for seeing issues clearly, and his considered statements always proved unshakable in the light of scrutiny and analysis. His advice was given only after careful thought, and was characterized by a precise avoidance of over-statement combined with an equally precise avoidance of under-statement. At the end of important group discussions his opinions and recommendations seemed invariably to stand out as the best ones. All in all, those who worked with him at West Point would be likely to summarize their impressions with two words-accuracy and soundness."

During Colonel Jones tenure as Head of the Mathematics Department, the mathematics curriculum taught to all first and second year cadets remained fairly constant, although quite a few new textbooks were introduced during this period. Perhaps the most significant change was the introduction of the slide rule into the fourth class mathematics program in 1944.

In January 1947, Colonel Jones was appointed to succeed General Roger Alexander as Dean of the Academic Board. This was a position that had been established in 1946. General Jones held this title for nine years. During that time he initiated many policies to improve the academic standards of the Academy. It was during General Jones tenure that the annual West Point National Invitational Debate Tournament and the Student Conference on United States Affairs (SCUSA) featuring the participation of representatives from leading colleges and universities throughout the nation was initiated. An important change involving academic policy was the substitution of the College Entrance Examination Board tests for the West Point Qualification Test required of all candidates for admission to USMA. General Jones was the senior member of the Athletic Board who played an important role in establishing and maintaining athletic standards for the Corps of Cadets. He was also the Chairman of the Post Planning Board

overseeing the additions to Washington Hall, Hotel Thayer, the development of many new roads and government quarters on post, and the construction and renovation of Thayer Hall.

General Jones was well loved and revered by anyone who had contact with him. He was remembered for "...his brilliant analytical mind and efficient manner of dealing with people...his unmatched devotion to West Point... most of all his inimitable personality...a warmth of understanding, a well balanced sense of humor, and a ready wit. Cadets knew him as a gentleman, a gentleman devoid of rancor, who inherent self-discipline would never permit an outward display of indignation or impatience."

On 31 July 1956, Brigadier General Harris Jones retired as Dean of the Academic Board, USMA after serving West Point for twenty-five years.

References:

Cullum's Register, Volume VIB, page 1861.

"General Harris Jones Retires," Assembly, Volume 15, October 1956, page 2.

McDaniel, "West Point's Professor-General," Pointer, Volume 32, January 1955, page 6.

Who's Who In America, Volume 27, 1952-1953.