

**INDIANA’S LATEST MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENT  
FIRST SERGEANT WILLIAM SIMON HARRIS  
(BETTER 119 YEARS TOO LATE THAN NOT)**

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On October 30, 2025, the official Medal of Honor headstone for First Sergeant William Simon Harris was dedicated at a ceremony at the Kokomo Memorial Cemetery in Kokomo, Indiana. William Simon Harris died in 1963 but, under a set of extraordinary circumstances, he is now the most recent Indiana recipient of the United States’ highest military award, which was issued on January 16, 2025 — 119 years after it was approved in 1906 at the direction of President Theodore Roosevelt.

William Simon Harris died never knowing he had been approved for the Medal since the War Department sent his notification letter in 1906 to the wrong address. This War Department mistake was compounded repeatedly in succeeding decades since the Department had his address both as a military pensioner and as a resident in a home for soldiers — yet it never notified him.

For his family, which includes six living grandchildren, the discovery by this author in 2022 of the compounded oversight by the War Department engendered bittersweet reactions and recollections. As one grandchild stated at the headstone dedication, “Grandpa was a man filled with pride, love and gratitude for his country, and a great deal of love for his wife and family. Grandpa was a true hero.”

William Simon Harris was born on April 9, 1873, and enlisted as a volunteer on May 21, 1898, in the 4<sup>th</sup> U.S. Cavalry to serve during the Philippine Insurrection from 1899 to 1902. That conflict, as a consequence to the Spanish American War, involved some 125,000 American troops, with over 4,200 American casualties and over 20,000 Philippine casualties. It marked the first time that an American general officer, Major General Henry S. Lawton, was killed in action on foreign soil. General Lawton had served for decades and was a recognized leader in a number of conflicts. He was a Civil War Medal of Honor recipient. His leadership in the Philippines prior to his death resulted in important strategic initiatives which included the formation of an elite group of two dozen soldier/scouts known “Young’s Scouts.” It was named after their vaunted civilian scout leader, Henry Young. General Lawton employed these scouts, which included Pvt. Harris, as a nimble and tactical advance probing force, often engaging much larger numbers of heavily armed insurgents in anticipation of major battles.



Young's Scouts 1899

Two strikingly successful engagements by Young's Scouts occurred on May 13 and May 16, 1899. The initiation of the first battle on May 13 at San Miguel, which involved a confrontation with 200-300 insurgents, was described in General Lawton's official report as he described that one of his commanders

*... brought the support forward promptly in extended order, but before it could come up and engage, 12 scouts on the left of center, encouraged by two of their number (Chief Scout Young and Private Harrington), under the direct supervision of Captain Birkhimer, broke from the bushes which temporarily concealed them and charged straight across the open for the right center of the enemy's line, which wavered, broke, and carrying with it the flanks, precipitately fled before the scouts could reach it.*

Twelve scouts were involved in the engagement at San Miguel, including Pvt. Harris. All were recommended by General Lawton for Medals of Honor in his official report in September 1899.

On May 16, 1899, three days after the battle of San Miguel, Private Harris and another group of Young's Scouts discovered that some 600 insurgents were entrenched near the strategically positioned Tarbon Bridge one mile from San Isidiro, and they were intent on burning the bridge to prevent its use by advancing American troops. The scouts rushed the bridge, prevented its burning, and drove the insurgents from their trenches with the aid of the oncoming Second Oregon Volunteers. The bridge was recaptured. Along with other scout participants, Pvt. Harris was recommended a second time by General Lawton for the Medal of Honor.

While General Lawton's official Medal of Honor recommendations were recorded in his written report in September 1899, the War Department failed to act on those recommendations until 1906 when one of Pvt. Harris' fellow scouts inquired about the status of Lawton's

recommendation. General Lawton's death in December 1899 was a likely contributor to this delay. Nonetheless, upon receipt of the inquiry in 1906, the War Department promptly processed General Lawton's recommendations and issued approvals for scouts involved in both battles, including for Pvt. Harris. While Pvt. Harris had been recommended for both battles in May 1899, he was approved "at the direction of the President" on January 8, 1906, for a single Medal of Honor.

While General Lawton's original Medal of Honor recommendation for William Simon Harris cited his then current rank of "Private" in the 4<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, Harris obtained his discharge from the 4<sup>th</sup> Cavalry a few months after the battles at San Miguel and San Isidoro so that he could re-enlist in the 11<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, as did other members of Young's Scouts. Upon his re-enlistment, he became a member of another scout troop called "Lowe's Scouts" which had also been formed by General Lawton. He was assigned the rank of Sergeant, and shortly thereafter was promoted to First Sergeant, no doubt for his leadership skills.



William Simon Harris Circa 1899

On January 12, 1906, the War Department sent a notification letter to William Simon Harris advising him of his Medal of Honor award; the letter was addressed to him care of the "Dept. of Police, Manilla, P.I." The War Department had previously received correspondence from Harris in 1902 when he was employed with the Manilla Police Department following his military discharge on August 29, 1901. However, by 1906 he was no longer working with the Manila Police Department and the 1906 War Department notification failed to reach him. The official military files for Harris revealed no further attempt by the War Department to locate him in order to notify him of his Medal of Honor approval, even though a pension record and a VA record with his address have been found in the official government files. There is also an official record of Harris spending time in a U.S. soldiers' home in 1933, as well as records of medical visits to federal government hospital facilities in the 1920s.

Not until 2022 were the War Department oversights discovered by this author as part of an otherwise extensive review of Medal of Honor records at the National Archives. Fortunately, despite Harris' death in 1963, there were several grandchildren still alive in 2022 when they were

advised of the discovery of the documents establishing the approval of their grandfather's Medal of Honor. The delivery of this information was met with a mix of disbelief and pride. His grandchildren all fondly remembered him, and some grandsons had distant memories of their grandfather's accounts of military service over a half century earlier. However, those accounts involved no mention of a Medal of Honor.

The efforts from 2023 to 2025 to rectify the War Department's oversight took various twists and turns as the present-day Department of Defense bureaucracy was confronted with a case it had never seen before, i.e., an approved Medal of Honor that had not been issued due to failed communications with the approved recipient now deceased. Despite persistent inquiries by the Harris family over a year, the Secretary of the Army moved very slowly in considering Harris' case even though Pentagon lawyers recognized the validity of the 1906 approval. As months dragged on, Indiana Senator Mike Braun asserted himself and personally insisted on action by the Secretary of the Army. Two letters and a personal phone call from the Senator were required. Finally on January 16, 2025, the Secretary of the Army made a personal call to the Harris family and announced the issuance of a Medal of Honor for William Simon Harris. Fittingly, on January 29, 2025, newly elected Governor Mike Braun hosted a ceremony at the Indiana State Capitol for Harris family members with the official presentation of the Medal of Honor for William Simon Harris.



Governor Mike Braun Presenting Medal of Honor

In his letter to the Harris family commemorating the dedication of the headstone on October 30, 2025, Governor Braun stated:

*Private Harris' courage and selflessness in service to our country represent the very best of the American spirit. His actions in the face of overwhelming odds were not only extraordinary in their moment, but enduring in their meaning. Though the events that earned him the Medal of Honor took place more than a century ago, the recognition we bestow today is a powerful reminder that valor never fades, and that history has a way of finding its heroes.*

*This dedication marks the culmination of a long road paved by historians, advocates, and loved ones who refused to let his story be forgotten. It is a testament not only to Private Harris' gallantry, but to the enduring strength of memory and importance of honoring those who gave more than could ever be asked.*

*To your family, I offer my deepest gratitude. Your stewardship of Private Harris' legacy ensures that his sacrifice will continue to echo through time. May this ceremony serve as both a tribute and a promise — that we will never cease to remember, and never fail to honor.*

When William Simon Harris passed away on January 22, 1963, his short obituary referred to his employment “connections with the Nickel Plate railroad, a Kokomo brass works and the Kingston Products company...” He was an ordinary man but an extraordinary soldier. His grandchildren remember him as a man who lived a life with a large family filled with “love and kindness.” However, despite a fulfilling life, William Simon Harris passed away without reflecting on the greatest recognition his country can bestow, the Medal of Honor that he never knew. That recognition however has not eluded his grandchildren — finally.



Mark Harris and Mike Eberhardt at the October 30, 2025, grave marker dedication