

# Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Maj. Gen. Marcelite Harris

PERSON

Harris, Marcelite J, 1943-2018

**Alternative Names:** Maj. Gen. Marcelite Harris;

**Life Dates:** January 16, 1943-September 7, 2018

**Place of Birth:** Houston, Texas, USA

**Residence:** Atlanta, GA

**Occupations:** Major General

## Biographical Note

Major General Marcelite J. Harris was born in Houston, Texas on January 16, 1943 to Cecil O'Neal Jordan and Marcelite Terrell Jordan, Sr. Harris graduated from Kashmere Gardens High School before attending Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia in 1960. After graduating from Spelman with her B.A. degree in speech and drama in 1964, Harris enrolled at Lackland Air Force Base for military training and then joined the Women in the Air Force (WAF) program. She also earned her B.S. degree in business

management from the University of Maryland.

Harris enrolled in an Aircraft Maintenance Officer Course at Chanute Air Force Base, Illinois in 1970. One year later, Harris was named a maintenance supervisor for the 49th Tactical Fighter Squadron at the Korat Royal Thai Air Force Base in Thailand. She successively held the positions of job control officer and field maintenance supervisor at the 916th Air Refueling Squadron at Travis Air Force Base in California. In 1975, Harris was named personnel staff officer and White House social aide under the Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter presidential administrations before becoming an air officer commanding for the Cadet Squadron 39 at the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Harris then served as the maintenance control officer for the 384th Air Refueling Wing at McConnell Air Force Base in Kansas. She was the first woman to hold the post of commander of the 384th Avionics Maintenance Squadron at the McConnell Air Force Base in 1981 before assuming the role of commander for the 384th Field Maintenance Squadron. In 1982, Harris was named the director of maintenance at the Pacific Air Forces Logistic Support Center at Kadena Air Base in Japan. Four years later, she became deputy commander for maintenance at Keesler Air Force Base in Mississippi. Harris was the first women to hold the positions in those just listed.

In 1990, Harris took the position of vice commander for the Oklahoma City Air Logistics Center at Tinker Air Force Base and later became the director of technical training at the Air Education and Training Command Headquarters at Randolph Air Force Base in Texas. In 1994, Harris was named director of maintenance at the U.S. Air Force Headquarters in Washington, D.C. Before retiring from the Air Force, Harris helped to establish a permanent office for the Committee on Women in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), within its military committee.

Harris's tenure with the Air Force saw her rise from the rank of Second Lieutenant in 1965 to Major General thirty years later, becoming the first ever African American Female General. Harris joined the United States Alliance as Director of Operations Support and Logistics Processes in 1999. She also served a brief time as the chief of staff for New York Schools Chancellor Joel I. Klein. In 2010, Harris was appointed by President Barack Obama to serve as a member of the Board of Visitors for the United States Air Force Academy. She has been featured in Ebony and was the recipient of the Trailblazer Award by the Black Girls Rock Foundation. Harris is listed in many Who's Who publications.

Maj. Gen. Marcelite J. Harris was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on March 21, 2012.

Harris passed away on September 7, 2018.

## Related Entries

**Spelman College** [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

**B.A.**

**University of Maryland** [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

**Harvard Kennedy School** [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

**United States Air Force** [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 1965 to 1997]

**Major General**

**United Space Alliance** [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 1999 to 2002]

**Logistics Process Owner**

**New York City Board of Education** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 2002 to 2003]

**Chief of Staff**

**United Services Automobile Association (USAA)**  
[MEMBEROF]  
[from 1993 to 2009]

**Secretary**

**Atlantic University** [MEMBEROF]  
[from 2003 to ?]

**Board of Trustees**