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**The Incredible Stanley Harris [Col. S. W. Harris,
C.B.E., T.D. (06-10)]**

One of the most versatile and accomplished sportsmen South Africa has ever produced is undoubtedly Col. Stanley Harris, C.B.E., who lives in Kenilworth. In the course of this remarkable man's life, he was an international in no fewer than five major sports, a finalist in the world amateur ball-room dancing championships and a P.O.W. working on the Japanese "Railroad of Death" in Siam.

Stanley Harris was born in Somerset East and educated at Bedford School in England, a famous nursery of rugby footballers, oarsmen and boxers. Jack Beresford, who won three successive Olympic sculling gold medals, was an Old Bedfordian, and of a long list of England rugby internationals Budge Rogers, who toured as a flank with the 1960 Lions, was the latest product. Stanley Harris, however, was destined to become one of the greatest men the School ever produced.

Before World War I he played wing for Transvaal. He joined up as a trooper in the Imperial Light Horse and after serving in South West Africa he hastened to England in 1915 and served as a gunnery officer in France and Flanders.

He was seriously wounded by a high explosive shell which shattered his left hip. "More important," he says, "than the loss of a large chunk of hip-bone, was the loss of about three yards in the hundred".

For it was this injury that prevented him from becoming a runner of world class, which before the war he had showed every promise of becoming. After 18 months in hospital and a series of operations, he managed to get himself passed as fit, and joined the North Russian Relief Force.

In 1919 he played rugby for the South African Services team captained by Boy Morkel, and in 1920 was capped for England against Ireland and Scotland. He played for Blackheath Club and still holds the record for having scored the greatest number of tries in one season in over 100 years of the club's history.

In the same year he was selected to represent Great Britain in the modern pentathlon at the Olympic Games, but had to decline because of his rugby commitments.

In 1921 he was invited to the Springbok rugby trials for the team to play against New Zealand. Once again he had to turn down the offer. The same year he won the Transvaal 440 yards hurdles championships, became the South African light heavyweight boxing champion and was runner-up in the heavyweight division of the South African amateur boxing championships.

Returning to England in 1922, after playing one game for Blackheath, he was back in the England team again. In the final trial at Twickenham, he had the bad luck to break his leg in two places. *The Times* said: "The serious injury to S. W. Harris is a dire calamity for England." Whatever else it was, it was certainly a calamity for Stanley Harris as it seemed the end of a brilliant rugby career.

He took up dancing to exercise his broken leg and such was the spirit of the man that he was even determined to dance well. Once he got into the swing of it nothing could hold him back. He entered the world amateur dancing championships which were held in the Queens Hall, London, and won the waltz section.

So it wasn't long before he started to play rugby again and

he was chosen to tour South Africa with Cove-Smith's 1924 Lions. And this was after turning down an invitation to represent South Africa as a heavyweight boxer in the Paris Olympic Games.

On the Lions tour he played in 17 of the 21 games as wing, fullback and centre, the last nine games including two Tests. In the final test at Newlands, he was judged the best back in the British side.

This was his swan song as a rugby International. After the Lions tour Stanley Harris disappeared from the international scene and spent the next four years managing Lord Delamere's estates in Kenya.

Once again he returned to England. The year was 1929 and Stanley Harris's rugby days were definitely over. But there were other sports to conquer and he decided to take up lawn tennis seriously.

After a spectacular success in the English covered courts championships, he played in the trials for the British Davis Cup team. In 1931 he played for South Africa, partnering his great friend, Louis Raymond, in the doubles against Germany.

He was an extremely difficult man to beat and during his tennis career he beat Fred Perry, the Japanese champion, Y. Ohta, and Booby Myers, the Spanish ace.

When World War II broke out he was in command of the Bedfordshire Yeomanry and was in France in 1940 before Dunkirk. Later in the war the regiment was sent to Singapore, taking part in the last phases of the Malayan Campaign.

The regiment was captured by the Japanese after the fall of Singapore and another chapter in the life of Stanley Harris began. He was in command of "F" Force which was sent from Singapore to Thailand by the Japanese to work on the rush construction of the infamous "Railroad of Death". Of this force of 7,500 P.O.W.s, barely a thousand emaciated men returned to Singapore after a year in the jungle. The rest had died from disease and starvation and the calculated brutality of the Japanese guards.

The names of Stanley Harris and Cyril Wild became legendary in Thailand for the way they protected their men from the brutal cruelty of the guards, and for their courage in tackling the Japanese commandos during the incessant crises that arose. Together they saved the lives of hundreds of prisoners and ameliorated the conditions of thousands more. On one occasion, the intervention of Stanley Harris with the Japanese general commanding in Thailand resulted in the reprieve of four officers sentenced to death for escaping.

After the war, and a period of rehabilitation from the effects of captivity, he played polo for the first time and within two years he had a handicap of three. Taking his ponies to England, he played at Cowdray and Windsor with many famous stars and on occasions he played in the same teams as Prince Philip and Earl Mountbatten.

He represented Great Britain in the international tournament at Deauville. He had a bad fall, breaking his wrist in three places and injuring his spine. On medical advice he very reluctantly retired from high-goal polo, but played in club polo till two years ago.

Now retired, Stanley Harris lives in Kenilworth. He is chairman of the Western Province Horse Society, and still plays tennis and, according to him, excruciatingly bad golf.