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Office of University Communications

August 15, 2012

Shelby Native was Decorated Army Veteran, Longtime Baptist Courier Editor, and University Friend

Boiling Springs, N.C. – With heavy hearts, officials at Gardner-Webb University are saluting the life of a man who claimed that his time at Gardner-Webb guided him to fulfill his life's purpose. Dr. John Roberts, the retired editor of the *Baptist Courier* and recipient of an honorary doctorate from GWU, died Wednesday, Aug. 15. He was 85.

"It was on these grounds and within association with this institution that I found who I am, and what God would have me to do with my life," Roberts shared during a 1987 GWU commencement address. "No matter where I am or where I serve, Gardner-Webb is and remains a key influence, a major landmark in my life. That is simply who I am."

John Elgin Roberts was born in Shelby in 1926 and spent his formative years in the Kings Mountain community of El Bethel. He graduated from Bethware High School in 1944 and served as a sergeant of intelligence in the United States Army. He was stationed overseas in the Philippines during World War II and in Korea during the post-war U.S. occupation, where he received six medals and commendations.

Following his military service, Roberts began attending Gardner-Webb College, where he served as editor of the student-produced publication *The Pilot*. In 1949, he earned his associate's degree and went on to earn a bachelor's degree from Furman University and a master's from Vanderbilt University. Roberts began his career as a teacher in the Gastonia (N.C.) City School district and later became director of promotion and associate director of public relations at Gardner-Webb. In 1965, he joined the staff of the *Baptist Courier* as associate editor and business manager, and was promoted to the editorial position in 1966. Following a 30-year career as editor, Roberts retired in 1996.

He was awarded honorary doctorates from Charleston Southern University, Furman University, and Gardner-Webb University. The Outstanding Male Graduate Award, given at Gardner-Webb commencement each year, was named in his honor in 1993. He was a recipient of the award in 1949. Roberts also served as a GWU Alumnus Trustee in 2006.

Roberts died at the Rolling Green Retirement Community in Greenville, S.C. following a brief illness. He is survived by his wife, Helen, six children, and eight grandchildren.

“Go from this place today in happy anticipation of finding joy, fulfillment, achievement, and success in life,” he told the graduates of 1987. “Hope must never be abandoned. It is the bond that links the shortcomings of yesterday to the bright promise of tomorrow. Hope is the light that drives off despair. It is the healing balm that eases the pain of disappointment. Hold onto hope every day of your life.”

Funeral services were held Friday, Aug. 17 at First Baptist Church in Greenville, S.C. Roberts was buried at Woodlawn Memorial Park.

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