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CAMPUS NEWS

Gardner-Webb Honors Fallen Alumni During Its First Memorial Day Prayer Service

BY OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS ON MAY 28, 2021



▲ From left, Vice President of Advancement Nate Evans, GWU President Dr. William M. Downs, and Vice President for Christian Life and Service Tracy Jessup led the Memorial Day Observance in front of E.B. Hamrick Memorial Hall.

Five Individuals From the GWU Community Remembered During Event

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—Gardner-Webb University held its first Memorial Day Prayer Service on May 28 in front of E.B. Hamrick Memorial Hall. The event honored the heroes—from the GWU community and elsewhere—who gave their lives in service to their country.

In his remarks, GWU President Dr. William M. Downs noted the real reasons for the national Memorial Day observance that dates back to 1868. “Memorial Day exists to recognize and remember those who stared down evil, those who fought tyranny, those who put themselves directly in harm’s way and paid the ultimate price in order to make the world a safer place,” Downs stated, “a world safe for democracy...safe for liberty...safe for the generations that would follow...including ours.”



▲ Dr. William M. Downs

He also reflected on growing up in a family of military historians, and the time he spent on battlefields in America and around the world. “And my most vivid memory, and I think one of the most profound experiences of my life, was touring the American military cemetery at Omaha Beach in Normandy, France,” Downs related. “There, on June 6, 1944, D-Day began, the liberation of Europe from Nazi rule. And today, as a visitor you can stand there on the steep cliffs overlooking the beaches where thousands of young Americans landed under heavy and relentless gunfire. So many of them died right there, and today there are 9,387 white crosses and white stars of David—for as far as the eye can see in every direction—at that sacred burial place. Each grave offers an important lesson about sacrifice, about devotion, and about love.”



▲ Garrett Chitwood

Also participating in the service of remembrance were Garrett Chitwood, a senior music major, who played the National Anthem and Taps. Nate Evans, vice president for Advancement gave the welcome, and Tracy Jessup, vice president for Christian Life and Service and senior minister to the University, gave the invocation and led the responsive reading. Natalie Bishop, associate dean of the Library and the University archivist read the names of the fallen servicemen, and Leah Clevenger, director of

Alumni Relations, gave a prayer of remembrance and thanksgiving. The service closed with a benediction by Jessup.

Originally named Memorial Hall in 1925, the building was dedicated to honor individuals from Cleveland and Rutherford Counties who died while serving in World War I, 1914-1918. Three men, Ira Alberto Crabtree, William Norwood Huggins and Copher Meade Ewing, were students at Boiling Springs High School, now GWU. Crabtree is buried in the old Boiling Springs cemetery located across the street from the University.



▲ Tracy Jessup

In 1943, the Gardner-Webb Board of Trustees voted to name the building E.B. Hamrick Memorial Hall in honor of Elijah Bly Hamrick. He was a local merchant, who gave financial help, encouragement and advice to Gardner-Webb officials through the years. He was the college's first financial administrator, served as a trustee and gave land for the development of campus. He also served on numerous committees of the school.

During the service, E.B. Hamrick Memorial Hall was rededicated to honor the memory of the three men recognized in 1925 and tributes were made to the following alumni:

- Lt. Col. William Barkley Jr., class of 1975, who gave his life, along with his co-pilot and crew, while test flying a helicopter near the Marine Corps Air Station, Quantico, Va., on May 19, 1993.
- US Army Green Beret, Staff Sgt. Jerry Gass, class of 2003, who served his country as a member of Company C, 1st Battalion, 3rd Special Forces Group and was stationed at Fort Bragg in Fayetteville, N.C.

To commemorate the occasion, a plaque was placed at the entrance to E.B. Hamrick Memorial Hall with the names of the alumni from 1925. Later, a larger memorial will be placed to include the names of all five alumni and other veterans who have died in the line of duty. The University's archivist, Dr. Natalie Bishop is researching to find any others who may need to be recognized.

In addition, a plaque recognizing E.B. Hamrick Memorial Hall's placement on the National Register of Historic Places was also presented.



Located in the North Carolina foothills, Gardner-Webb University is a private, Christian, liberal arts university. Gardner-Webb emphasizes a strong student-centered experience and rigorous academics to prepare students to become effective leaders within the global community. Ignite your future at Gardner-Webb.edu.