

Dr. James Irvin “Bud” Robertson Jr.
July 18, 1930 – November 2, 2019

Robertson was born on July 18, 1930, and raised in Danville, Virginia. He earned his bachelor’s degree at Randolph-Macon College in 1955, and his master’s degree and PhD. at Emory University in 1956 and 1959 respectively. He earned his Litt.D. at Randolph-Macon in 1980.

Known as an excellent public speaker, Robertson made his career teaching thousands of college students in his Civil War and Reconstruction course at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, in Blacksburg, VA, as the Alumni Distinguished Professor in History from 1967 to 2011.

Robertson was the founding executive director of the Virginia Center for Civil War Studies research and education center. He was considered the preeminent scholar on Confederate Lieutenant General Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson. Robertson was the Chief Historical Consultant in the 2003 Warner Brothers film “Gods and Generals”, which prominently features Stonewall Jackson. Robertson was also a member of the Board of Trustees at the Museum of the Confederacy in Richmond, VA.

Robertson authored 18 books including award winners *General A.P. Hill*, *Soldiers Blue and Gray*, and *Civil War! America Becomes One Nation*. His biography, *Stonewall Jackson: The Man, The Soldier, The Legend*, won eight national awards including the American Library Association’s Best Book for Young Readers Award. Robertson also edited an additional 18 books on the Civil War.

In 1961, President John F. Kennedy nominated Robertson to serve as the executive director of the U.S. Civil War Centennial Commission, a federal committee that was foundering under the pressures of regional differences and the emerging civil rights movement, unable to organize a dignified commemoration of the war era. Robertson worked effectively with 34 state and 100 local centennial committees to create a successful result. Fifty years later, he was named a charter member of the Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Commission.

Since 2000, Robertson also sponsored an award in his name honoring scholarship in the field of Confederate history.

Along with his academic career, he spent several years as a faculty representative from Virginia Tech to the NCAA. Robertson’s work as Faculty Chairman of Athletics and President of the Virginia Tech Athletic Association from 1979-91 helped Virginia Tech join the Big East athletic conference. Robertson was elected to the Virginia Tech Sports Hall of Fame in 2008.

His main other contribution to college athletics was being an Atlantic Coast Conference football referee for 16 years.

Bio from Virginia Tech:

In 1967, Robertson joined the faculty of Virginia Tech, where his course on the Civil War attracted an average of 300 students each semester and became the largest class of its kind in the nation. During his 44 years at the university, he taught more than 25,000 Virginia Tech students. In several instances, he ended up teaching three generations of the same families.

Robertson held the C. P. “Sally” Miles Professorship at Virginia Tech from 1976 until his appointment in 1992 as Alumni Distinguished Professor, a preeminent appointment reserved for recognition of faculty members who demonstrate extraordinary accomplishments and academic citizenship.

In 1999, Robertson became founding director of the [Virginia Center for Civil War Studies](#). From its home in the Virginia Tech Department of History, the center educates scholars and the public about the causes and consequences of one of the nation’s most momentous conflicts. The center’s annual Civil War Weekend is just one of the ongoing, vibrant programs that Robertson established.

The consummate teacher was also a celebrated author and editor, with more than 40 books on the Civil War to his credit. One of those works was based on another of Robertson’s boyhood passions *General Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson*. The book, considered a definitive biography, won eight national awards, and became a key source for a 2003 movie, *Gods and Generals*, for which Robertson served as chief historical consultant.

“For fully six decades Bud Robertson was a dominant figure in his field, and a great encouragement to all who would study our turbulent past during the middle of the 19th century,” said William C. “Jack” Davis, former director of the center and himself the author or editor of more than 50 books on the Civil War and the history of the South. “Moreover, amid a conversation that can still become bitter and confrontational, his was a voice for reason, patience, and understanding. In the offing, he has become virtually ‘Mr. Virginia,’ a spokesperson for the commonwealth past, present, and future. His voice is now sorely missed — and irreplaceable.”

Virginia Tech honored Robertson with emeritus status soon after his retirement in 2011. At the same time, during the commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the war, Robertson served as an executive committee member of the Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Commission. He also served as executive producer of “Virginia in the Civil War: A Sesquicentennial Remembrance,” a complimentary DVD provided to every school and library in the commonwealth.

“The next generations must have a knowledge of the past,” Robertson said. “If you do not know where you have been, you have no idea where you should go.”

A lecturer of national acclaim, Robertson also delivered more than 350 radio essays that aired weekly for nearly 15 years on National Public Radio affiliates as far away as Alaska. Those broadcasts featured the stories of the men, women, children, and even animals who endured the heartbreak of the Civil War.

“If you don’t understand the emotion of the war,” he would say, “you’ll never understand the war.”

Under Robertson’s championship, in 2015 the Commonwealth of Virginia adopted “Our Great Virginia,” based on the folk song “Oh, Shenandoah,” as the traditional state song.

“Virginia is the Mother State,” he said. “It should be the leader in all facets of the Republic. This makes the absence of a state song glaring. The physical beauty and incomparable history of Virginia need to be transformed as well into the emotions of music. ‘Our Great Virginia’ fulfills that need.”

Robertson received numerous prestigious honors, including three commendations from the Virginia General Assembly; the Virginius Dabney Award, the highest recognition given by the Museum of the Confederacy; the Virginia Press Association’s 2004 Virginian of the Year; the Best Non-Fiction Book Award by the Library of Virginia in 1997; and the Outstanding Professor Award of the Virginia Council for Higher Education. Both Randolph-Macon College and Shenandoah University gave him honorary doctorates.

One honor, in particular, was unusual for a historian: In 2008, he was elected to the Virginia Tech Sports Hall of Fame. Robertson spent several years as a faculty representative from Virginia Tech to the National Collegiate Athletic Association, and from 1979 to 1991 he served as faculty chairman of athletics and president of the Virginia Tech Athletic Association. Notably, for a historian immersed in the nuances of major battles, he also worked as an Atlantic Coast Conference football referee for 16 years.

Robertson was a long-time, generous supporter of Virginia Tech. He was also a member of the Ut Prosim Society, which recognizes leaders in the philanthropic support of the university.

Not all of Robertson’s generosity to the university was monetary. He was instrumental in establishing a special Civil War collection at the University Libraries at Virginia Tech. He also donated most of his own 7,000-volume collection — one of the country’s largest private collections of Civil War books — to both that special collection and to Randolph-Macon College.

“Dr. Robertson was so many things: spellbinding lecturer, beloved teacher, accomplished author, guardian of Civil War history, big band player, ordained deacon, even football referee,” said Paul

Quigley, director of the Virginia Center for Civil War Studies and the James I. Robertson Jr. Associate Professor in Civil War Studies. “Above all else he was a Hokie, unfailingly dedicated to Virginia Tech and the thousands of students he taught here.”