

## **Gordon Gray**

Gordon Gray (1909-1982) was among the 20<sup>th</sup> century's most notable North Carolina newspaper publishers. His only problem was he almost never had time to be a publisher. Public service continually pulled him away from the newspaper office.

Born to a well-to-do Winston-Salem tobacco family, Gray trained as a lawyer and became a newspaper publisher by heading a corporation that bought the Winston-Salem Journal (morning) and Twin City Sentinel (afternoon) in 1937, as well as a local radio station.

In the next four years, however, Gray was often away from the newspaper office, serving as a member of the North Carolina General Assembly from Forsyth County. Then World War II came. Gray rose from private to captain. He returned to Winston-Salem in 1945 and resumed his editorial career.

A Washington friend called and asked Gray to become undersecretary of the Department of the Army. In 1949, President Harry Truman named him secretary of the Army. He became the first secretary to have previously served as a private.

Gray had hardly settled into the secretary's office in the Pentagon when his home state called. In 1950, the board of trustees of the University of North Carolina offered Gray the presidency of the UNC system, as successor to Frank Porter Graham who had been appointed to the U.S. Senate by Governor Kerr Scott.

For five years, Gray presided over the state's higher education institutions that were exploding with post-World War II growth, while often traveling to Washington to take on special assignments for the White House.

In 1955, he stepped down from the university post to become undersecretary of the Department of State for international security. He led other key jobs under President Dwight Eisenhower.

Finally, in 1961, he returned to North Carolina to become president of the newspaper corporation and a corporation of radio and television stations throughout the region.

When he was in his editorial office, Gray exercised energetic and determined leadership, supporting community service and civic betterment, the hallmark of so many of North Carolina's newspaper

editors in every century. His talent for leadership led Gordon Gray away from the office more than most others.

By Roy Parker Jr.  
January 1998