

## **Mr. Graham Nelms**

By David Contreras

Ninety-seven and a half year-old Mr. Graham Nelms is a Korean War and World War II veteran. I was talking with Mr. Graham, who is a member of our church. He told me that after working in the Navy for three years during World War II, he returned home to Richmond, Virginia where he got married. Fourteen months later, 24-year-old Mr. Graham was reactivated. When the North Koreans crossed the 38th parallel, he was put on a destroyer, the U.S.S. Shelton (G. Nelms, personal communication, October 13, 2023; Thompson, 2021a).

He recalled one intense moment when he said they were just off the coast of North Korea taking pictures of enemy guns. They did not find anything, so they did what was called bird-dogging when they ran parallel with the shoreline, and shot at the shore to get a response from the enemy. When they started shooting, they got no response. They moved a little further up the shoreline, and the enemy shot a shell which went right over the destroyer. Mr. Graham ducked as the shell exploded, dispersing sharp pieces of shrapnel. Mr. Graham looked at me, and said, "The Lord was looking out for Graham when Graham didn't have the sense to look out for himself." His daughter, who was present, said that that was his favorite saying (G. Nelms, personal communication, October 13, 2023).

After 18 months of serving in the Korean War, Mr. Graham returned home on a Friday. On Monday, he went straight to work at Dupont, a large chemical manufacturer, where he was told they would save his position. They told Mr. Graham to take a break since he had just returned from war. He explained to them that he had a car and house payment to make, so they let him stay and work. Later that day, the boss called him and gave him a two week check for a

vacation! Mr. Graham was very happy with his job (G. Nelms, personal communication, October 13, 2023).

Although Mr. Graham did not have any combat injuries, he did have long-term health effects. As a motor machinist third-class mate he was working near the engine. The engine's loud shrill made Mr. Graham lose his hearing. He also got asbestosis in his lungs from being exposed to asbestos in the belly of the destroyer (G. Nelms, personal communication, October 13, 2023).

After settling back in at home, Mr. Graham and his wife soon became parents and kept attending the church where he grew up. On their way there, they would pass Branch's Baptist Church. A while later, Mr. Graham's family decided to go to Branch's, where most of his neighbors went, but he made sure he finished his commitment as a Sunday School teacher first. He has attended Branch's Baptist Church ever since. Now, when he can come to church, he rides on his three-wheeled scooter with his daughter walking behind him. I remember one occasion when we passed by him in church, and he kindly let my little brother and sister sit on his lap and honk the scooter's horn. Mr. Nelms also tries to attend most of the events held at the war memorial; he has great friends there (G. Nelms, personal communication, October 13, 2023).

I think Mr. Graham has been inspiring since the beginning of the story. His courage and faith in God helped him through his main hardship during the war of leaving his wife behind. I know that must have been difficult, especially because he was recently married. Mr. Graham is a trustworthy man, like when he kept his commitment to be a Sunday School teacher at his childhood church. Also, he was responsible to do what was right, like when he came back from war and went to work as soon as possible to take care of his family and pay his bills (G. Nelms, personal communication, October 13, 2023).

Mr. Graham is a bright, open man. We can learn from his passion to share his story with others so they may learn from his mistakes and achievements. He has been in many media reports and has been quoted in the Richmond Times Dispatch and filmed on channel 6 and channel 12 (Hood, 2021; O'Connor, 2017; Thompson, 2021a). His experiences are very valuable to him. As Mr. Graham says, "I wouldn't trade the experience I had for a million dollars, but I wouldn't give you 5 cents to do it again" (Thompson, 2021b). His faith in God and service to our country is inspiring. Mr. Graham is a kind, courageous, trustworthy, responsible, and passionate man.

## References

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