

# ROBERT GRAHAM

Role in war goes here



*“ ‘Greatest Generation’ is kind of flattery in a way.  
But I feel we really did something.  
Individually and collectively. We stepped up.”*

—Tech. Sgt. Robert Graham, U.S. Army Air Forces

In the summer of 1937, Bob Graham and his pals were heading home from a swim in the Humptulips River near Copalis Crossing, a wide spot in a two-lane road meandering through the forested hills of Grays Harbor County. When someone offered them a ride, it changed the direction of Graham's life.

He was 16 then. He was 93 when we sat down to talk in 2014. At his home in Olympia, Washington's former seven-term state auditor flipped through school annuals, tattered clippings and the sepia-toned pages of a booklet about his Air Transport Command squadron during World War II. Lloydine Ryan Graham, the Hoquiam girl



*Robert Graham collection*

whose letters were his lifeline to home, sat nearby. They'd been married for 69 years. Bob's legs were tentative but his memory was remarkable. He still had a head for numbers. One in particular. "If you were in the war, you'll never forget your serial number. Mine is 39185223." Just for drill, he said it again, ending with a satisfied smile.

Technical Sergeant Robert Vincent Graham was a flight engineer on cargo planes that shuttled everything from C-rations to atomic bomb parts ever deeper into the Pacific Theater. Every island and atoll extracted an awful price. On flights back to home base in California, their C-54's were jammed with

sick, maimed and otherwise wounded men. Some cried out for loved ones and more morphine. “There were always a number of nurses on board,” Graham recalled. “They were great, but they had their hands full. There’d be two rows of litter cases in the middle; then there was an aisle on each side, and another row of litter cases, five high, the length of the airplane. Our motto was ‘We always deliver the goods.’ To me, that particularly precious cargo came with a real feeling of accomplishment and an appreciation for the overall struggle we were in. I felt lucky to be alive.”

Luckier yet was his big brother, Ralph Graham—“Moonie” to family and friends. For a while they feared he’d been killed in the Battle of the Bulge in Belgium, the Nazis’ last-ditch attempt to halt the advancing Allies. The week before Christmas, 1944, found Moonie and a buddy holed up in



Graham points out an island on a World War II map of the South Pacific. The interviewer is John C. Hughes, a Legacy Washington historian. *Laura Mott*

a cellar after their squad was surrounded by German tanks. Twenty-five other GI's were rousted out in a house-by-house search and summarily executed. Moonie and his pal were spared for reasons unknown. They spent the rest of the war in POW camps, each progressively worse as the Third Reich was reduced to rubble. Malnutrition was rife. Some of the captive Americans died in allied bombing raids. The survivors were detailed to bury the dead—foe and friend alike, soldier and civilian. “We didn’t learn any of that until after the war ended in Europe,” Bob remembered. “We just prayed. My mother was a prayer warrior. Her primary prayer was for our family, that the chain would not be broken—our family chain. That was always the way she put it, that ‘the chain would not be broken.’ Her sons made it home. The chain was not broken.”

Throughout the war, Graham’s thoughts often turned to the fate of his best friend at Grays Harbor Junior College, “a wonderful guy named Perry Saito” who happened to be Japanese, a pacifist and as American as a sock hop.

A man of deep faith, Graham saw God’s hand, and startling coincidences, everywhere in his eventful life. For instance, when he decided to transfer from Hoquiam to tiny Moclips High School he never imagined he would be elected student body president. He also caught the eye of the school superintendent, who saw bigger things for the strapping kid with wavy hair and the radiant smile of a natural born politician.

Some of Bob’s classmates had dropped out of school to work alongside their dads, brothers and uncles in the logging camps and mills that dotted the area. They came home every night with banged up hands and sawdust in their ears. You could tell a “shake rat” by his missing fingers. Bob respected them for their plain talk and resilience.

There were loggers in Graham’s family tree. Its roots run deep in Scotland. The Grahams and Bob’s maternal grandfather’s people, the Smiths, were dairymen, farmers—“crofters”—and tree cutters in the Highlands and islands county called Ross and Cromarty. Like his fellow proud Scot, former longtime secretary of state Ralph Munro, Graham had made a sentimental journey to the land of his ancestors.

Growing up, the forest was Graham’s neighborhood.



The teacher and students at the tiny Newton School in rural Grays Harbor in the 1920s. This group appears to be slightly ahead of Bob Graham's days there. His passing prevented us from getting identifications. His brother Ralph may be in this group. *Polson Museum collection*

When he was a young state worker, he spent his days off at the headwaters of the Copalis River, cutting the clear-grain cedar that was milled into siding for their new rambler. It's a very good house, with a flag out in front. He and Lloydine raised four sons and a daughter there. The grandchildren and great-grandchildren visit often.

GRAHAM'S PATERNAL GRANDPARENTS came from Scotland to Ontario in 1877 and moved across the river to Sault Sainte Marie, Michigan, two years later. They took up farming at a hamlet called Dafter. Bob's father, Ralph V. Graham, got itchy feet when he turned 17. He hopped a train and landed at Sumner near Puyallup in Pierce County. Before long he was in love with a pretty schoolgirl named Hazel Smith, whose father divided his energies between building lumber mills and running dairies. In the 1920s at Moclips, overlooking the gray Pacific north of Grays Harbor, L.T. Smith built what was reputedly the largest shingle mill in the world. A few miles southwest, in the green fields along the Humptulips, Smith also launched the Riverside Dairy. His son-in-law became his partner. The Northern Pacific Railway, collecting lumber and shakes along its route from Hoquiam to the beach, ran right through the Grahams' back yard.



Two of Graham's classmates at the Newton School enjoy a homemade car.  
*Polson Museum collection*

Bob, his siblings and a dozen other kids attended the tiny Newton School just below Copalis Crossing. Every weekend the schoolhouse doubled as Sunday School. In first grade, despite being its youngest member, Bob got himself elected president of the choir. When seventh grade rolled around, he rode the school bus in to Hoquiam. It was during the summer after his sophomore year at Hoquiam High that he and four other “big lugs” were heading home after a swim.

A car pulled alongside.

“Like a ride?” said the driver. He was a big man with a friendly face.

“We just live up the road a little ways.”

“Well, that doesn’t matter. Hop in.”

A mile later, when it was time to hop out, the driver said, “Just a minute. Do you boys play football in Hoquiam?”

Nope, said Graham. “If we’re not on that bus at 2:30, it’s 18 miles back out here and we’re out of luck.”

“I’ll tell you what: My name is Doug Dreeszen. I’m the football coach at Moclips. I’m also the bus driver and we never leave until after practice.”

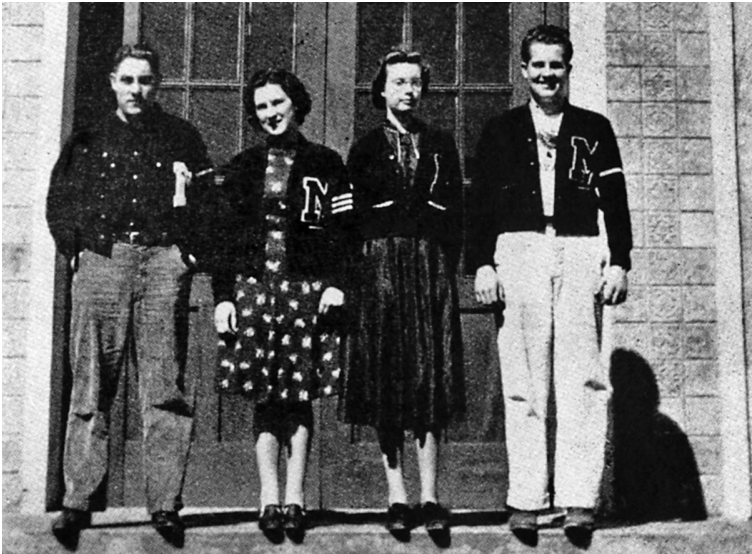
Graham and his buddy, Bill Campbell, transferred from Hoquiam High School to Moclips High School and became starters for Dreezen’s Moclips Hyaks. In their senior year, they drubbed the Aberdeen and Hoquiam B-squads. At 6-feet and

190 pounds, Graham was still burning through his baby fat. Dreeszen dubbed him “Chub.” Graham’s good friend, Gene “Cubby” Jackson, son of the chief of the Quinault Nation, was their team captain and quarterback.

There had been 156 kids in Graham’s sophomore class at Hoquiam. At Moclips, he was one of only 23 in the Class of 1939. “Suddenly being a big fish in a small pond” gave him enormous confidence. He was elected student body president his senior year, lettered in football, joined the band and glee club and appeared in three plays. Jackson took him up the Quinault River and showed him how the Indians reeled in nets squirming with salmon. In his spare time, Bob had become the Grays Harbor County 4-H Club swine-raising champion, winning a week’s stay at Washington State College in Pullman. “And that was really something!” Still, his horizon hadn’t stretched much farther than Hoquiam where a cute girl named Lloydine Ryan was a junior.

On graduation night, the school superintendent, Eli T. Moawad, cornered him:

“What are you going to do now that you’ve graduated, Chub?”



Graham, right, and the other student body officers at Moclips High School in 1938-39 proudly wore their letter sweaters for the yearbook photo. *Moclips High School Neptune, 1939*

“Well, I’ll probably go to work in the shake mill with the family.”

“*I don’t think so,*” Moawad said, italicizing every word. “Tomorrow morning at 9 o’clock I’d like to have you put on your best bib and tucker, wash behind your ears, and we’re going to Aberdeen.”

“What are we going to do there?”

“I’ll show you when we get there.”

High on a hillside stood the four-story Terrace Heights School. Built in 1892 to house the first Aberdeen High School, it was an unpainted, abandoned grade school when in 1930 it became the first home of Grays Harbor Junior College. With unemployment rapidly rising in the wake of the stock market

crash—it would top 30 percent on the Harbor by 1932—leading citizens chipped in \$100 apiece to incorporate a two-year college. Otherwise, they feared, hundreds of Harbor-area young people would never have a chance at higher education.”

Laborers from the New Deal’s Works Progress Administration completed some rudimentary renovation of the drafty old school. Grays Harbor Junior College opened its doors to 122 students in the fall of 1930. Its first dean was a resourceful educator named Lewis C.



Grays Harbor Junior College in 1940. *GHC Nautilus*

Tidball. In Wyoming, Tidball had been a teacher, principal, school superintendent and state commissioner of education before receiving a Ph.D. in political science from the University of Washington. His career in higher education started out on the lowest rung at the outset of the Great Depression. “Eco-





Dean Lewis Tidball, who gave Graham a scholarship to Grays Harbor Junior College. *GHC Nautilus*

conomic conditions bordered on the catastrophic,” Tidball recalled.

At the college’s 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1980, it was written that “probably no institution—public, private or industrial—in Harbor history has had as much impact upon as many people as Grays Harbor College. ...” What was true then is even more so today, Bob Graham said. He believed the community college system had transformed the quality of life in Washington State by keeping academic and vocational training affordable.

Without Dean Tidball, however, Grays Harbor Junior College likely would have died

aborning. In addition to teaching psychology, philosophy and political science, Tidball recruited talented young instructors who stayed the course even though they were often paid in vegetables, fish, clams and game “brought in by students in lieu of tuition.” He raised scholarship money, schmoozed legislators and bummed firewood to feed a cranky old boiler. Somewhere on the sprawling modern campus that now overlooks Grays Harbor, Graham said, there ought to be a statue of Lewis C. Tidball, perhaps smoking his professorial briar pipe.

It was Lewis C. Tidball whom Eli T. Moawad took Bob Graham to see on May 17, 1939.

“I’m going to apply for a scholarship for you,” Moawad revealed as they arrived at the school on the hill. On graduation day he and the other superintendents for miles around had received letters from Dean Tidball, announcing the availability of one \$150, full-tuition scholarship.

Tidball welcomed them, settled back in his chair and listened intently as Moawad launched into his pitch about why it should go to Graham. “Eli, he was a car salesman! He really

did a sales job," Graham said, smiling at the memory.

When Moawad stopped to catch his breath, Tidball said Bob seemed to be an exemplary boy, but if he got the scholarship it wouldn't be fair to the other superintendents who had yet to respond with applicants of their own. "I wrote to all of them," he said.

Moawad said he doubted any of them could come up with as fine a candidate as Graham. He was an honor roll student, student body president and tenacious athlete. He got up early to milk the cows and slop the pigs. He sang in the church choir. This boy, Moawad declared, could become someone special.

Graham sat up straighter. He felt like Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer eavesdropping from the church balcony at their own funeral.

Tidball sighed. "I'm going to give him the scholarship!" But there was a catch: he had to stoke the furnace at the crack of dawn. No problem, Graham said. He'd rent a room in Aberdeen so he could keep his end of the bargain. "Oh no. You're coming to live with us," said Tidball. After two months with the Tidballs, Graham protested that he was imposing. The dean hired a carpenter to enclose a space under the third-floor stairwell. It was

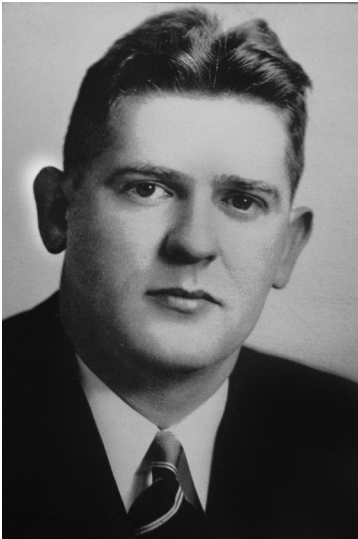


Graham, left, as student body president at Grays Harbor Junior College in 1941.  
*GHC Nautilus*

big enough for a small bed, a wash bowl and a makeshift desk.

Graham plunged into everything. He was business manager of the school's *Nautilus* yearbook and a member of the college's debate team, which posted victories against the College of Puget Sound and other four-year schools. He was rushed by the Midshipmen, the school's self-proclaimed "live-wire" fraternity. With a flower in his lapel, Graham sported a striped tie and two-tone shoes as he posed with his frat brothers on the bow of a boat at Westport.

In the fall of 1940, Graham was resoundingly elected president of the associated students of Grays Harbor Junior College. Soon he was in the thick of a landmark battle to shore up the state's community colleges. State Rep. John Pearsall, a Grays Harbor Junior College alumnus elected to the Legislature in 1938 at the age of 25, had taken up the challenge of securing state aid for the two-year schools. Governor Clarence D. Martin, a frugal Democrat from Cheney, vetoed a \$100,000 appropriation in 1937. Martin feared the mandate was unsustainable, a recession having stalled recovery from the



State Rep. John Pearsall, D-Aberdeen, was the youngest member of the Legislature in 1939 when he first proposed state aid for the junior colleges. *GHC Nautilus*

Depression. Two years later, with an improving economy and the governor's support, Pearsall jawboned similar legislation through the House, only to see it die in conference committee. For the 1941 session, Pearsall and Dean Tidball mobilized junior college boosters from around the state and assembled the seven student body presidents for a strategy session. They chose Graham as their spokesman. The group made several trips to the capitol to lobby legislative committees. Graham, shrewdly, had also secured signed statements of support from both 1940 gubernatorial candidates, Seattle Mayor Arthur B. Langlie and former U.S. senator Clarence

## Junior College Bill Becomes Law



Scene at Olympia as Governor Langlie signed Saturday the junior college aid bill, which is expected to double enrollment and expand educational services at Grays Harbor and other junior colleges in the state. Watching the ceremony are three legislators, Senators Harry Wall of Chelan and Shirley R. Marsh of Cowlitz, who introduced the measure in the senate, and Representative John Pearsall of Grays Harbor, who sponsored the measure in the house.

(Courtesy Longview Daily News)

Gov. Arthur Langlie signs the junior college aid bill in 1941. Looking on at right is Rep. Pearsall. It was Graham who pinned down the candidates for governor.  
*Longview Daily News photo*

C. Dill. Pearsall's bill cleared both houses and was duly signed by Langlie, a good-government Republican who had won by a whisker in a Democratic year. The junior colleges were granted a total of \$200,000 from the general fund, the equivalent of \$6.1 million in 2015 dollars. The heady experience with law-making strengthened Graham's goal to study law or accounting and pursue a career in government.

Pearsall, an Irish Catholic wunderkind in his day, went on to become a longtime Grays Harbor County commissioner. He was a cross between Lyndon B. Johnson and Tip O'Neill, who famously posited that "all politics is local." Pearsall's statue should be next to Tidball's, Graham said. "The legislation John sponsored was a watershed. It led to our modern community college educational system in Washington State,

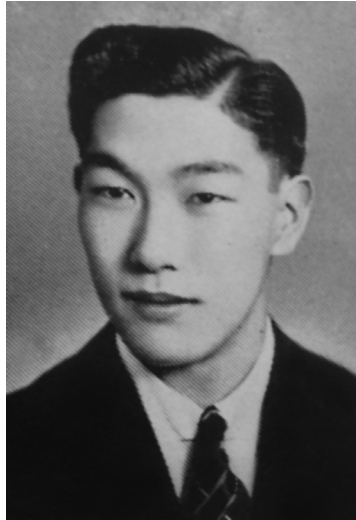
which has improved hundreds of thousands of lives, including mine.” Graham’s yearbook staff voted to dedicate the 1941 annual to Pearsall, saying “what we owe to him can never be fully repaid.”

The winter of 1941 otherwise was fraught with anxiety. President Roosevelt, struggling with the isolationists, hatched a plan to “lend” embattled Great Britain 50 old destroyers and vowed to make America “the arsenal of democracy.” Imperial Japan, pursuing its own ruthless version of Manifest Destiny, had signed a Tripartite Pact with Hitler and Mussolini.

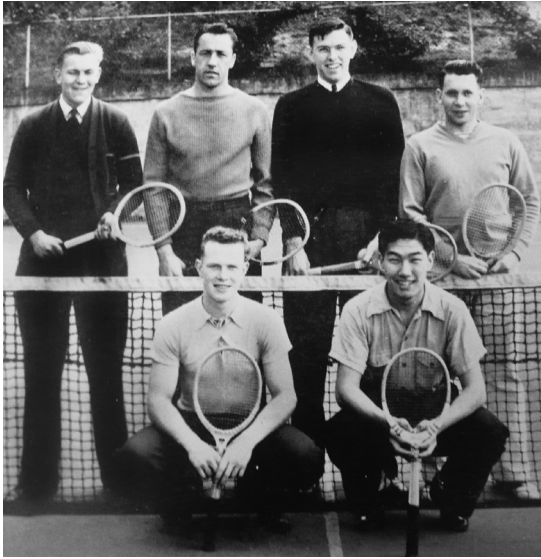
There were only a couple of a Japanese families on Grays Harbor, a province of working-class Scandinavians and Croatians.” Yet many of the pages in the 1941 edition of the *Nautilus* yearbook feature Bob Graham’s best friend at Grays Harbor Junior College. Perry Saito was a tall, handsome, impeccably dressed youth with jet-black, Brylcreemed hair. By year’s end, Graham, Saito, their families and hundreds of friends on the Harbor would be caught up in a war that would claim 65 million lives.

Perry Saito’s father was a Japanese immigrant who supplied ships calling on the Port of Grays Harbor. The Saitos also owned the Oriental Art Store, an import shop, in downtown Aberdeen. Like many *Nisei*—the second-generation, American-born children of Japanese immigrants—Lincoln, Perry, Morse and Dahlia Saito were steeped in patriotism. Ransaku Saito had named his sons after Commodore Perry, Abraham Lincoln and Samuel F.B. Morse, the pioneer telegrapher. The Saito children could recite the Declaration of Independence.

At Aberdeen High School and Grays Harbor Junior College, Perry Saito was a model student and active in Methodist youth groups. He was serious about his studies and his faith, yet the life of any



Perry Saito’s sophomore portrait at Grays Harbor Junior College in 1940. *GHC Nautilus*



Perry Saito was a standout tennis player at the Junior College. *GHC Nautilus*

party. He played the clarinet, sang beautifully and was light on his feet. “All the girls loved to dance with him,” Graham recalled. As if all that wasn’t enough, Perry played tennis with flair and was a rangy right fielder. Graham savored the day he finally beat his friend at Ping Pong. Perry even learned Finnish from a friend’s dad. (“What kind of

town is Aberdeen that a Jap speaks Finnish?” a surprised listener declared when Perry was visiting a classmate studying at an Army language school in Minnesota during the war.) At the Junior College, Perry was sports editor of the yearbook, treasurer of the Men’s Club and, together with Graham, a member of the debate team. He helped organize a “Jinx Dance” featuring black cats, broken mirrors and ladders. One gag photo in the yearbook shows Perry Saito and a classmate with their heads in stocks.

When the war hit home on Grays Harbor six months after their graduation, one of the strangest, bitterest ironies was, as Graham put it, “that a Jewish Army colonel who grew up in Aberdeen sent the Saitos to a concentration camp.”

The tangled story of Karl Bendetsen, Perry Saito and the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II unfolds in *The Colonel and The Pacifist*, a book by Klancy Clark de Nevers of Salt Lake City. The award-winning author grew up on Grays Harbor.

When Imperial Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, 20-year-old Perry Saito, a fledgling pacifist, was a music major at Washington State College in Pullman. On December 9, 1941, his widowed mother, Natsu, was arrested by the FBI and accused

of being a spy. Japanese seamen had frequented the store; she received mail from other Japanese in both America and Japan. Moreover, she owned a typewriter and rumors had circulated that the import shop was a front for subversive activities. The agents ransacked the shop and took Mrs. Saito to the Aberdeen City Jail for interrogation. "After a week she was taken to Seattle for detention. ... Her family still knew nothing of her whereabouts as Christmas approached." Syndicated columnist, Westbrook Pegler, appealing as usual to the worst instincts of his readers, declared, "... to hell with habeas corpus until the danger is over."

Karl Bendetsen, the son of a prosperous Aberdeen haberdasher, was 34 and just months away from becoming the youngest full colonel in the U.S. Army. The Stanford Law School graduate became the architect of the "military necessity" rationale behind Roosevelt's executive order mandating the evacuation and internment of 110,000 West Coast Americans of Japanese ancestry. Perry Saito, ironically, had been an after-school elevator operator in the Aberdeen office building where Bendetsen practiced law before going on active duty with the military. De Nevers writes:

Like all the men of their generation, their lives were vastly changed by World War II but in very different ways. ...As head of the Aliens Division of the provost marshal general's office, [Bendetsen] was about to take charge of an operation that would totally disrupt the lives of the West Coast Japanese and Japanese Americans, including Saito. A year later, while Perry Saito struggled to free himself from the incarceration that Bendetsen had organized, Bendetsen received a Distinguished Service Medal for a job well done. The forced removal and incarceration of the West Coast Japanese and Japanese Americans had repercussions for both men throughout their lives.

Perry Saito's story is that of a young Nisei whose country had turned against him.

Karl Bendetsen's story is that of an ambitious young man who hid and denied his Jewish roots (presumably to avoid discrimination) and used his education and talents to direct a program that trampled the rights and denied the humanity of another ethnic minority.

In 1980 and 1981, the Grahams followed with fascination the congressional inquiry into the Japanese internment and the debate over proposed reparations to surviving internees. Perry Saito was now the activist pastor of the largest Methodist congregation in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He told of his family's incarceration on a desolate dry lakebed in a remote corner of California. Tule Lake was the most notorious of the internment camps. During the 1960s, Saito had been in the forefront of the Civil Rights and anti-war movements. He decried the "flagrant violations of human rights" during the internment. "If any American can be incarcerated without trial or even proper accusation," he told the congressmen, "then it becomes a mockery for us to declare ... 'All persons are created equal.' "

His old adversary, Karl Bendetsen, testified too. He had retired from a long and distinguished career that included a stint as undersecretary of the Army and chairman and CEO of Champion International, the forest products giant. Bendetsen testified that the proceedings were an exercise in politically correct hindsight. You had to be there then, he said, to fully understand the fallout from "the grim events of December 7, 1941, and the terrible months which followed." Bendetsen flatly refused to concede that the internment had been a mistake. And in practically the next breath denied what he had boasted of in his *Who's Who* entry—that he written the president's executive order and played a key role in its execution. Japanese Americans and their allies in Congress were intent on a "raid on the treasury," Bendetsen asserted, his disgust palpable.

Bob Graham was appalled by Bendetsen's duplicity. At the height of the war, when he was a young sergeant flying missions against a ruthless Imperial Japan, it was "horrifying" to him that his friend and 110,000 other Japanese and Japanese Americans were behind barbed wire back home. They weren't



the enemy. "I thought, 'My God! This cannot be happening here in free America.'

"One of my laments is that over the years I never got to see Perry again," Graham said. "I deeply regret that. He died in 1985 after years of heart problems. He was only 64. That book is filled with the names of people we knew and lessons about what America should stand for. Everyone should read it."

Ronald Reagan signed into law the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, which authorized \$1.25 billion in redress to the surviving Japanese-American internees.

GRAHAM MODESTLY EMPHASIZED that he never saw combat in the Pacific Theater. But he saw its wake on practically every trip: White crosses and Stars of David over fresh graves; stretcher after stretcher of hollow-eyed survivors being carried aboard C-54's. "No one was shooting at us on any of the missions I flew," Graham said. "In fact, I never fired a weapon during World War II." It was still risky business. The crews of the Air Transport Command flew hundreds of thousands of miles over undifferentiated ocean and bounced down roller-coaster runways that were often a crude approximation of tarmac. Landings, likewise, were "an ass-pucker every time," a top-turret gunner on a bomber crew recalled. After hopping 30,000 miles across the Pacific Theater to entertain the troops, Bob Hope said, "Everyone claims I'm a little more serious than I was. ... Those men, those soldiers, they're not just a bunch of crap-shooting, wolfing guys we like to joke about. These men are men, with the deepest emotions and the keenest feelings that men can have about everything life holds dear."

"A flight engineer had a lot to do," Graham remembered. "Most people didn't understand the responsibility we had, especially when we got to larger planes. The pilot was on the left, the co-pilot on the right. The flight engineer sat on a little jump-seat in the middle. I ran the throttles and 'gear up and gear down.' Fuel consumption was my total responsibility. If you had a major malfunction out there, it was a long swim home."

Graham's closest call came one day as they set down on Kwajalein in the Marshall Islands, some 2,000 miles south-

west of Honolulu. The pilot came in too fast on a short runway. Bob yanked the equivalent of the emergency brakes “but we ripped the tires off the landing gear—blew out all the tires—and went right into the ocean. Not very far, but far enough” to be scared spitless. “Some of those islands were so small you could go over to look out at the ocean, stand there, then look back to see the waves coming ashore on the other side. They called them atolls—a coral reef that’s not much of an island.

“The first leg of the shuttle would be from Travis Field in California to Hickam Field in Hawaii. When we got off the plane there, there’d be a crew standing by to fly the next leg, hauling cargo deeper into the Pacific. But on some missions, we’d refuel and keep going. We found out later that some of the stuff we were hauling out to Tinian and Saipan was part of the atomic bomb system. It was stockpiled there to assemble the bombs. ... There was hardly an island in the Pacific I wasn’t on. After Hawaii, Eniwetok was one stop, then Kwajalein. Then Johnson Island. I had to haul rock in there so they could build that thing up to make an airstrip on it. ... We never stayed in one place very long. Sometimes we’d shuttle along one route to Wake; another time we’d go the other route to the Marshalls. ... By late ’44 and ’45 we were getting closer and closer to Japan.”

GERMANY SURRENDERED in the spring of 1945. Now that the main islands were within range of U.S. heavy bombers, the Japanese were taking a pounding. Yet signs were that the fanatical militarists would defend the homeland until the last kamikaze crashed and old men and boys with sharpened bamboo sticks were mobilized to repel invaders on the beaches

Graham got a two-week furlough to come home. He arrived in Hoquiam just as the first atomic bomb was leveling Hiroshima. Still no surrender.

Bob and Lloydine had decided to wait until war’s end to get married. However, after he’d been home for a couple of days, he held her tight and said, “It may be a long time before this darn war is over. Maybe we should get married.”

“I think we should,” she said.

“When?”

“Sunday.”



The newlyweds depart the Hoquiam First Presbyterian Church on August 12, 1945. *Robert Graham collection*

That was three days away. “I found a dress I liked at a little shop in Aberdeen,” Lloydine recalled. “When I hear about brides today taking months to arrange everything I think to myself, ‘That’s too much time!’ Ours turned out fine.”

There was a hitch. Bob’s job was to secure the Presbyterian Church and its minister. Problem was, the pastor was on vacation. So Bob walked a few blocks to the Methodist Church and shared his dilemma with Pastor Howard P. Buck. If it was OK with the Presbyter-

ians it was OK with him, Buck said.

It was OK with the Presbyterians. On August, 12, 1945, the Grahams were wed in a packed Presbyterian Church by a Methodist minister.

It would be hard to imagine a happier honeymoon. As they arrived in Seattle two days later in Bob’s uncle’s Chevrolet, Japan’s unconditional surrender was being announced. “People were dancing in the streets, and all the girls were grabbing service men and giving them hugs and kisses,” Lloydine said. Bob was wearing his uniform. She yanked his hand and said, “C’mon. We’re going to a movie!” The Grahams joked ever since that their marriage caused the war to end.

When his leave was up, Bob still had to go back to his base in California. There was mopping up to do, and a points system was in place to regulate the discharge of service men and women.

That December, Bob missed the marriage of Lloydine's sister June to a fighter squadron guy she'd met at Washington State College. His name was Ted Reder. "All I knew was his name. I'd never even seen a picture of him."

On January 5, 1946, Bob's crew arrived in Atsugi, Japan. Most of the fellows were dead tired and hit the sack. But Bob and the radio operator wanted to go into the city and see what Japan was like. They were standing on a dock in a rice paddy when Bob declared:

"You know, I wouldn't trade this whole damn island for an acre in Washington!"

"Pardon me," said another GI. "Did you say 'Washington'?"

"I sure did."

"Where you from in Washington?"

"You know where Aberdeen is?"

"I sure do. I just married a girl from Hoquiam."

"Hold on. Your name can't be Ted Reder, can it?"

"It is! You're not Bob Graham are you?"

Out of hundreds of thousands of GI's deployed around the world, what are the odds of that? "Phenomenal," Graham said.

"On January 6, June's birthday, Ted and I got on a little narrow-gauge electric train and went to Atsugi. We found a telegraph office and send Lloydine's sister a telegram. That was the first time they knew where he was and that we were together."

"I still get quivers thinking about that telegram," Lloydine said.

A day or two later, as Graham was assisting with the pre-flight inspection for the first leg of the trip home, he glanced down at the tarmac when the fuel truck arrived. "It was my old gas man from Travis! I said, 'Hey, you got extra gas?' 'Sure thing.' So I got our pilot, co-pilot and navigator together and they figured that with the extra fuel we could fly over Hiroshima on the way to the Philippines."

Ground zero of the first atomic bomb dropped on humanity struck him as "surreal." Thousands of people had been vaporized. "I thought to myself, 'That's something pretty

powerful. Something pretty terrible.' But if [Truman] hadn't dropped the bombs there would have been a heckuva lot more killed. It was a frightening thing, but I agreed with Truman."

GRAHAM HAD BEEN ACCEPTED for officer training school, but when his discharge came through on January 31, 1946, he happily headed home. Lloydine's uncle was a partner in the largest medical/dental laboratory in Los Angeles. Eyeing retirement, he offered Bob a chance to learn the ropes. After only six months, however, the Grahams grew homesick for the Northwest. Ever since his first trip to the capital as junior college student body president, Bob had dreamed of living in Olympia.

In 1947, he became a claims adjustor for the Department of Labor & Industries. He soon jumped to the Budget Office, with the promise of \$25 more per month after three months. Three months came and went. Then four. Then five. Then six. Disgusted, Graham quit. A promise is a promise.

"I went back to my office, put all my private things in a cardboard box, walked out, stood on the back steps and looked over at the Capitol Building and thought, 'Boy, Graham, you're out of a job!'"

To think things over, he went to the cafeteria in the basement of the marble-lined Capitol and had a cup of five-cent coffee. Then, box in hand, he walked down the hall. "There was a sign on a door that said, 'State Auditor's Division of Municipal Corporations, Lawrence Hubble, chief examiner.' I thought, 'Well, Lloydine's folks knew a Lawrence Hubble in Hoquiam. My God, this is fate! So I walked in and told the secretary, 'I have no appointment, but I'd sure like to meet Mr. Hubble.' She said, 'He's right here, right now.' I told him the story about why I'd left Labor & Industries. I told him that working for the Auditor's Office was something I was really interested in. 'You're in luck, Bob,' he said. There was an opening. 'Let's go upstairs so you can meet Cliff Yelle,' the state auditor. It was this beautiful big office with tapestries, and I thought, 'My God, what am I doing here? I'm from Copalis Crossing!' Hubble told Cliff the story about me leaving Labor & Industries and my background in college and the service. Back then everything was political patronage. Cliff asked me a bunch of ques-

tions and talked about the role of the office. Finally, he looked at me with a squint in his eye and said, 'Bob, what kind of a Democrat are you?' I said, "*I'm a Cliff Yelle Democrat!*" The next words that came out of his mouth were 'Hire him, Lawrence!'

Graham's laughter filled the room.

"I worked for Cliff for 17 years. He became my friend and mentor. When he told me in 1963 that he was going to retire as state auditor after 32 years, I'd held every major administrative post in the agency. I was chief examiner of the Division of Municipal Corporations. It was the major crossroads of my government career: whether I should remain on the staff and take my chances when a new man—or woman—came in after the election or run for the auditor's job myself. I chose to run. It was a hard-fought primary but I went on to win election with a 200,000-vote plurality in 1964. Over the years, I never lost an election—from president of the Newton Sunday School Choir, to student body president at Moclips and Grays Harbor Junior College and seven runs for state auditor. I also served three or four terms as elder of the Westminster Presbyterian Church here in Olympia. And I was Sunday School Superintendent for nine years."

Graham retired as auditor in 1993. His most memorable battle focused on his assertion that the Auditor's Office had the right and responsibility to conduct "performance audits" of state agencies. A fiscal audit focused only on whether appropriated funds were being spent in keeping with the law. The broader question, Graham said, "is what kind of a job are they doing with the taxpayers' money?" After considerable study and staff training, Graham's team began conducting performance audits in 1967, late in his first term. The move received national recognition. It also soon angered influential lawmakers in both parties when the Auditor's Office reported that junkets to Europe and Puerto Rico had been reimbursed on a per-mile basis rather than actual cost.

There was even talk of making the office appointive. Graham said the state auditor's job was to be an independent watchdog, without fear or favor. He recommended that the office be nonpartisan. "I ran and won seven times as a Democrat because it's a partisan office, but it shouldn't be. I was never a

‘Democrat’ auditor.” He clashed on some occasions with three-term Governor Dan Evans, a Republican, who in 1971 signed with mixed emotions legislation prohibiting the state auditor from conducting performance audits. All things considered, “Dan Evans was probably my favorite politician,” Graham said. “Very progressive and fair-minded.

“During my years we brought the office into the modern era, and I put together a great team. We were hardnosed about the law, but fair and honest. The auditor and the auditee are often pretty difficult to bring together. But invariably I was able to bring people to the point where they felt ... that they would be treated fairly. That’s the thing I’m most proud of. We also had fraud investigation courses. We received national awards for our accounting department. I always said that we were the ‘Largest CPA firm in the state.’ The federal General Accounting Office said our agency was one of the top 10 government accounting offices in the United States.”

GRAHAM KNEW AND ADMIRERD ONE of the greatest of “The Greatest Generation”—the late Bob Bush, who grew up in Pacific



Bob and Lloydine Graham in the 1980s when he was state auditor. *Robert Graham collection*

County. Bush received the Medal of Honor for his heroism under fire as an 18-year-old Navy medical corpsman during the horrific battle for Okinawa in 1945. He went on to found the highly successful Bayview Lumber Company. General Jimmy Doolittle became one of his best friends after Bush was elected president of the Congressional Medal of Honor Society. Bush’s life story is featured in Tom Brokaw’s best-seller, *The Greatest Generation*.

Is that sobriquet

over-reaching, as some suggest?

“I hold Tom Brokaw way up there,” Graham said. “‘Greatest Generation’ is kind of flattery in a way. But I feel we really did something. Individually and collectively. We stepped up.”

Mrs. Graham said, “We were all drawn close together by the war, culturally and emotionally. I think our kids today are having knowledge beyond what we had ever dreamed. But it’s how that gets used that will matter.”

Three of the Grahams’ five children have key roles in state government. The other two are doing well in the private sector. There are 12 grandchildren and 15 great-grandchildren, all close by, “another blessing.”

“It’s their world now,” Bob said.

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When we asked the Grahams to recreate their wedding photo, Bob interrupted the photographer after the first flash, pointed to a vase on the coffee table and said, “Hand me those flowers.”

Robert V. Graham died peacefully—at home in his own bed—on April 16, 2014, four days after his 93rd birthday and two weeks after our last interview.

**John C. Hughes**