

## NEWS

### Career devoted to cutting risk of nuclear war

Louisville native was tireless treaty negotiator

By Matt Frassica

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Late one night in January 1992, Thomas Graham Jr. stood on a tarmac in Minsk, Belarus, waiting for a flight to Alma-Ata, then the capital of Kazakhstan. The breakup of the Soviet Union weeks earlier had left nuclear weapons stranded in four newly independent states, and Graham was part of a U.S. delegation sent to try to persuade them to give up their warheads.



Thomas Graham Jr. now teaches about disarmament.

A small plane pulled up and a U.S. ambassador came down its steps, carrying a briefcase that contained \$20,000 in small bills. Without a word, the ambassador handed the briefcase to Reginald Bartholomew,

undersecretary of state for national security, as Graham watched.

"I wasn't sure if I was engaged in arms control or running drugs," Graham, a Louisville native, said in a phone interview last week.

Kazakh authorities demanded the \$20,000 simply to refuel the delegation's plane once it reached Alma-Ata (now Almaty); credit card payments in the two-week-old nation still ran through Moscow, which took a cut of the proceeds. The Kazakhs wouldn't take a check.

Graham's recollections and career are back in the news because of the new book "The Twilight of the Bombs," the final volume in Pulitzer-Prize-winning author Richard Rhodes' series of four books about the history of nuclear weapons.

The book, published late last month, is dedicated to Graham, who served in gov-

ernment for three decades at the highest levels of U.S. arms control policy. He was involved in negotiating every major arms control treaty from 1970 to 1997.

Graham is "one of the central figures in the global (arms control) debate," said Hans Blix, former head of the International Atomic Energy Agency. His work "has earned him respect in all quarters in disarmament, and rightly so."

#### A political family

Born in 1933, Tom Graham graduated from Male High School in the last all-male class. The son of Thomas Graham, who served for 30 years as treasurer of the Jefferson County Democratic Party and who ran for mayor in 1948, he grew up breathing political air.

It was a useful education for someone who would serve under six presidents, both Republican and Democratic.

*"Tom (Graham) is the proverbial steel fist in a velvet glove. He's obviously a very good negotiator."*

**RICHARD RHODES**, author of a series of four books on the history of nuclear weapons, the latest of which, "The Twilight of the Bombs," is dedicated to Graham

His father was on the board of directors for Churchill Downs. His mother developed a reputation for nearly always picking the Derby winner. Tom Graham attended his 50th Derby this spring.

He became interested in international politics while attending Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs. His thesis was on American attitudes toward the Soviet Union in the 1930s and '40s.

"I knew I wanted to do international work, but I didn't know what kind," said Graham, who now lives in Bethesda, Md.

He was accepted to Harvard Law School three times. He deferred the first acceptance so he could study in Paris at the esteemed Institut d'Etudes Politiques and travel through the eastern Mediterranean and Middle East.

He later reapplied and was accepted again, but in 1956 was drafted into the Army.

Harvard accepted him a third time two years later, after his military service. He arrived in Cambridge in September 1958 and presented himself at the registrar's office. Graham remembers that the clerk who took his name said, "At last!"

#### Congressional work

Graham's education included clerkships with a federal Circuit Court judge and the prominent Kentucky firm Wyatt, Tarrant and Combs. At the invitation of then-U.S. Rep. Brent Spence, a congressman from Northern Kentucky and a friend of Graham's father, he worked as counsel for the House Banking and Currency Committee.

He accompanied Spence and President John F. Kennedy on a trip to Cincinnati in October 1962, during the Cuban Missile Crisis. While Air Force One sat on the tarmac in Northern Kentucky, he recalled, everyone left the plane except Spence, Kennedy and Graham.

In his memoirs, Graham recalls "when you spoke with President Kennedy, he looked you right in the eye as though he was intently listening to what you said — an important political attribute."

By 1968, however, Graham had become disaffected with the Democratic Party. He resolved to work for Richard Nixon's campaign — work that eventually led to a job as a legal adviser for the Air Force.

After a year, he took a job in the national Arms Control and Disarmament Agency.

"I heard about this little agency that negotiated arms control agreements with the Soviet Union," Graham said. "I thought that would be an interesting place to work."

"I said to myself, 'You've had six jobs in nine years; maybe you ought to stay a few years here.'"

Graham stayed 27. He said his experience with Spence proved invaluable in his career as counsel and congressional

liaison for the arms control agency. Since many of the international agreements negotiated by the agency needed the advice and consent of the U.S. Senate, Graham frequently found himself back on the Hill.

Graham later drew fire from congressional Republicans opposed to disarmament. And Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee in the 1990s, eventually succeeded in declawing Graham's agency.

Doug Shaw, an associate dean at George Washington University, was Graham's special assistant for public affairs when it came under fire. "One of the pieces of advice he gave me that I think put him in good stead was: 'Never lie to Congress,'" Shaw said.

### Right to remain silent

In his long career at the arms control agency, Graham more than once found himself on the wrong side of more hawkish members of the Republican Party.

During President Ronald Reagan's administration, Graham opposed the administration's attempt to reinterpret the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty to allow the development of space-based missile defenses — part of Reagan's "Star Wars" program. Graham, who witnessed negotiations for the ABM treaty in the 1970s, argued that the treaty could not be read in the way the administration wanted without twisting its meaning beyond recognition.

Judge Abraham Sofaer, a former federal judge who became a State Department legal adviser in 1985, led the effort for a broader interpretation of the ABM. According to Graham, Sofaer and other officials knew that "Reagan would never agree to withdraw from that treaty, but that a bogus interpretation might be put over on the government." Through an assistant, Sofaer, now a fellow at the Hoover Institution, a conservative think tank on the campus of Stanford University, declined an interview request.

Graham saw the dispute in starkly moral terms. The broad interpretation was "not being proper or honest," he said. Its advocates were "affecting the honor of the United States."

Conservative thinkers saw these issues differently — and many viewed internationalists like Graham as dangerously misguided.

"They were posing a danger to Ronald Reagan, because Reagan obviously passionately believed not only in ballistic missile defense, but we now know that ... he had a longstanding and quite serious belief that you could have a nuclear-free

## THOMAS GRAHAM JR.

**Born:** 1933 in Louisville

**High school:** Graduated from Male in 1951

**Current home:** Bethesda, Md.

### Career highlights:

► Involved in the negotiation of every major arms control and nuclear nonproliferation agreement between 1970 and 1997 — including START, SALT, the CTBT, the INF Treaty and the ABM Treaty.

► Participated in nuclear talks with more than 100 countries.

► Served as general counsel for the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency for 15 years, and as acting director for one year.

► Advised five U.S. presidents on issues related to nuclear nonproliferation; as President Bill Clinton's special representative for arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament, Graham led the U.S. delegation that successfully led efforts to permanently extend the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

world, and (missile defense) was a big part of that," said longtime conservative columnist George Will.

"There was a whole clerisy of arms control experts. They went to the conferences, they read their papers, they published their journals and they spoke as a clerisy loves to do — in arcane language with an argot inaccessible to laymen," Will said in a telephone interview from Washington, D.C. "It was a hermetically sealed little community, and it developed its own imperative, which was, 'God, we sunk our whole lives into this, let's get another agreement.' People outside this delusional circle said, 'Wait a minute.'"

During the course of this political and ideological battle, the FBI investigated Graham for allegedly leaking classified information to a New York Times reporter — a claim suggested by Sofaer in a memo to senior administration officials and picked up by Helms, who denounced Graham from the Senate floor.

FBI agents came to interview Graham at his office and read him his rights. "It's an impressive experience," Graham said "It focuses your mind."

The investigation led nowhere, and Congress eventually blocked the broad interpretation of the ABM.

"Tom has this incredible record of integrity in terms of legal interpretation and standing up to heavy political pressure," Shaw said. "He can't be swayed. He can't be cowed."

### The velvet glove

As general counsel for the arms control agency, Graham wasn't a political appointee. After President Bill Clinton took office, Graham became its acting director and, later, special representative of the president for nuclear nonproliferation, with the title of ambassador.

Rhodes suggests that Graham's greatest accomplishment in that role came in the mid-1990s, when the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty came up for renewal. The treaty is the cornerstone of global arms control. Excepting the "nuclear-weapon states" officially recognized by the treaty as having such arms — the U.S., Russia, the United Kingdom, France and China — its signatories promise not to acquire nuclear weapons. (North Korea, which had signed the treaty, withdrew in 2003.)

"It was no easy thing to convince the other nations of the world to extend the NPT," Rhodes said. "They had watched the five original nuclear powers do very little ... of what they had pledged to do in 1968," when the treaty was originally signed with promises from nuclear-armed states to decrease their arsenals."It was his responsibility to convince them to rejoin the club," Rhodes said. "That's an extraordinary act of diplomacy."

Graham accomplished this by traveling to as many capitals as he could and negotiating directly with world leaders. Typical diplomatic etiquette would have meant negotiations in New York with the countries' U.N. representatives.

"It was sort of an unprecedented diplomatic endeavor," said Ambassador Susan Burk, who traveled with Graham on about half of these trips and now holds Graham's former position as the special representative of the president for nuclear non-proliferation. "He was just the Energizer bunny."

Eventually Graham visited nearly 40 capitals over two years. According to Burk and Rhodes, it made a difference: In 1995, a majority of states voted to extend the treaty indefinitely.

"If we had approached this as business as usual, just sending out telegrams, I don't think it would have the same result," Burk said.

"Tom Graham was one of those harbor pilots who steers some gigantic ship through a very tricky maneuver so it can dock," said Christopher Jones, who teaches with Graham at the University of Washington. "The world would be a very different place right now if the NPT had not been signed and then ratified."

"Tom is the proverbial steel fist in a velvet glove," Rhodes said. "He's obviously a very good negotiator."

### **A busy retirement**

Although he retired from government service in 1997, Graham continues to

teach courses in disarmament at Stanford in California and the University of Washington. Back in Kentucky, he serves on the board of the Thomas Merton Institute.

He is also executive director of the Lightbridge Corp., which is testing a new type of nuclear reactor whose spent fuel cannot be used for weapons.

Graham has written five books and is working on a sixth, to be published in 2012. "It's about the crises that we face today and how difficult and almost insoluble they are — North Korea, Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq and so forth."

For now, Graham's legacy in U.S. arms control policy seems assured. President Barack Obama has made arms control — and living up to the disarmament commitments made in the Nuclear Non-

Proliferation Treaty — a foreign policy priority. "With Obama, I think we were both delighted that he championed this policy," Blix said.

But Graham remains active. "I don't really want to retire," Graham said. "I enjoy doing what I do — I like writing, I like speaking and I like politics.

"I don't like traveling so much, but I do like being in interesting places," he said. "The price you have to pay is to travel."

Still, despite all his jet-setting, Graham has a few destinations left on his list. "I've always wanted to do the trans-Siberian railway; I've never done that. I'd love to see Machu Picchu some time."

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