

Ray Eugene Nash

U.S. Navy, Quartermaster Second Class

1926 - 2005

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Ray Eugene Nash was born in Richwood, Nicholas County, West Virginia July 27, 1926, to Alta Maude Williams Nash and Samuel Jerome Nash. The Nash family was quite large with six children. Ray had two older brothers, William and Archie, one younger brother, Hugh, and two sisters, Katherine and Doris. Parents Alta and Samuel were both natives of West Virginia.

Richwood was a manufacturing hub in the early 20th century thanks to its proximity to large-scale timbering operations, but the town was hard hit by the Great Depression. Once the “clothespin capital of the world” and home to the largest shoe sole leather tannery, Richwood’s employment opportunities dwindled throughout the 1930s, and residents left the community to find work elsewhere. Samuel Nash worked in the paper industry, eventually moving up to the position of foreman. Though the paper industry in Richwood survived the Great Depression, the working-class Nash family had moved south by then, probably so Samuel could find better employment in his lifelong trade.

By the time Ray was in his early teens, the family had settled in Plymouth, Washington County, North Carolina. Samuel worked for the North Carolina Pulp Plant while Alta stayed home to raise their children. Ray attended Plymouth High School and worked at the pulp plant alongside his

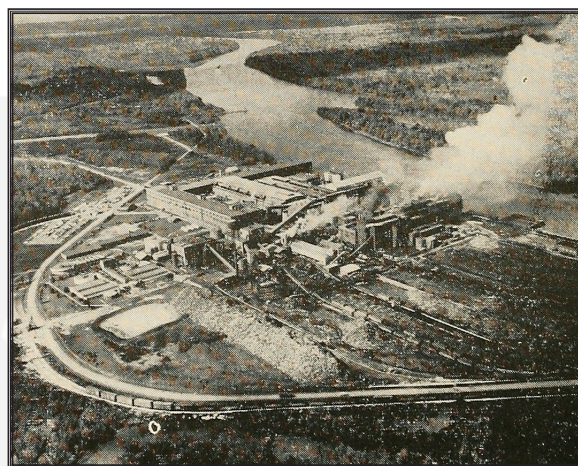


Ray Nash in his last high school photo, taken in 1942. He only completed ninth grade before enlisting at age 17, but gained his diploma 13 years later. *1942 Plymouth High School (NC) yearbook*

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father and brother, Archie, until early 1943 when he enlisted in the U.S. Naval Reserve. Ray was just 17 years old, and had not yet received his high school diploma.

Military service was expected of young men at the height of World War II, but Ray may also have felt compelled to follow his two older brothers, William and Archie, who both enlisted in the preceding months. Archie eventually served as an Army corporal in France. William was a machine gunner during the invasion of Italy. In the assault on the fortress of Monte Cassino in January 1944, his first major battle, William was struck by shell fragments and severely injured. Blinded in his left eye and recovering from injuries to his left jaw, right arm, and chest, William was honorably discharged in October 1944.



The North Carolina Pulp Plant, where Ray's father worked until his death in a car accident in 1955.
DigitalNC

Young Ray Nash was sworn into naval service in February 1943. On August 5, 1943, after completing his training, he joined the USS *Duffy* (DE-27), an *Evarts*-class destroyer escort. He was one of the first aboard of just under 200 officers and men—mustering in the same day as the ship's first commanding officer. *Duffy* was a brand-new vessel, built and launched from Mare Island in San Francisco Bay, California, just a few months before.



***Evarts*-class destroyer escort USS *Duffy* (DE-27) after launching from Mare Island, San Francisco Bay, in 1942. Nash was among the first crewmen to report aboard for its maiden cruise the following year.**
NavSource.org

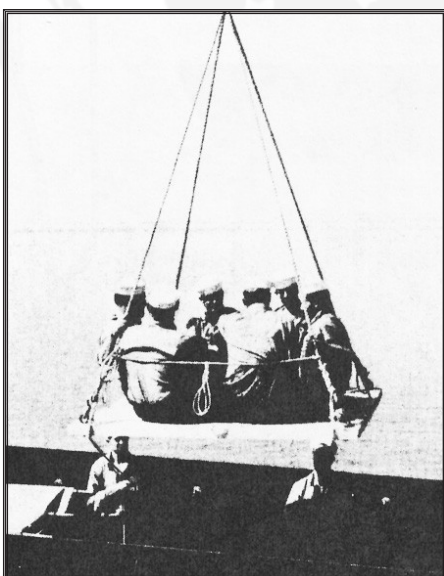
While Ray was aboard the USS *Duffy*, the ship escorted a convoy to Pearl Harbor and protected aircraft carriers bound for air strikes against the Marshall Islands. As a destroyer escort, the *Duffy*'s primary task was escorting convoys of Merchant Marine ships, or other vessels carrying troops or supplies. In November 1943, for example, *Duffy* escorted the fleet oiler USS *Neosho* (AO-48) during the Gilbert Islands invasion. In December 1944 the log of LST-783 records *Duffy* as one escort of a large convoy of LSTs (Landing Ship Tanks) moving troops from Saipan to the Philippines. The LSTs, nicknamed "Large Slow Targets" by their crews, were lumbering, lightly-armed transports vulnerable to attack by aircraft or submarines without escorts like *Duffy*. There

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may have been disciplinary problems on the *Duffy* around this time, as several men were reduced in rank by the commanding officer, and two were court-martialed.

By this time Ray had been promoted twice: first to seaman first class in March 1944, then to coxswain in October. U.S. Navy coxswains during World War II worked primarily on deck, handling and repairing lines, chains, and cables, as well as operating cranes, davits, and other lifting gear. They (and the boatswain's mates above them) acted as foremen during deck maintenance, and operated smaller boats on the ship.

In May 1945 *Duffy* picked up four Japanese prisoners floating at sea in a small boat. The crew captured more Japanese soldiers throughout the Marshall Islands in June. Nash himself joined an armed landing party of six *Duffy* sailors on June 28, which brought back a prisoner, Toshio Nishimoto, "who had agreed by visual contact to surrender."



As a coxswain in his later months on the USS *Duffy*, Nash was responsible for cables, cranes, and ropes on deck. Safely moving men and equipment from ship to shore would have been an important priority. NHHC

Ray Nash and the USS *Duffy* returned to San Francisco Bay in August 1945 after nearly two years sailing the Pacific. Dozens of replacement crew members came aboard as the destroyer's old hands departed, many of them now done with their wartime service. Nash himself stepped off in San Francisco "FURAS" (for further assignment) September 1, 1945, one day before Emperor Hirohito formally signed the Japanese surrender in Tokyo Bay.

Following World War II Ray returned to North Carolina and began working for the Nello L. Teer Company as a recapper, reviewing bids from subcontractors. Nello L. Teer, a massive North Carolina-based firm, had constructed the Raleigh-Durham Airport during the war, and was poised to expand even more at war's end. On October 17, 1946, Ray married a local woman, Mary Katherine Cruikshanks, in Plymouth. Just a year apart, it is possible that Ray and Mary first met while they were both attending Plymouth High School. After their marriage, Ray reenlisted in the Navy and returned to California—where he had departed for his first tour in the Pacific—to ship out to sea again.

During the Korean War, Ray was assigned to the USS *Willard Keith* (DD-775). The *Willard Keith* was one of two destroyers that attempted to rescue the SS *Flying Enterprise*, a freighter, as it sunk off the coast of France in January 1952. Caught in a turbulent winter storm with hurricane-force winds and 40-foot waves, the *Flying Enterprise* suffered two fractures in her main hull. Despite valiant efforts from the *Willard Keith*, the USS *John W. Weeks* (DD-701), and several other vessels, the *Flying Enterprise* sank to a watery grave in the icy waters of the North Atlantic. Fortunately, the entire crew was successfully evacuated before sinking.

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While the *Willard Keith* was in Europe, Ray was able to visit Plymouth, England, and the Mayflower Stone from which Miles Standish and company had embarked en route to the New World. Ray also saw other historic sites such as the Elizabethan House and the Royal Citadel. In summer 1952 Ray attended a midshipmen summer cruise around Northern Europe with midshipmen from the Naval Academy and Navy Reserve Officer Training Corps units from several colleges.

Europe was just the beginning of all the sights Ray would see while on duty. In September 1953 the *Keith* departed from Norfolk, Virginia, for East Asia via the Atlantic Ocean and the Suez Canal. The ship made stops in Bermuda; Gibraltar; Naples, Italy; Aden, Saudi Arabia; Colombo, Sri Lanka; and Manila, Philippines. Part of Destroyer Division 221, *Willard Keith* served as part of the fast carrier Task Force 77 and the Escort and Blockade Task Force 95. In the last leg of her round-the-world tour, *Keith* visited nearly a dozen Korean and Japanese ports, and then began her homebound voyage through the Pacific. Along the way she stopped at Midway Island, Hawaii; San Francisco and Long Beach, California; Balboa, Panama; Havana, Cuba; and Key West, Florida.

By the time Ray had returned home in April 1954 he had achieved the rank of Quartermaster Second Class. While Army quartermasters typically take charge of logistics and supply issues for their units, Navy quartermasters man and maintain the navigation equipment on the bridge of their warships. After Ray retired from the military, he went back to finish his education. He was

Local Man Back From Long Cruise

Norfolk, Va. (FHTNC) — Destroyer Division 221, consisting of the USS Owens, Keith, Henley and the Putnam, returned here after an around the world cruise the last week in April.

Ray E. Nash, quartermaster second class, USN, son of Mr. and Mrs. S. J. Nash, and husband of Mrs. Mary Nash, all of Plymouth, N. C., is serving aboard the USS Willard Keith.

The ships left here last year in mid-September.

Enroute to the Far East via the Atlantic Ocean and Suez Canal, they visited Bermuda, Gibraltar, Naples, Italy, Aden, Saudi Arabia, Colombo, Ceylon and Manila, Republic of the Philippines.

The division served as an element of the fast carrier Task Force 77, and the Escort and Blockade Task Force 95 in the Far East.

After visiting nearly a dozen Korean and Japanese ports, the ships began their homeward voyage via Pacific, stopping at Midway Island, Hawaii, San Francisco and Long Beach, Calif., Balboa, C. Z., Havana, Cuba, and Key West, Fla.

Small insights into Ray Nash's naval adventures appear more than once as "Local Man" columns in *The Roanoke Beacon*, his North Carolina hometown newspaper.

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congratulated for his graduation from Plymouth High School in *The Roanoke Beacon* in May 1955. Tragically, his father, Samuel, was killed in an automobile accident just five months later.

Ray stayed on with the Nello L. Teer Company for many years. By now the Durham-based company was one of the largest construction companies in the world and had worked on many notable projects both domestically and internationally, including the West Virginia Turnpike and the Pan-American Highway. Over the years, Ray worked his way up to survey party chief.

Ray and Mary had four children—three girls and one boy: Debra, Sharon, Christy, and Joe. The family lived in Plymouth, North Carolina, for many years until Mary's untimely death from cancer in 1965. Following Mary's passing, Ray relocated the family to his home state of West Virginia and switched to working for Nello Teer's West Virginia division.

Ray remarried in 1965 to Evelyn Sononia Holmes Angell in Kanawha County. Married once before, Evelyn had a daughter named Donna. Their blended family settled in Cross Lanes, West Virginia. Ray and Evelyn remained married until she preceded him in death in 1983. All of Ray's children remained in West Virginia or nearby in western Pennsylvania. In his later years, Ray was likely surrounded by his grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Ray passed away July 14, 2005. He was laid to rest at the West Virginia National Cemetery in Pruntytown.



Nash spent four years aboard the destroyer USS *Willard Keith* (DD-775). *Naval History & Heritage Command*

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Resting Place

West Virginia National Cemetery
42 Veterans Memorial Lane, Grafton, WV 26354
(304) 265-2044

Section: C3
Site: 43

Date of Interment: August 9, 2005

About the West Virginia National Cemeteries Project

The West Virginia National Cemeteries Project is a program of the West Virginia Humanities Council, funded in part by the Veterans Legacy Program of the Department of Veteran Affairs and initiated in 2021. All biographies produced as part of this program are composed by West Virginia high school students, who conduct original research on veterans interred at the Grafton National Cemetery or the West Virginia National Cemetery, both of which are located in or near Grafton, Taylor County, West Virginia.

As home to one of the nation's earliest National Cemeteries, the community of Grafton has longstanding traditions of honoring America's veterans, including the longest continuously celebrated Memorial Day parade in the United States. The Grafton National Cemetery, located in the heart of the city and founded in 1867, is typically the endpoint of each year's parade. When the Grafton National Cemetery began to run short of space during the 1960s, the West Virginia National Cemetery was dedicated in 1987, just a few miles outside of Grafton in the community of Pruntytown. The same National Cemetery Administration staff cares for both facilities.

The West Virginia Humanities Council is proud to thank the following organizations for their participation in the West Virginia National Cemeteries Project: West Virginia Archives and History, the West Virginia University history department, Taylor County Historical and Genealogical Society, Taylor County Public Library, and Grafton High School.

Please refer comments or questions to the West Virginia Humanities Council
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