

# Glen Peacock

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# Glen Peacock

U. S. Army Engineer

Today is March 26<sup>th</sup>, 2004. My name is Margaret Lofgren. I am a volunteer with Midway Village and Museum Center which is cooperating with the statewide effort to collect oral histories from Illinois citizens that participated in events surrounding World War II. Today we are in the office of the Midway Village interviewing Glen Peacock who was in the engineers of the United States Armed Forces during World War II.

**LOFGREN:** Would you please give us your first name, your complete name?

**PEACOCK:** My name is Glen Peacock.

**LOFGREN:** What was the place of your birth and date of your birth?

**PEACOCK:** I was born in Rockford, Illinois, November 25<sup>th</sup>, 1919.

**LOFGREN:** We would like to have the names of each of your parents including your mother's maiden name.

**PEACOCK:** My mother's maiden name was Mary Wells. My dad's name was Charles W. Peacock.

**LOFGREN:** Do you have any brothers or sisters?

**PEACOCK:** I had a brother and a sister, both deceased at this time.

**LOFGREN:** Are there any details about your parents or your family that you would like to give? Perhaps their place of birth or something like that or what they did?

**PEACOCK:** My mother was born in Canandaigua, New York. My dad was born right here in Winnebago County near Perryville, Illinois, which is just outside of Cherry Valley.

**LOFGREN:** What was your business?

**PEACOCK:** My dad worked on the farms when he was younger and he decided to come to town.

He worked in a factory—Burson Knitting factory for one week and he couldn't stand being inside so he quit and he went to work for Parson's Lumber Company on North Madison Street. He worked there for 25 years and he decided he wanted to be in the lumber business himself. In 1940 he bought the Perryville Lumber Company and we had that for 8 years, sold it in 1948.

**LOFGREN:** What was life like for you before the war and specifically before 1941?

**PEACOCK:** My life before the war started was very enjoyable. I loved to be outdoors, I was an avid hunter and fisherman. In 1941 I had to sign up for the draft and I was always watching for my number to come up. That was always on my mind.

**LOFGREN:** Had you graduated from school by then?

**PEACOCK:** Yes I graduated from Central High School in 1938.

**LOFGREN:** What thoughts had you had about the war before the United States became directly involved in the conflict? Were you aware of what was going on in Europe?

**PEACOCK:** I really didn't pay much attention to it although I knew \_\_\_?\_\_\_ was happening. I wasn't smart enough to be concerned enough to think what was going to happen.

**LOFGREN:** Did you hear the 1941 radio announcement about the bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese? If so, where were you and what were you doing at the time?

**PEACOCK:** Yes, I remember that day very well. December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941, was a Sunday and I was at State and Madison Recreation playing pool. They had a radio on. Of course, everybody there heard it and things really kind of quieted down and you can imagine what the noise was in a pool hall. It got real calm and serious.

**LOFGREN:** What was your reaction and the response of those around you?

**PEACOCK:** The response of other people around me was kind of sadness and wondering what's going to happen now. Of course, my thought was having had a draft number and now how long do I have before I'm going to be called.

**LOFGREN:** Have you formed any prior opinion to or developed any feeling about what had been taking place in Europe or Asia?

**PEACOCK:** Like I said before, I wasn't paying much attention to it. I didn't have any opinion as to what was going on although I knew the Germans were pretty bad people at the time.

**LOFGREN:** Do you recall reading newspaper accounts of German aggression in Europe?

**PEACOCK:** I can't recall at this time. If I did, it probably wasn't good.

**LOFGREN:** Did you have knowledge of Hitler's speeches, ideas or actions?

**PEACOCK:** No, I didn't. I didn't pay any attention to that I guess.

**LOFGREN:** What events led you to your entry to the military service? Were you drafted?

**PEACOCK:** Yes, I was drafted and at the time I was called up, my dad had just had a stroke and had been in an auto accident and he was bedridden and couldn't take care of his business at the lumber yard so I tried to get a deferment. They said you can have one week to get your things in order and then you're gone.

**LOFGREN:** While you are waiting you can look over some of these. There are some things that — This will be about basic training. Do you have any — When and where were you inducted?

**PEACOCK:** I was inducted at Camp Grant, Illinois. It was in January of '42 and in February

I was sent out to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, where I had my basic training.

**LOFGREN:** How old were you?

**PEACOCK:** I had just had my 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday in November.

**LOFGREN:** And you said you were sent to Missouri?

**PEACOCK:** Yes, Fort Leonard Wood.

**LOFGREN:** And that was for basic training?

**PEACOCK:** Right. We were told at that time after our basic training was finished that we were the first troops in the Army to get our 13 weeks basic training and had it done in 8 weeks. They had it all planned what we were going to do.

**LOFGREN:** What were you trained to do?

**PEACOCK:** We had all kinds of training for a lot of infantry stuff. We had to qualify with the rifle and we had a lot of bridge building and road work and that was our main goal for the first year.

**LOFGREN:** What did you think of the training?

**PEACOCK:** It was real tough at first when you had to get in the water to build these trestle bridges.

**LOFGREN:** Did anything special happen during your basic training?

**PEACOCK:** I can't recall anything special that happened. It was tough work, long hours,

**LOFGREN:** Tell us about any other training camps you attended.

**PEACOCK:** After my first year in the service, I was on the Elkan Highway when I got [carried] out and sent back to Fort Lewis, Washington where I helped organize another combat engineer unit and that was not much easier training in Washington. The territory was nicer although

there was a little a lot of rain. But like they say there in Washington, it can rain all day and you don't get wet.

**LOFGREN:** What do you recall of this period, the places where you were stationed other than what you already mentioned?

**PEACOCK:** Fort Lewis was a good place to be because if you could get a pass to go into town you could go to different places, Tacoma, Washington, or Olympia, Washington, just a short distance away. The people were very good to us there.

**LOFGREN:** Can you tell us something about the friends you made?

**PEACOCK:** The friends I made were life long friends. Some of them I still have. Some of the girls were okay too there in Washington.

**LOFGREN:** Were there any associations with civilians like being invited to dinner or something like that?

**PEACOCK:** There was one family in Spokane, Washington, no, not Spokane, Seattle, that invited another buddy and I to their house for Christmas dinner and that was a very wonderful experience,

**LOFGREN:** What was your military unit?

**PEACOCK:** The military unit was the Corps of Engineers. My first unit was called General Service Engineers where we built the Alaskan highway and then the next year it was the Combat Engineer. I didn't get to stay with them, thank goodness, because they shipped out and when they were overseas, they had to get off the boat fighting. I was cadred to another camp in Camp Boone, Texas, where they were organizing another Combat Engineering Unit.

**LOFGREN:** Where did you go after completing your basic military training? If you were not sent overseas immediately following basic training when did you finally leave the United States?

**PEACOCK:** Like I said before we went, after my first basic training we were shipped to Alaska. We got to Alaska on April, 22<sup>nd</sup> and on June 1<sup>st</sup> we left the little town of Skagway, Alaska. We took a train fifty miles to a little village called \_\_\_?\_\_ We got off the train and we had to start walking following a trail through timber and tundra to where we picked at the Tazman(?) River [possibly Teslin?]. Then we were taken to a little village down the river called \_\_\_?\_\_, That's where we had a base camp ...

**LOFGREN:** When were you sent overseas and how did you get there?

**PEACOCK:** I was sent overseas, I think that was in October of 1944. We went over in a convoy on a big re-done luxury liner. It was like 3000 troops on this ship and we left New York on our own and we rendezvoused out in the ocean somewhere and we went the rest of the way in a convoy in November. It took almost 30 days to go across the ocean.

**LOFGREN:** What were you assigned to do after arriving?

**PEACOCK:** After arriving there we were assigned houses to live in and then we had—we did a little more training keeping in shape and taking marches and stuff there in Western \_\_\_?\_\_, England.

**LOFGREN:** When did you go to the mainland?

**PEACOCK:** We left England on New Year's Eve day of 1945, went across the channel and we got off the boat. One scary thing there was going across the channel, we were out in the middle of the channel, we had to stop dead still in the water while a hospital ship was going from France to England. It was all lit up like a Christmas tree. It had a big red cross on the side and it was painted white and we had to stay very still until it got out of the way because of submarines from the Germans. Then we got underway again and we finally got to Cherbourg where we got off the boat and went up to a base camp on top of the hill in France.

**LOFGREN:** What did you think about our nation's war effort up to this point?

**PEACOCK:** Well that was a tough one to do because they were having a hard time with the Germans. Of course, with the winter being on it was all more hardships.

**LOFGREN:** If you did not immediately enter a combat zone where did you go before entering combat? I guess you answered that. You were in England. Tell us about your experience about your entering your first combat zone.

**PEACOCK:** There isn't anytime where—I was very lucky. I never saw any combat. The only time I was near a combat zone was when I was on reconnaissance trip looking for things to do for our engineers like roadwork, and bridges to be repaired and stuff. I came upon some other engineers that were fixing a railroad that the Germans had dropped on to this road to block it. I was asking—I could hear shelling going on in the distance and I asked one of the troops there how far we were from the front lines. He pointed out to a house across the field from where we were standing. He said, "You see them fellows walking around down there? They are the Germans right there." It was about a half mile away. He said, "That's the front lines." That is the closest I ever got.

**LOFGREN:** Taking these one at a time in chronological order please tell us in full detail, if possible, about the approximate number and types of casualties.

**PEACOCK:** Well I can only recall two casualties in my outfit. One was a fellow who was out in the field and he was kind of careless where he was walking and he stepped on an anti-personal mine and he lost a foot. Another casualty was we were working on a bridge over the Rhine River, the Remagen Bridge. One of the truck drivers that was hauling gravel on the approach road, he had been hauling all night. The lieutenant said he had to go back and get one more load of gravel and it made him mad and he went racing through the company area and he drove his truck into a big—we call it tank retriever unit. It had a General Sherman tank on a trailer and this

truck with its brakes set. This fellow hit that load so hard it moved it five feet. He killed himself pinned in his truck. That's the only two casualties I can recall.

**LOFGREN:** How were they treated? Were they both killed?

**PEACOCK:** The one that lost his foot, he survived okay but the one in the truck, he was dead instantly.

**LOFGREN:** The one that lost his foot, how were the hospital facilities? Do you know anything about that?

**PEACOCK:** I don't know anything about that. He was in a different company but in the same outfit—he was in a different company. I just heard about him and I don't know how he ever made out.

**LOFGREN:** Did your mental attitude change as combat continued?

**PEACOCK:** Well we all got to be more serious as we heard about these incidents and we would pay more attention about what we were doing and looking out for our own well being now.

**LOFGREN:** Did you write many letters home?

**PEACOCK:** I wrote as often as I could. Sometimes we didn't have very much time to write and I received many letters from home which was a big moral booster.

**LOFGREN:** Were you married at the time?

**PEACOCK:** No I wasn't married. I didn't have a girlfriend yet? I left her behind.

**LOFGREN:** Did you receive many letters? How often and did you receive packages?

**PEACOCK:** One interesting thing about a package I received—When I left home being 22 years old and, of course, I had been smoking for 8 or 9 years and I didn't think my folks knew about it. My first package I received overseas, there was candy bars and cigarettes. That sur-

prised me because I didn't know they knew I smoked.

**LOFGREN:** Did most of the other men write and receive letters from home?

**PEACOCK:** Yes most of them did. Most of them wrote like everyday if they could. They all received letters and packages, too. Mail was pretty good coming over there.

**LOFGREN:** Have you remained in contact with any of your World War II companions?

**PEACOCK:** I have up until now. There are so many of them passing away. Of the 3 different units I was in, we all had reunions pretty near every year and for the last 40 years we've been having reunions. They're getting so few now that no one wants to come any more. The friends are about all gone.

**LOFGREN:** During your combat duty, did you ever capture any prisoners?

**PEACOCK:** I never had any combat experience, although I did have 2 German prisoners that gave up to me one time when we were coming back to camp. Two old German couples came out on the road waving their arms, saw that we were Americans and they stopped us and they pointed to their barn over in the field there and they said, "Bosh, bosh.(?). So we started to go over to this barn. As we did these two Germans walked out with their arms over their head carrying their rifles and they gave up to us. Then we had to take them to our battalion headquarters. They questioned them for a little bit and then they decided they had to get rid of them because we had nowhere to keep them. So then they had to take them to a POW camp which was some distance away. That was another experience. We had to take them at night and we was close enough to a combat zone that we had to drive "blackout" and that was an experience. Not knowing where we were going or couldn't see where we were going. We finally got rid of them. Then we had to find our way back to our own camp.

**LOFGREN:** Prior to the end of the war were you aware that any civilian concentration camps existed? If so, please explain how you learned about and how much you knew at that time.

**Peacock:** We really didn't know about any concentration camps so I can't say anything about how they were or what they were like.

**Lofgren:** Did you help liberate any prison camps at the end of the war?

**Peacock:** No, I had no help in doing that.

**Lofgren:** What was the highlight occurrence of your combat experience?

Peacock: There again, I didn't have any combat experience so not much highlight there.

**Lofgren:** Tell us what you and the other men did to celebrate America's traditional holidays such as Thanksgiving and Christmas.

**Peacock:** I remember one Thanksgiving, we were going to have chicken for dinner on Sunday and we got this shipment of chickens and they were all frozen. They were cleaned but they weren't drawn so I helped the cooks draw these chickens for Sunday dinner.

Lofgren: When or how did you return to the U. S. after the end of the war?

**Peacock:** When the war was over I finally had enough points so I could come home and I went to one of the camps where they were assembling enough troops to load up the boat. I was put in charge of another platoon and I remember this one fellow, he would rather have stayed there than go home. He hated to get back on the boat. He got seasick just going up the gangplank to get on the boat. He was sick all the way home.

**Lofgren:** What happened when you arrived in the U.S.?

**Peacock:** We got off the boat in New York and I think it was the Red Cross or the USO. Somebody met us there and they led us right into a big cafeteria type thing and give us a steak dinner.

That was a very good meal. I remember that plainly.

**Lofgren:** Tell us about your military rank and your decorations especially any campaign decorations that you might have received.

**Peacock:** I hadn't been in no combat. I didn't get any medals for that. We did get a citation for being in the Alaska Highway. I got a ribbon for that. My military rank, I got up to be a Staff Sergeant.

**Lofgren:** How did you get along with men with whom you had the greatest contact?

**Peacock:** I got along good with my men. In fact, that was one of my downfalls. I was too good to them. The company commanders were going to break me down to a private again because I was too lenient on my men.

**Lofgren:** If there were things that you would do differently, what would they be? Be not so lenient?

**Peacock:** I'd be a little tougher on the guys and which is hard to do because they expect you to have your eyes on the guys all the time. I'd have been a little stricter.

**Lofgren:** What was the most difficult thing you had to do during your period of military service?

**Peacock:** I guess the most difficult thing in the early part of my service was being on the Alaskan Highway. That first winter, we were just trying to stay warm. When it got down to 72° below zero it was tough to stay warm. That was one of the toughest things to do.

**Lofgren:** Is there any one thing that stands out as your most successful achievement in your military service?

**Peacock:** I guess just be made a—I wasn't in the army very long and I was already a Buck Sergeant and after coming back from Alaska, I went right to a Staff Sergeant and that was my highest ranking.

**Lofgren:** How did you learn about VE Day?

**Peacock:** We heard about VE Day—We were working on a road doing repairs to a road and the Jeep came down the road and they were delivering the Stars and Stripes, our newspaper, and they said, "The war is over. The war is over." We thought they were all drunk and we didn't pay much attention to it until we got back to camp that night and we had the official news.

**Lofgren:** How did you learn about VJ Day?

**Peacock:** I can't recall where I was to hear about VJ Day.

**Lofgren:** What was your opinion of the use of the atomic bomb when it was used against the Japanese civilians in August of 1945?

**Peacock:** Well, that was a terrible think I guess but it sure put an end to the war in a hurry.

**Lofgren:** Has that opinion changed over the last 50 years?

**Peacock:** No, I'd do it again, I guess, if things got bad enough and we may have to do it the way things go now.

**Lofgren:** Do you have any opinions about our national military status or its policies?

**Peacock:** I have no great opinion about it other than we have to have it and I think they are a little lax in some of the ways—especially the Air Force, the way they're treating the women there. That's got to be corrected.

**Lofgren:** Do you have any contact with the Veterans' Administration?

**Peacock:** No I do not.

**Lofgren:** How did your family support during your military life?

**Peacock:** They were all good to me. All they could do was send me care packages and write.

**Lofgren:** I have some other questions that I would like to ask you. Do you remember Camp Grant and tell what you can about it?

**Peacock:** I remember Camp Grant even before the war. We used to go there during the summer and watch the National Guard train and especially go to Bell Bowl and watch the boxing matches. When I came back, I was discharged at Camp Grant also. When I got there I had some kind of a rash all over my body and I had to stay in the hospital a week or so before I could go home. One day they give me a pass so I knew where I was and I jumped over the fence and I went home. I had to come back though.

**Lofgren:** What did you do when you came back from the service? Did you go right to work?

**Peacock:** Yes I went right back to work with my dad and brother and sister. We still had the lumber yard and I stayed there until we got rid of it in 1948.

**Lofgren:** After that, what did you do?

**Peacock:** After that I met this nice lady one time when I was home on a furlough. She worked at Woodward Governor Company. We got pretty when I come home and she encouraged me to go take the test at Woodward Governor and luckily I got a job there and that's where I finished my industrial works.

**Lofgren:** When did you retire?

**Peacock:** I worked there 32 years and I retired December 5<sup>th</sup>, 1980.

**Lofgren:** Did you belong to any social club?

**Peacock:** At the time I only belonged to the Masonic Lodge, Masons, no social club other than that.

**Lofgren:** Did you belong to the VFW or the American Legion?

**Peacock:** I did belong to the VFW for a while and then I dropped out of that. I had been a

member of the Grange, farmer's organization and I dropped out of that later.

**Lofgren:** What is the most significant memory in your life?

**Peacock:** I have one memory that comes to mind right now. After I got out of the service I started taking flying lessons out at Machesney Airport. One time I was up solo flying and I'd been flying around over Lake Geneva and Delavan and I was coming back to the airport and the engine on the plane started sputtering and spitting. I thought Oh, Oh. I was right over a highway and I thought I'm going to have to land on the road but luckily I leaned on the throttle and the engine caught hold and by that time I was in sight of the airport. I just flew right on in and landed. Luckily, I made it okay.

**Lofgren:** Is there anything else you can think of that you would like us to know about.

**Peacock:** I can't think of anything exciting other than the most memorable experience was the first year on the Alaskan Highway. There were so many trees there, like one fellow said, "Look out there's opportunity behind every tree out there."

**Lofgren:** I suppose that was a chance for you to have a little laughter.

**Peacock:** Oh, yah.

**Lofgren:** Is there anything else?

**Peacock:** That's all I can think of now except that the lady I met at Woodward Governor is still my wife, 57 years.

**Lofgren:** There won't be many married that long in the future.

**Peacock:** I don't imagine.

**Lofgren:** Well, Glenn, it has been a pleasure interviewing you and I hope you have many, many more years with that nice young lady who is your roommate.