

September 5, 2009 (Our Daddy's birthday)

We would like to submit this information to the McGehee Veterans Memorial to be included in the gallery section of its website. It is in honor of our father, Grover E. Williams, who was a resident of McGehee, Arkansas for most of his life, where he and his wife, Mary Elizabeth Conrad Williams (lovingly known as Bessie), raised two daughters, Marion Williams Peacock and Janice Williams Tucker.

Our father was much loved by us, his sons-in-law, Jimmy Peacock and Sonny Tucker, his sisters, sisters-in-law, brothers-in-law, nieces, nephews, and cousins. He absolutely delighted in his two grandsons Sean Peacock and Keiron Peacock (who has served in both Afghanistan and Iraq as a member of the Oklahoma National Guard.). Page 1 is a photo of Daddy, taken during the time of his service. The following pages are a tribute to Daddy, written by his son-in-law, Jimmy Peacock and was given as a loving eulogy to him at his funeral service on August 5, 1989. The tribute also has a photograph of Daddy, taken by his grandson, Sean under a giant pecan tree next to their house on Thompson Street in McGehee. It not only describes our own father, but also evokes memories of the men of that era. Unfortunately, they seem to be a dying breed of men.

We will be honored if your website can post these items.

Sincerely,

Janice W. Tucker (daughter) janicetucker@hughes.net Marion Williams Peacock (daughter) jdpedit@aol.com



Grover E. Williams

Date of Induction: February 19, 1942
Date of Discharge : August 3, 1945
Branch of Service: U.S. Army Company E

Military Occupation: 19th Infantry
Cook and Combat
Infantryman
Places of
Deployment:
Hawaii,
Philippines,

New
Guinea,
Australia
Decorations & Citations:

Distinguished Unit Badge 19 Inf 45 AP
Service Ribbon & 3 Bronze
Service
Stars Philippine Liberation
Ribbon and
2 Bronze Stars Good Conduct
Medal

Grover:

The Passing of a Real Man

September 5, 1914 - August 2, 1989

“The first step to greatness is to be honest.”

—Shaker *Manifesto*, 1887, quoted on desk calendar

Within the past decade, there has been a great deal of attention focused on the issue of male-female role types. Since 1982, especially, one aspect of this crucial issue seems to be concentrated on the burning question: do “real men” eat quiche?

Being born as I was just prior to World War II in a rural Arkansas which was yet to experience the marvels of post-war prosperity and modernity (i.e., electricity, running water, indoor plumbing, telephones, etc.), at a moment I consider the “tail end” of real-life existence, I feel eminently qualified to recognize a “real-man type” when I meet one.

Back in those days, a wartime society might be forced to accept the temporary necessity of synthetics in its manufactures, but even then it would never countenance artificiality in its people.

Life was very real back then. In a part of the country just barely emerging (if at all) from a decade of life-or-death struggle for economic survival during the Great Depression, we suddenly found ourselves thrust into a perhaps even more dramatic and crucial conflict, the outcome of which could well determine our very existence, not only as a state and region, but also as a people and a nation.

Even we children were aware that this was no game we were playing. Ours was a very real world, and it was populated by very real people.

Despite the passage of time and the inroads of that most insidious of enemies to all that is truly authentic—creeping modernism—some of those real people still exist today, though their number grows dangerously smaller with each passing year. One of those real people was my father-in-law, a simple, native son-of-the-soil who could say with Abraham Lincoln: “I never knew who my grandfather was; I’m more interested in what his grandson will be.”

A “good ole country boy from Arkinsaw,” he was married one week to the day before Pearl Harbor, sought to enlist in three different branches of the service, but was turned down (flat feet), only to be promptly drafted into the army and sent to the South Pacific to see months of service against the Japanese.



When the war was over, he came back home: unsung, unheralded, undecorated, and unappreciated, to a young wife and a three-year-old daughter (later to become my wife) whom he had never seen.

After his four years or so of military duty, there followed an unbroken and uneventful thirty-five-year, seven-days-a-week, on-call-twenty-four-hours-a-day tour of duty as a brakeman for the Missouri Pacific railroad, for which he was awarded a modest pension (no gold watch, no testimonial dinner, no pat on the back).

Then, having dutifully “fulfilled his obligation” to his country, his company, his community, and his clan, he settled down to spend his retirement years attending to his garden, his VFW membership, his duties as a deacon down at the First Baptist Church of McGehee, his neighbor’s welfare, his aching joints, and (perhaps most important) his own business.

Now, in my estimation, this is a real man: the nameless, fameless, dog-faced GI of “Dub-ya, Dub-ya Two”; the hard-workin’, law-abidin’, tax-payin’, church-goin’, guitar-pickin’ family man whose intentions are honorable, whose gaze is level, whose mind and conscience are clear, whose hand is steady, whose debts are paid, and whose word is bond.

Surely there are some of us left who are old enough to remember (hearing stories, at least) of the old-fashioned, feet-on-the-ground, look-you-dead-in-the-eye-and-tell-you-the-honest-to-God-truth, “No-credit-thanks,-I-pay-cash-for-what-I-buy,” “I-won’t-promise-unless-I-can-deliver,” “Here,-let-me-help” type. Well, if so, I’m happy to say that there are a few of that rare breed still around! My father-in-law was one of them.

This quiet man was the personification of a simpler, nobler, bygone era symbolized by the humble, self-effacing, Gary-Cooper-toe-twisting-in-the-dirt, “Shucks,-ma’m,-it-tweren’t nuthin’,” “I-just-seen-my-duty-and-I-done-it” hero types we all admired and respected and emulated “back in them days.”

Quiche? It’s likely he never heard of it. Even if he did, it was not a part of his vocabulary any more than Gucci or Pucchi or “fen-TIS-tic!” Neither “quiche,” nor “gauche,” not “God, you guys!” ever issued from his lips. His diet tended much more to cornbread, collard greens, and apple cobbler; his haberdashery to J. C. Penney; and his use of the name of the Almighty to reverence, praise, and thanksgiving.

He knew nothing of “clout,” or “charisma,” and he was certainly not “with it.” But he most assuredly did “have it.” And what he had comprised the three essentials of a *real* man—grit, gumption, and godliness.

That bit of alliteration seems somehow poetically fitting, since his name was Grover. Grover Williams. A man as solid, and dependable, and unpretentious, and old-fashioned as his name, and his namesake, Grover Cleveland.

Quiche and quiche-eaters? These “ye have with ye always,” I suppose. But there ain’t many Grovers left. It is they, not the whooping crane and the alligator, who have become the real endangered species.

Thank God for the Grovers of this nation—who now, since August 2, 1989, are one less. In the perilous times in which we live, they are as vital as they are scarce.

Jimmy Peacock

August 1989