

## *A SOLDIER REMEMBERED*



Former Gainesville resident and Camp Howze worker, Bette Speake Anderson, recently visited the Morton Museum remembering not only her days at the World War II camp but also a brother who was killed on D-Day in 1945.

## **Gainesville Daily Register**

*May 26, 2014*

### **Former resident remembers brother lost in World War II**

*By Cathy Mounce, Register Staff Writer*

Gainesville — With the 70th anniversary of D-Day on June 6, former Gainesville resident Bette Speake Anderson recalls the day that not only changed the course of the world but also changed the life of her family forever with the death of her beloved brother, Roy Speake, on the sands of Normandy.

On June 6, 1944, 160,000 Allied troops including American, British and Canadian forces landed along a 50 mile stretch of heavily fortified French coastline to fight Nazi Germany on the beaches of Normandy, France which eventually led to the surrender of Nazi Germany 11 months later.

Her green eyes glistening slightly, Anderson said that her big brother Roy, a Gainesville High School graduate and Cooke County native, perished on that day with many others as the event signified the beginning of the liberation of France and other European countries overtaken by Hitler's Axis powers.

“He was only 25 years old but everyone loved Roy,” Anderson said. “He was one of my four brothers who served in various branches of the service but, he was the one who didn’t come back. Even though there were 11 children in our family, his death left a void never filled.”

Anderson was born at Spring Creek in Cooke County June 21, 1925, in the same house where her mother and several of her siblings were also born.

The farm had been in the family for generations since her grandparents had homesteaded the land parcel in 1878.

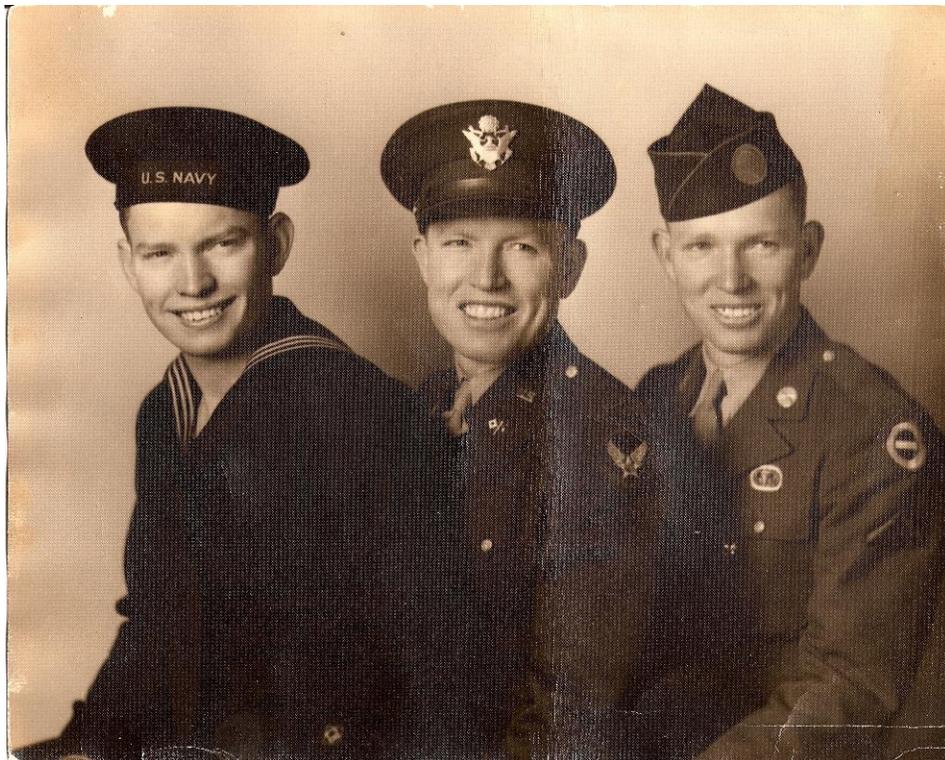
“When my grandparents retired in 1924, they moved to the Rio Grande Valley then back to Gainesville. My father and mother moved us to the farm because with 11 kids, we needed the space,” Anderson said.

“When my father died at the age of 51, my brother Roy took care of the farm along with my mother, myself and two remaining small sisters still at home,” she said.

“Interested in everything, Roy was a pilot, learning to fly at the Gainesville Jr. College,” Anderson said. “Prior to the war he also organized softball teams and if I did all my chores, he would take me with him to ball games in Myra, Era, Slidell and other towns in the area.”

“He was song leader at the church, and a member of the Board of Trustees at the Spring Creek Church at the age of 18. He mowed the cemetery at the church and he loved photography.”

When World War II started, the head of the draft board in Cooke County came and told Roy that since he was now head of the household, he would not be drafted.



L/R: Robert W. Speake, Sterling S. Speake and Roy H. Speake Jr. A fourth brother, not pictured was Claude E. Speake who joined the Merchant Marines in 1944 and then was drafted during the Korean War.

“I think Roy felt so guilty about not serving, he enlisted anyway,” Anderson said. “All of his friends were drafted

and teased him about being home dating all the pretty Gainesville girls. He always had a date so he must have been pretty popular. I think he enlisted because he thought it was the right thing to do.”

Anderson said that when Roy Speake enlisted, she moved to Gainesville with her mother and two sisters, not wanting to stay alone at the country home.

When the news came that Roy had died, Anderson rode her bicycle to pick up the dreaded telegram addressed to her mother.

“Telegrams were not delivered to us back then,” Anderson said. “They usually did not bear good news so we were apprehensive.”

“We actually received two telegrams, one that said that Roy was missing and one that said that he had been killed in action,” Anderson recalled.

Opening a folder, she pulled out the yellowed telegrams still intact despite the passage of time. She says she does not quite know what to do with them but they are part of a life lost and if for that reason alone, they are important.

Miscellaneous pictures and memorabilia accompany the telegrams and the items are kept together, evidence of a life cut much too short.

“When he heard about Roy’s death, a preacher wrote to us that it was such sad news that someone with such sterling qualities was killed,” Anderson said. “He said that ‘this war was such a terrible loss not only of property, architecture and art but a waste of the finest and noblest manhood of the world.’”

A purple heart sent to the family posthumously was some comfort to the Speake family but certainly did not ease the pain of their loss.

In 1948, the family requested that Roy’s body be removed from the American Cemetery in France and brought back to Texas.

“The government charged us \$75 to do this,” Anderson said. “My mother wanted him home. He is now buried at the Spring Creek Cemetery not far from where he was born.”



Photo by Norman L. Newton, 5/26/2014

All four of Anderson's brothers served the military in World War II. Her other three brothers Claude Speake, Sterling Speake and Robert Speake came home safely.

Anderson aided in the war effort herself during World War II when she began working at the Camp Howze dry cleaners at the age of 16 during the summer months of 1942. College in Denton was followed by two more years at Camp Howze beginning in 1944 and lasted until the Camp closed in 1946. Anderson said that one of her duties was sewing new stripes on uniforms.

"I never was able to catch up on my sewing as there were so many soldiers coming through Camp Howze," she said.

During the camp's heyday, German prisoners of war were also housed at the camp and performed supervised jobs around the county.

One such prisoner, lonely for his family, made a ring for young Anderson out of a mercury dime.

"I told my boss about it as we were not suppose to talk to the prisoners," she said. "He told me that these boys were homesick and that they were just lonely. He told me it was all right to keep it so I have kept it all these years as a reminder of my days at Camp Howze."

After the war ended in 1945, Anderson was asked to go to Washington D.C. for a temporary assignment as Camp Howze records were transferred to the capitol city for storage.

Upon her return from Washington D.C., Anderson went to work at the Denton County National Bank where she was employed for 35 years. She married in 1951 and settled into life with husband Arnold Anderson raising a family including a daughter, Sheila, and a son, Brian.

Anderson knows that this year, all eyes of the world will again be on the beaches of Normandy commemorating the 70th anniversary of D-Day.

Many lives were lost on those beaches of France but for Anderson, they are more than sea tossed sand where liberation forces once waded to shore so many years ago. For on this small strip of land, once teeming with the efforts of military might, a brother was lost forever.

### End of Story

Additional information is;

Sergeant Roy H. Speake, 18125290, was assigned to Company C, 1/506 Parachute Infantry Regiment, 101<sup>st</sup> Division. He was killed about 1:20AM on June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1944 during the Normandy invasion when his C-47 aircraft #42-100819 was hit by enemy fire and crashed just Northeast of Picauville as part of Operation Albany.

Situated right next to the Picauville church is a stone wall with eight black plaques with gold lettering commemorating the air crews of the C-47's that crashed in the area while dropping paratroopers on D-Day.

Plaque 7: [English translation:] The C-47 N 42-100819 met a tragic end on the night of 5 to 6 June 1944. After its takeoff from Upottery airbase in the UK, it was hit by German AA fire and crashed in flames in "the high house" area. All sixteen paratroopers and four crewmen died in the crash. This Pratt & Whitney motor 1830 N P-133538 was discovered in 1986 at the crash site by the Dennebouy family.

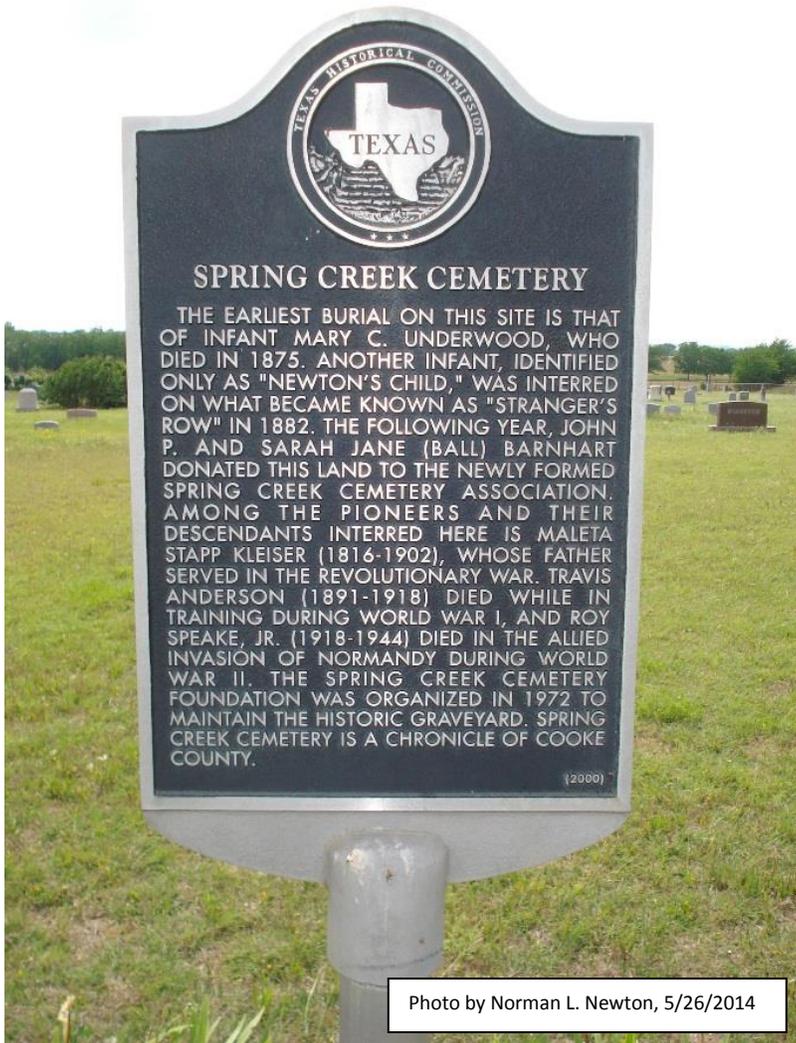


Photo by Norman L. Newton, 5/26/2014

Note: The title and two pictures were added by me. The story by Cathy Mounce of the Gainesville Daily Register is used with permission. Special thanks to niece, Jenny Sparkman Woods for allowing me the use of the picture of the three brothers in uniform.  
(Norman L. Newton)