

# POW column draws response

At the end of last month's column about a German prisoner of war from Camp Sutton killed near Van Wyck during World War II, I asked any readers who had additional information on the German POWs in Indian Land to contact me.

No one in Indian Land contacted me, but some old-timers from Van Wyck did. Apparently, the incident occurred at a farm owned by a Mr. Sachemaer and there is some question over whether the man was really fleeing when he was shot.

Keith Starnes was the first to call and he gave me contact information for the others. So this came primarily from Starnes, Carl Vaughan, David Alexander and Betty Broome.

Vaughan was one of four sons of Robert Vaughan, who drove a truck outfitted with benches and covered on top that picked up prisoners from Camp Sutton in Union County, N.C., close to Monroe. Robert brought them to a large farm on Riverside Road, south of Van Wyck, and returned them to camp.

Carl Vaughan had pleasant memories of the POWs tossing small bags of candy, chewing gum and notes from the truck to the children. On the last day, Robert Vaughan took the pris-

## PANHANDLE PAST



Indian Land native Louise Pettus is an area historian.

isoners informed the guards. The guards were patrolling the road in a Jeep when they spotted Werner Friedrich Meier, a former sergeant in the German Luftwaffe. He was on the road walking toward, not away from, the work area. The guards fired twice and Meier was killed.

David said Glenn always believed the POW was trying to return to the camp.

"We were told the prisoner tried to escape, but that didn't make sense because he knew no one and had no place to go," said Betty Broome, who was 10 at the time. She was aware of the shooting at the time and said she had thought about it many times over the years.

She knew exactly where it happened, too: "in the Springdell community, sometimes called Gibson Quarters, on Riverside Road about 3 or 4 miles west of Highway 5 (which wasn't there then) on land owned by a Mr. Sachemaer of Charlotte."

hoped that consideration given to German prisoners of war in America would be repaid in kind to the American prisoners held in German hands. Both countries were signatories of the Geneva Convention of 1929, the purpose of which was to protect the lives, well-being and dignity of captured combatants. Not only did the American government house, feed and clothe POWs in accordance with the Geneva Convention, but it recognized the duty of military men of all nations to attempt flight from confinement." What a contrast with Guantanamo today.

When I apologized to Starnes for my error in thinking that Indian Land was the only spot in the county during World War II where German POWs cut trees and stacked lumber, he said, "Oh, don't

apologize; back then, we folks in Van Wyck didn't know what was happening in Indian Land, either."

He's right. We didn't. In all of Indian Land in 1944, there were only two paved roads—U.S. 521 and S.C. 160. On the Van Wyck side, there was no Highway 5 until 1959. Riverside Road, where the shooting took place, was unpaved. And I believe it is accurate to say that in 1944 more picked cotton arrived at the Pettus Cotton Gin in mule-drawn wagons than came in trucks.

In 1944, people living in Indian Land and Van Wyck only had two places they could cross the Catawba to go to Rock Hill—the Spratt Bridge between Fort Mill and Rock Hill or, if the river was calm, they could take the somewhat hazardous Ashe Brick Co. ferry at Van Wyck.

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