

Meet Treemont resident Robert E. Ford

In the Great Depression, a boy behind a plow looked skyward in the hope of seeing one of those airplanes that occasionally flew over. Someday, he knew, he would fly one.

Even in those dark days, Bob Ford's family was one of those blessed with a roof over their heads and plenty to eat, thanks to the fertile land they rented and lived on near Little River, Texas, and the river that shared its name.

Life was not easy, yet Ford has good memories of caring parents and a warm, secure home for his older sister, himself and his two younger brothers.

The boys had constant chores — care of the animals, clearing, plowing, planting and harvesting the fields — each in their season. The women kept the home, did the laundry, cooked three substantial meals a day, and cared for the chickens and small animals.

Ford's sister helped with all that and went to school in the four-room school titled Little River Academy. His schooling was sketchy because all three boys were needed for the farm, but he managed to get a high school diploma from



COURTESY OF TREEMONT

SKY BOUND: Bob Ford served in World War II in the Panama Canal Zone, escorting convoys and patrolling for enemy subs.

Little River Academy at age 16 and set out to earn enough money to go to college. About this time his dad bought his first piece of mechanized equipment, and Ford was able to save some of his meager earnings for his college fund.

When a growth spurt put him well north of 6 feet in height, and he was offered a basketball scholarship to San Marcos State Teachers College (now Texas State University), he gladly took it.

His first year there, however, a ruptured appendix ended his sports career,

and he joined the work crew at the college, serving as everything from ditch digger to lab assistant.

His senior year Ford took flying lessons from a former Army pilot and flew a Piper Cub, then advanced to a L927 TravelAire, a popular stunt biplane.

Graduating in 1941, he went directly into the Navy and applied for cadet training. With his college degree and a pilot's license he had to pass a stressful elimination phase, go through cadet training and he was commissioned as an officer.

Now flying five days a week, Ford was a happy man. His squadron was formed and sent to the Panama Canal Zone to escort convoys and patrol for enemy subs. He flew first the OS2U single-engine sea plane and then the SBD dive bomber.

After two years in the Canal Zone, Honduras and Colombia he was sent to Boca Chica Naval Base on Key West for multi-engine flight training. Now equipped to fly anything with wings, he expected to join the action in the Pacific but was told he had served his offshore duty and would be assigned

stateside. He rejoined his squadron in North Carolina and spent the rest of the war flying sub patrol over the North Atlantic.

When WWII ended, Ford was a Lt. Commander and was assigned to the Navy's Ferry Command out of San Pedro, Calif.

The rest of his Navy career was spent moving planes worldwide to where the government wanted them for storage or final disposition. In doing so he logged thousands of flight hours in every kind of plane in every state of repair of disrepair.

In 1947 he married a girl he had met in college, and he stayed in the reserves so he could retain access to Navy planes and fly as often as possible. He took a position with a major oil company as a quality control specialist developing

new test methods for their products.

He and his wife had a son and a daughter, Wade and Sharon.

The marriage came to an amicable end in 1970, and a few years later at a party in Houston, he spotted a familiar face.

His approach was direct: "Didn't you graduate from Little River Academy?" She was Elleen, a Houston bank officer who started life in Little River.

Elleen's daughter Linda was close to the ages of Ford's grown children and became like one of his own. Even now each year he spends Christmas with her family, and they blend seamlessly with Sharon and Wade's families.

Bob and Elleen were married in 1974.

Both had given serious thought to what they want-

ed do with the rest of their lives and agreed what they wanted most was to own a pretty piece of acreage on a river, build a nice home on it, and become hobby farmers and frequent hosts to their city-bound children and grandchildren.

The search had begun before they were married, and they finally found it — 40 acres of beautiful riverfront land in Bell County near Belton, not far from their roots. They planted fruit trees. They created a large garden and gave away its bounty to neighbors and the local senior center.

When health considerations led them to a retirement village near Temple, they built a smaller home, sold the farm and settled in; after Elleen's death in 2007, Ford's daughter Sharon in Houston asked him to move back here.

He moved into Treemont August 2010.

Lois McCall, Treemont Tattler