

Pioneer Flying Farmer Taught Himself

ONE of Oklahoma's aviation pioneers died last Sunday. He was just an old country boy, a wheat farmer, who wanted to fly and did.

Henry G. "Heinie" Bomhoff of Calumet, about 50 miles west of Oklahoma City, didn't have money to buy an airplane back in the dry, dusty 1930s. So he built one and taught himself to fly it.

It would have taken too many bushels of 75 cents wheat to pay for a ready-made plane, so Heinie ordered parts from mechanics magazines. Whenever he got a chance he visited airports in the Oklahoma City area to see how to put them together.

This humble farmer didn't set out to make a reputation as an aerial coyote hunter, but he did. He claimed bounty for ears of more than 3,000 of these predatory animals before he quit hunting them from a low-flying plane with help of a companion hunter.

One time Bomhoff flew his first load of wheat to market, landing downtown on Calumet's Main street.

Eighty-three year old Bomhoff was still living in the same farm

home and still wearing overalls a few months ago when this writer and Bronita Davis Evans of Mangum sat in on an interview he gave an Enid historian who is writing a book about Oklahoma Flying Farmers.

Bomhoff was first president of this organization, formed after WWII when people were looking for ways to use thousands of ex-service planes and ex-service pilots. Mrs. Evans was first secretary of the OFF, the wife of a rancher and a leader in the wartime Civil Air Patrol. They had a great time reminiscing.

You might have difficulty imagining a plain wheat farmer and his wife helping to start an international social organization such as the International Flying Farmers. The Bomhoffs carried their part well.

What brought the Flying Farmers together was that they owned airplanes, found them useful and enjoyed using them. The first state organization was formed at Stillwater when Oklahoma A&M College President Henry G. Bennett invited him there for a "fly-in."

Today there are Flying Farmer organizations in most states and they get together somewhere almost every month for a variety of activities.

Heinie Bomhoff never seemed to tire of telling in his German brogue how he built his first plane and took off unexpectedly on his maiden flight. He was taxiing it across his wheat field when the tail raised up and he was flying before he realized it. He hopped over the fence, landed and then made a wide circle to get back home.

"Just about that time here come the old woman around the henhouse," Heinie recalled. "She said, 'Well, I see you didn't kill yourself.' I told her, 'No, I didn't; she flew pretty good!'" As the children came home from school he gave each of them a short spin.

Heinie was a good flier and a safe flier. During WWII he became a certified instructor without ever having had a regular flying lesson. He loved to fly and enjoyed talking about it.

Somewhere, Heinie probably still is flying and talking.