

# Pilots Profiled: Floyd Katz & Bill Stilley

by Russell Knetzger

There the two grandfathers are, doing what makes them distinctive in the club – Floyd Katz instructing, and Bill Stilley facilitating. The photo was taken at the Fly-In of about 2000 or 2001 by member Dave Simonson, at the request of Russell Knetzger. It was to be used in the club brochure, which got laid-out using the photo, but never printed due to then President Doug Imes having to take a job in the Carolinas. Doug alone had the printer contact.

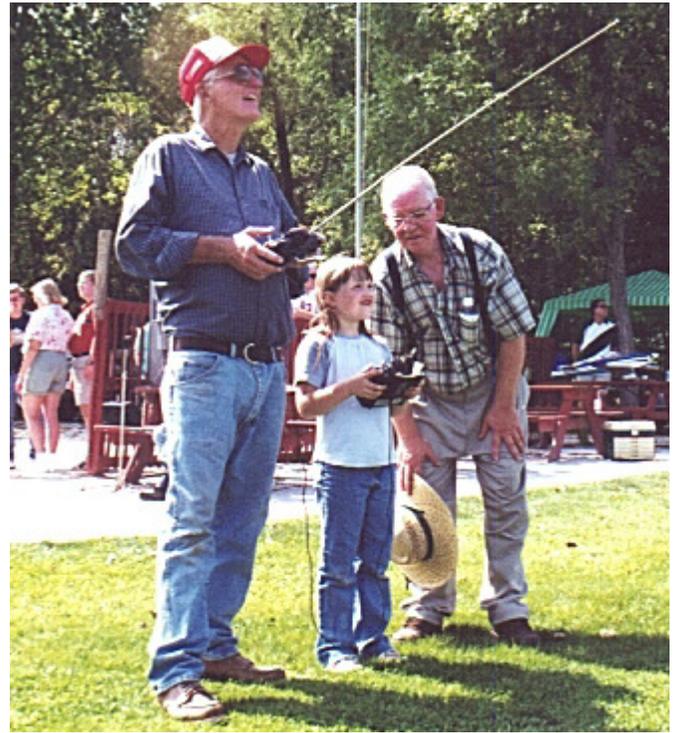
Perhaps Floyd and Bill have teamed each year to give test flights to children (and some adults) because of similarities in the lives they have led. Both served in the US Air Force (1950s), both ended up in development engineering careers of highly technical products, both did that at one place of employment (GE for Floyd, Astronautics for Bill), and both did it with less than 4 year college degrees.

Floyd, now 77, went to what became GE Medical right from the two year certificate in electronics he earned at MSOE (Milwaukee School of Engineering). He stayed to retirement. He was privileged to help create the CAT scanner which uses X-rays to see body bone and dyed tissues, and then was on the initial work for the MRI, which uses intense magnetism to see soft tissues. Bill, now 67, is still working full time at Astronautics developing instrumentation for military aircraft and lately commercial airliners. With 39 years in, he hopes achieve 40. His training was in Aero Shop at Milwaukee's "Boys Tech.," plus what he has picked up in decades of home-building full scale aircraft, and restoring commercially made single engine planes.

Both were into modeling before they were ten years old, and both took advantage of the model shops found at most larger US Air Bases. Both were in "R-C" before it was reliable.

And while we are doing the "both thing" each has served as a club officer: Floyd as secretary for several years, and Bill as president the 4 years 1995-1999, and editor since March, 2004.

Floyd, however, had a rural upbringing, while Bill has been a big-city boy all his life. Northern Iowa, is where Floyd grew up in a small town, and where he did some farm work. Bill grew up near 15th and Highland in Milwaukee and would have attended West Division High School at 22<sup>nd</sup> & Highland with Russell Knetzger, 69, had Bill not chosen "Tech."



**Floyd Katz and Bill Stilley, 2000 Fly-In**

The farm work probably explains why Floyd has rarely said "no" to a work party at the County field in the 26 years since the field opened in 1979. Even this past season, and nearing 77, he pitched in with full energy at the half dozen or more work details. He was quite active along with another youth-farm worker become development engineer, Carl Springer, recently deceased, in the 1987 building of the SE runway.

Between Floyd and Bill, Floyd is probably the more inborn engineer. Who else at our field records every flight he makes, and has done so for years? Floyd says 400 is a typical flight total for a season, 500 is also common, and he hit 700 one season. Even though Art Schmidt, our first profiled pilot, flies a lot, Floyd is probably the #1 pilot. The other inborn trait of engineers, calmness under fire, might explain why students admire Floyd as an instructor, and why Floyd teaches so much.

While Floyd Katz in the Air Force was a mechanic on the large Rv-36 pusher operated out of Rapid City, South Dakota by the Strategic Air Command, he has not been attracted to private full-scale aviation following his discharge. In contrast, Bill Stilley, whose Air Force draftsman career was not hands-on with aircraft (Fort Belvoir, Virginia), is an active pilot, has built or restored a dozen aircraft, and has worked in aircraft instrumentation. Thus Bill has had periods of low modeling activity, but Floyd has not.

One thing that brought Bill back into modeling in 1994 was the hanging of his aircraft at adjacent

Rainbow Airport before the County closed it. He remembers well the RAMS Club coming to Rainbow each year to display models for the Annual Pancake Fly-ins typical of small airports. Bill's plane was the last removed from Rainbow in March, 1997 under the October, 1996 County shut-down order.

One thing in common Floyd and Bill share that they might wish they did not is cancer. Bill developed tonsil cancer which resulted in removal of lymph nodes in his neck. That was ten years ago so Bill feels he beat the Big C. However, the radiation treatments left his neck skin sensitive to sunburn, which accounts for the familiar large hat seen in the photo. Floyd's bout with cancer is only two years ago but looks equally remitted. It was in a tumor that had not spread from one of his kidneys, so removal of the kidney was his only treatment, no radiation nor chemotherapy.

Bill Stilley's four daughters have pursued marriage and careers unrelated to aviation or engineering, whereas Floyd's three children are eerily following his footsteps. His daughter is the X-ray tech at an Indiana hospital, his one son works for the FAA in Chicago, and his other son is a civil engineer for Racine County.

For those RAMS Club members who were not at the club the night of Bill Stilley's Show & Tell with one of the aircraft instruments on which he was the lead designer, the work of his company is on display in the museum at Gen. Mitchell International Airport in Milwaukee. The museum is called the *Mitchell Gallery of Flight* and is at the north end of the shops & food main concourse.

**RAMS Horn**, January, 2006, Bill Stilley, Editor  
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