

Pilot Profile: Frank Burton

by Russell Knetzger

How did a Kansas boy like Francis Burton, born 76 years ago (1932) in a very small rural town called Caney, end up here in Milwaukee? It was via military service in the US Air Force. After working as a hired hand on area farms around Caney until 1952, Frank signed up with USAF, and they sent him for training and service on bases around the country. Schooling in “ground power” maintenance was in Cheyenne, Wyoming. Service was in Tennessee, and in California northeast of San Francisco. Aircraft serviced included F-86 Sabre Jets, and C-47 cargo carriers and RB 45 reconnaissance bombers.

Before shipment overseas to England, Frank was sent to Milwaukee in 1954 for specialized training at **Nordberg Manufacturing Co.** on Oklahoma & Chase Avenues. Nordberg was known for building giant engines and equipment. While here, Frank met and married Bonnie Kukla, who joined him in England.

Upon discharge in 1957, the Burtons settled back here on Milwaukee’s south side, now living in Bay View on Wentworth Ave. between DeMarini’s pizza place, and Groppi’s specialty grocery store. Frank found work in heavy industry at **Allis-Chalmers** in West Allis, **Caterpillar** near Nordberg, and finally **Bucyrus Erie** in So. Milwaukee, maker of giant mining shovels. Frank stayed 25 years to his 1995 retirement as a **welder/fitter** of 1/2” to 9” thick steel.



Above: Frank Burton with his .40 sized trainer on loan from his wife’s nephew, RAMS member Dennis Kukla. Frank hopes to start flight instruction this spring.

Bonnie’s nephew, Dennis Kukla, a RAMS member, has been instrumental in encouraging Frank into two hobbies, wine making, (lower left) and now model aircraft (above). Frank obtains concord grapes from his immediate Bay View neighbors. He crushes the grapes, stores the juice in clean plastic barrels, adds yeast for fermentation, constantly monitoring the percent of remaining sugars. At the right time, fermentation is ended, and the juice become wine is bottled. Frank is known for donating bottles of wine to the club meeting raffle.

After his Air Force Service, Frank joined the **Wisconsin Army National Guard** for 21 years, bringing his total military service well beyond the 20 years to qualify for a military pension.

Together the Burtons have reared four children, three born to them, Debra, Timothy, and Steven, and Kimberly by adoption. Among them the children have provided the Burtons with ten grandchildren and one great grandchild.

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Above: Frank Burton in his cellar wine-making space looking at a finished bottle of Concord grape wine, standing near his yeast, & bottle cleaning chemicals.

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