

Pilot Profile: Don Strahl

by Russell Knetzger

Don Strahl, in his 71 years, has managed to be active in his chosen profession, (pharmacist), in his love of flying, (both as a U.S. Air Force fighter pilot and now in radio control model aviation), and not least, in his family, consisting of wife Leah, their four children, and seven grand children. The children are Kevin, an electrical engineer, Brian a businessman, Darren also now in electrical engineering, and daughter Karla, a graduate music and theatre major, who has worked for 10 years in New York City. All have children; 4 boys and 3 girls.

Raised in Fairbault, (SE Minnesota), Don graduated in 1962 in Pharmacy from South Dakota State University in Brookings, SD. A military draft was on, so Don enlisted in the Air Force in hopes of becoming a pilot. He was successful, receiving two years of training (1963 and 1964) to become a pilot of the Convair F-102A "Delta Dagger." The 102 was an all-weather interceptor to defend North American cities from Soviet bombers carrying nuclear weapons. Don flew 102s for 8 years, totaling 1500 flight hours.



**U.S. AIR
FORCE
1963-1973**



Above: F-106 variant of F-102 (in an afterburner-on takeoff)



Above: Don Strahl at the Milwaukee County R/C Flying Field on Oakwood Road in Franklin, WI showing his electric powered all-foam Corsair. Don's instructors were Mark Mayrose and Phil Schumacher.

Flying an interceptor means having a squadron on 15 minutes notice, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. That meant having the hangers on the end of a runway, in a fire-house style operation, with on-call pilots eating and sleeping in the hangars. The 102-As were capable of climbing on full afterburner to 40,000 feet of altitude in one minute. Pilots also trained flying "on the deck" at 150 feet of altitude, and doing "snap-ups" to 65,000 feet from a starting altitude of 45,000 feet. The most common injury to pilots was compression of their spines from the "high G-forces" of maneuvers. Don was a victim, and required surgery to be back in flight-ready condition. He was with the Air Defense Command at Sioux Falls, S.D. As their children scattered across the country, Leah & Don found New Berlin, WI to be more central to their family. Don manages an Aurora Pharmacy at S. 69th & W. Edgerton Avenue.

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