

Pilot Profiles: Milan Zdrubecky and Jim Hatzenbeller

by Russell Knetzger

These two club pilots are written about together because they are bound by marrying sisters, and by model airplanes, with Milan being Jim's R/C instructor. That came about because they both worked at Erie Mfg. Co. on S. 13th & Howard where Milan's wife Anna also worked. It was through Anna that Jim, by 1995 a widower with three grown daughters, met her sister Zdenka, and after a 4 month courtship they married. They live in St. Francis.

But both Jim and Milan traveled long paths before meeting up at Erie Mfg. Co.

Jim, now 60, was raised until age 11 in Aberdeen, South Dakota, and came to South Milwaukee when his father, on family vacation there in 1957, noticed the good economy. He applied for and got a job, and in weeks relocated the family. At age 20 in 1966, after graduating from South Milwaukee High, Jim enlisted in the US Army rather than wait for the draft. He got what he wanted, Army mechanics training with the 82nd Airborne, repairing big equipment on tracks (tanks, etc.).

But in 1968 the Army switched Jim to the 101st Infantry, and sent him to Vietnam. So much for "enlisting for what you want." He survived 'Nam, and was sent in 1969 to Korea, perfect for a South Dakota boy – hot summers and bitter cold winters. There in the base craft shop he re-kindled his boyhood interest in aeromodeling. There he also met and married his first wife, a native Korean, and back in South Milwaukee they raised their three girls to adulthood until her sudden death (aneurysm).



Jim Hatzenbeller with his 1979 Cessna 152, and his Cessna 182 ARF, at Jim's Timmerman Field Hanger.

Milan, also 60, started life in Znojmo, Czechoslovakia. After 1948 it came under Communist rule. Znojmo was not too far from Vienna, Austria, but was never visited because the border could not be crossed. Communism was bad in general, but good for boys interested in aeromodels. The State subsidized model airplane clubs & supplies. Still, in 1969 at 23, Milan yearned to follow his dream of escape to the US. He and his wife Anna motor biked to Communist Yugoslavia, and then **walked** through the Alps to Austria! There they then applied for

Below, Milan Zdrubecky with his own design twin boom, twin OS.35 engines. Photo at the Racine flying field.



political asylum. Milan had his apprenticeship in tool & die making, so when he asked for US relocation, it was granted because a friend who previously fled had found a job for Milan in Milwaukee. The Zdrubeckys reached US soil on "9-11," 1969.

Already in 1969 Milan bought his first proportional radio control, an MRC system from Hobby Horse at Capitol Court. Milan crashed it in his Goldberg Sr. Falcon, trying in Grant Park to learn flying by himself. He switched to a power pod Graupner glider and mastered more basics. Then at the informal "F&I" field near Waukesha, a retired pilot probably Harry Hopper, helped Milan solo his Falcon.

Just as Jim suffered a major loss with his wife's death, in 1978 Milan experienced declining kidney function, to the point that only dialysis was keeping him alive. It took pleading and patience to get the Communist government back in Czechoslovakia to release Milan's only sibling, (brother Bohuslav-but none of his family), to come to the US to donate a kidney. The operation was successful. Milan now enjoys a vigorous life with Anna, their two sons, and 3 grandchildren. Fresh from that transplant, in 1979 Milan was an early pilot at the County Oakwood Rd. RC field, and in 1980 a charter member of the RAMS Club.

By 1993 Jim Hatzenbeller wanted to return to aeromodeling, so Milan guided Jim to a Goldberg Eagle II trainer, and taught Jim to fly. In 1994 Jim also got the "full scale" bug, taking lessons at Timmerman Field. Since 1999 he's been building a high wing GlasStar kit in his garage, and has joined EAA #18. The Cessna 152 came Dec., 2004.

With the demise of Erie Mfg. in Oct., 2000, Jim moved on to his current job in engineering-CAD drafting at Quick Cable in Franksville near Racine. They make custom battery connectors, such as for trucks. Milan ended up in the model making dept of Johnson's Wax, in Racine. Both travel most years to the Czech Republic to visit family. Jim was RAMS editor 7 years, March, 1997 to February, 2004.

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