

Pilot Profile: Steve Ward

by Russell Knetzger

The story of this pilot, Steve Ward, age 46, cannot be told without relating the story of his father, Floyd Ward, age 81, who accompanies Steve to all meetings, but through the ravages of Alzheimer's disease, does not react to what is taking place. Still, aviation was such a large part of Floyd Ward's adult life, as it has become of Steve's entire life, if even the presence of model airplanes and talk of aviation fills the evening, Floyd may find some comfort.

Floyd Ward concluded his working life as a butcher at the Patrick Cudahy, Inc. meat packing plant in Cudahy, WI. His upbringing on a farm at Mondovi, WI near the Minnesota Twin Cities, may account for his adaptation to the hard and disagreeable work of meat packing. But neither the farming nor the butchering can explain Floyd's lifelong love of aviation. He owned and piloted such 1930s planes as the Porterfield, the Fairchild 24, the Rearwin Cloudster, and after his retirement in 1984, the classic Cessna 150. Some of these planes were hangered at Hales Corners, and at the old Rainbow Airport adjacent to our field. During the latter part of WW II in the Pacific with the US Marine Corps, Floyd serviced C-47 transports, and took many a right seat ride in them, in and out of Bougainville in the New Guinea Solomon Islands.

It is no surprise then, that Floyd would support his wife & 3 sons in aviation pursuits, and allow Steve at age 15 to take flying lessons. The surprise is that Steve would start out at the West Bend Airport on a **glider**. Perhaps the quality of the instructor was a factor: former Luftwaffe glider pilot, Gunter Voltz. The Schweitzer glider models TG2 and TG3 were used. Floyd's brother Keith, who has been an Alaskan bush pilot, was another factor. Living back near Mondovi, WI, Keith helped Steve solo on the Cessna 150 when Steve was age 28. Floyd's wife, Margaret, also soloed. Presently Steve's brother Douglas is a US Army RPV pilot. Brother Jeffrey does not fly, but is aviation knowledgeable.



Above: Steve, his father Floyd and their Cessna 150



Above: Steve & father Floyd with new ARF Sukhoi 37" span, for .15 sized engine, converted to electric.

Steve has traveled to many states with his father and family to visit aviation events, even slope soaring parts of the Appalachian Mountains, or attending antique plane shows in Ottumwa, Iowa, or flying over the Grand Canyon.

Steve's interest in modeling began by watching his father build plastic model airplane kits in the 1960s. That inspired Steve to do rubber powered stick and tissue covered models. Steve participated in free flight activities with Milwaukee's Bong Eagles, who use our very same meeting room on another night.

The transition to engine powered radio control was delayed until Steve became age 30 in 1990. A terrible auto crash at age 19 left Steve facing a life in a wheel chair. Only great work by a Boston trained spine surgeon averted wheel chair confinement, but left Steve crippled in his walk. Steve's cousin "up north" showed Steve the basics of R/C and Steve largely taught himself to fly at the Wis. DNR Bong field in Kenosha County, soloing July 22, 2003.

That detail of memory may explain why Steve is one of the more knowledgeable aviation historians in our club. That, and access to the large aviation library his father Floyd has always maintained, plus Steve's membership in the Midwest Antique Airplane Club, & the Brodhead Pietenpol Association. He also is in the EAA Chapter that meets at Capitol Drive Airport in Brookfield.

As our Milwaukee County field in Franklin converted to using picnic table tops to start engines, that removal of the need to kneel attracted Steve to come to the field, joining the RAMS last year.

RAMS Horn, March, 2007, Bill Stilley, Editor
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