



**The late Sam Rentsch by his beloved blue Phaeton**

## **DR. SAM RENTSCH – VETERAN, INVENTOR & MODEL A ENTHUSIAST**

Club member Sam Rentsch passed away on February 24, 2016, at the age of 87. Born in Derby, Connecticut, in 1928, Sam was a long-time Model A Ford owner and enthusiast. Although his vision was compromised in recent years, he absolutely loved participating in the National Cherry Blossom Festival parades. Driven in 2014 by Jason Cunningham, and last year by James and Sharon Kolody, he had been talking to me very recently about who he would be able to ride with in this year's parade.

Although some think Sam's involvement with Model As goes back to his time as a student at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI) in Troy, NY, it actually dates back all the way to 1941, when he was just 13.

Sam's family lived in New Haven, Connecticut, and his family lived in a large Victorian house with a 150-foot square concrete-paved area that joined the house with the old carriage house. As was told in the February *Script* (pg. 11) in "Mickey's Model As," Sam's singular focus that year was to get a car... not just any car, but a special car that he could buy with 25 bucks! Sam reminisced that some may have called his beat up 1929 Model A rumble-seat coupe a "jalopy," but to him, "it was the cat's meow." Sam told me he earned his gas money as a "gas monkey" (Sam's words) at a local station. But after Pearl Harbor you needed rationing coupons for gas, and a teenager with only a part-time job didn't get any. The station owner had told Sam how to get a little bit of gas out of the long gas hoses of the day after the pumps had been shut off. So every evening Sam and his pals would ride their bikes around town with screw top cans to collect all the gas they could. Sam said they could usually collect

about a gallon or so a night that way.

By the time Sam left home for college at RPI, his old coupe was gone, and Sam was without a car. He told me he walked past a Model A phaeton on his way to and from classes his freshman year and noted that with each passing day, the number of tickets on its windshield grew. One day Sam stepped into the local police precinct and asked about the car. The desk sergeant told Sam that if he paid the tickets, he could have the car. Sam paid, and owned that Model A for the rest of his life.

After graduating the Medical School of Virginia, Sam served 3 years in the Navy, and was the ship's doctor on two different submarines. This experience fascinated Sam, and led him to develop, launch and sail a miniature submarine of his own design later. *The Benthic Explorer*, which Sam designed and built after a great deal of research. After finishing it in 1978, Sam launched it in the Connecticut River. His invention was later used for oceanography research at the University of Rhode Island, where Sam was an adjunct professor of oceanography. The *Benthic Explorer* is now on display at the Children's Museum of Southeastern Connecticut in Niantic.

Sam created a half-dozen other inventions, notably the Cardiac Press, but took a year-long hiatus from his medical practice of 35 years to be the Director of the Peace Corp in Chad, Africa from 1966-1967. Through all his life's adventures, Sam held fast to his love of his cherished Model A Phaeton. His association with the GWC came after he had lost a lot of vision, so he led from the right seat, participating in both the 2014 and 2015 Cherry Blossom Festival Parades as well as our "Wine and Sawdust" Tour to Willowcroft Winery and Jim & Edna Cross's JEBRAA farm and sawmill on May 4, 2014.

In 2014, Jason Cunningham drove Robin and Sam in the Cherry Blossom Festival Parade in Washington, D.C. James and Sharon Kolody drove Sam in the 2015, parade. Doug and Beverly Tomb were able to swing by Sam and Robin Rentsch's house in Great Falls, VA, and bring them on the Wine and Sawdust tour in Sam's Phaeton on May 4, 2014.

Sam's family asks that you consider donating to one of the causes that Sam was so interested in: Doctors Without Borders or the Jacques Cousteau Society. You can Google either one, mark tribute to Dr. Samuel Rentsch and notify [James.Rentsch@msn.com](mailto:James.Rentsch@msn.com). You may also donate by phone.

We will miss Sam in the Cherry Blossom Parade this year, and in all years in the future. I will miss my interviews with Sam for the "Mickey's Model A" columns, and our long discussions about ways to help locate individuals who become lost at sea. It seems only fitting that we say goodbye to Sam with the traditional words of the Navy blessing and farewell to mariners:

Fair winds and following seas,  
May forever you feel, upon your cheek, the salty breeze.  
Your spirit lives on in many a heart,  
your words captured, and never to depart.  
May your loved ones have the comfort in knowing,  
to heaven is where you are going.  
For all that they have to do is look above,  
and they will be reminded of your love.

<http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/NHC/fairwinds.htm>

Jim Gray