



John T. Shepherd

John Shepherd passed away February 20, 2012 at 92. Many of us today may not have known John very well, if at all; but each of us has benefited from his many contributions to the Model A hobby.

When I became Membership Chairman in 2001, I inherited a list of members who had let their membership lapse; John Shepherd was on that list. He'd been a long-time active member along with his wife, Milly. He served on our Board of Directors (BOD) in the 1970s and 80s; and been our Club Car Chairman; but when I first called, he said he wasn't interested.

In January, 2002, he finally agreed to rejoin. Maybe it was because I told him I was a retired Air Force Colonel after he told me he was a retired Navy Captain. He'd been the Navy Program Manager on the Tactical Fighter Experimental (TFX) / F-111 joint-service aircraft development program - a highly contentious McNamara-driven initiative in the early 60s. It seemed John must have been a stickler for detail; he was.

A 1943 Annapolis graduate who served in Naval Aviation in WWII, Korea, and Viet Nam I learned from club stories – verified by John - that he forced his maintenance crew on one of his carrier cruises to throw all their adjustable wrenches overboard; there was a correct wrench for each maintenance task, none other was acceptable. Rear Admiral Daniel. K. Weitzenfeld, former Vice Commander of the Naval Air Systems Command, wrote that in 1954, (then) Lieutenant Commander Shepherd was one of three hand-picked operations and engineering experts that directed installation of the first steam catapults in a US Navy carrier, the USS Hancock. Steam brought much greater power and speed - both necessary for jet aircraft - than available from the old hydraulic catapults. In fact, without steam catapults, according to Admiral Weitzenfeld, there'd literally be no Naval Aviation today; John Shepherd made a difference.

John brought this pursuit of improvement and perfection to the Model A hobby. He was a national judge; a member of the MARC BOD; and Technical Editor of "The Restorer" magazine. He participated in the

initial organization of what have become the joint MARC/MAFCA judging standards, and pushed hard to establish a tax-exempt national research organization before there was a MAFFI.

The engineering expertise honed in his Navy career was evident in two precise articles John wrote: "Alignment of the Flywheel Housing" and "A simplified method for using stroboscopic timing lights on Model A ignition systems," both of which are still part of MAFCA's "How to Restore Your Model A" book series (Volumes 4 & 6 respectively).

John was passionate about his timing method, and gave me one of the handouts from the seminars he'd given on the topic. "It'll give your Model A much greater power and speed" he said.

John was never convinced that you could use a paper match or a dime to set gaps on anything on the Model A, or even that the "simple" timing system (with the indented timing gear system of locating Top Dead Center on cylinder #1) was accurate enough for timing an A engine. John felt there was a more precise way – the right way - and often held that to be the only way. But John Shepherd's contributions to our club and to our hobby were significant, and many affect us to this day. In the Model A hobby, as in the Navy, John Shepherd made a difference.

Fair winds and following seas, my friend.

Jim Gray