

Roland Dawes
1928-2026

Roland Dawes, the oldest member of our Club and the Club's last surviving World War II veteran, died on Monday, March 23rd. He was 97. He was born in Culpeper County, VA. His family moved to Takoma Park, MD, when he was 4, where he would spend the rest of his life.

He was a real go-getter. First, he helped his father do yardwork on Saturday mornings for a Takoma Park city councilman when he was 6. But eventually he struck out on his own. First, he worked at a local delicatessen. The owner liked him so much, he offered Roland a free car, a 1936 Plymouth, for his 16th birthday. And Roland turned him down! He announced he was quitting and going to work for the Ford dealership uptown for higher pay. Only Roland hadn't even applied yet for a job there! That was Roland—full of confidence. He thought he would get to drive their tow truck, but he was still only 15. So he was hired as a mechanic.

After a year or so there, he dropped out of school, quit his job, and went to work at Walter Reed. He planned to work there for 30 years—until he was informed his job was only temporary, until all the war veterans returned. After considering this, Roland knew what to do—he joined the Army. He was really proud of his service, but after 2 years in a truck unit, he left the Army and went back to Walter Reed, working in a bacteriology lab.

After 8 years, he quit and started a trash collecting business with his brother. In the meantime, he got interested in barbering. He got his license and opened up a shop in Takoma Park that's still there. Two of his sons run it now. Roland married and had 6 children—3 boys and 3 girls.

In 2000, he ran for the city council and won. He really enjoyed his time on the council but he got railroaded out after 2 years, to hear him tell it, by the man who'd held the office before him.

One day, a friend of his phoned him to say she was looking out her back window onto an alley and saw that there was a Model A for sale. She knew there was a guy back there who would buy Model A junkers, fix them up and then sell them. He had just died and his family was trying to sell the car and his house. So Roland got the number off the For Sale sign and put in a bid. Then he forgot about it.

Sometime much later, that friend phoned him to tell him if he wanted that car, he'd better come get it, because his bid had won. The owner had 4 sons. Three didn't want it but one did. He planned to outbid Roland and asked him how much he'd bid. Roland told him \$25,000. (It wasn't true, but it scared off the brother.) The family lawyer sold him the car.

He didn't know anything about the GWC. He would drive that car around town and in parades. Finally, your editor corralled him and suggested he join the Club, which he did. He became a regular at Christmas parties and Club meetings, partly because he would ride with your editor to them every month. And before Milford Sprecher joined the Club, Roland was your editor's go-to guy to effect whatever repairs might be needed to get "Blaze" going. He definitely knew his way around a Model A engine.

When he got too old to drive his Model A, he gave it to his famous granddaughter, Dominique, of Olympic fame. She still has it but he was never sure if anyone was driving it.

MEMORIES OF ROLAND

