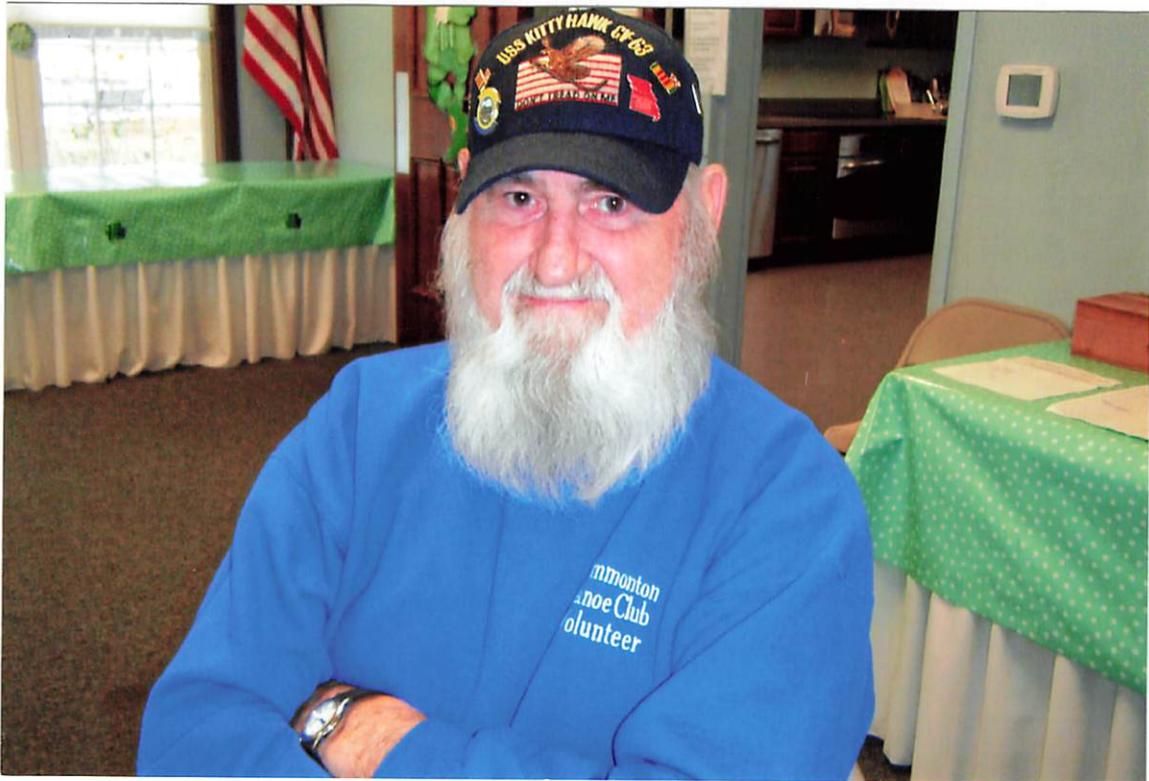


AN INTERVIEW WITH  
WILLIAM FRANKLIN OBEREMPT, JR.



APRIL 13, 2013

FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF HAMMONTON

**WILLIAM FRANKLIN OBEREMPT**

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**Interviewed and Recorded by: Ann DeCicco**

**Transcribed by: Carol Effinger**

USS KITTY HAWK HAT



William Franklin Oberempt Jr.  
Interviewed by Ann DeCicco  
for the  
Historical Society of Hammonton, New Jersey  
March 13, 2013

Q: What is your full name?

A: My name is William Franklin Obrempt, Jr.

Q: Your age and date of birth?

A: I'm 75 years old, born August 2, 1937.

Q: Where were you born and were you born in a hospital?

A: I was born in New Haven, Connecticut at Yale New Haven Hospital.

Q: Did you grow up in the town where you were born?

A: I was raised in West Haven, Connecticut which is right outside of New Haven.

Q: Did you move to other places or other houses as a youngster.

A: No. I lived within a three block area during the time which, but I lived in one house since I was age five.

Q: How did the teen agers dress when you were a teen ager? Do you remember that?

A: It was the "zoot suit" type with the pegged pants and the stripes down the side and they had the long chains hanging and so forth.

Q: What would have been considered wild clothes or hair in those days? Do you remember that?

A: No.

Q: Where did you gather for your entertainment as a teen ager?

A: I was not the typical teenager. I was a member of the DeMolay after school so I went to the DeMolay and I stayed active with them, so therefore it was more that than going with the teenagers in high school.

Q: What was the DeMolay?

A: DeMolay holds their meetings at the Masonic Temple. They are not a junior Masonic organization but they do similar type of work.

Q: Did you continue on as you were older, stayed in.

A: Oh, yeah. When I became twenty-one I entered the Masons and I have been a Mason ever since so next month I will be a Mason for fifty-three years.

Q: What is your spouse's name, your wife's name?

A: I have had two spouses. My first spouse was Eleanor and my present spouse is Carmen. Eleanor and I were together for twenty-five years and Carmen and I have been together for thirty years.

Q: How many children do you have?

A: I had four children. My oldest son died at age forty-one so I still have three children left. My daughter will be fifty this month.

Q: Do you have any grandchildren?

A: I have ten grandchildren and I have six great-grandchildren.

Q: Going back to your childhood do you remember any children's games that you played as a child?

A: Of course all children played war. We made our own soapboxes by taking a pair of roller skates and taking them apart and nailing them onto a 2x4 and putting a wood box on it and we made our own scooters that way. Of course we played tag and kick the ball and stuff like that.

Q: Did you have a lot of friends as a child?

A: Not that many. I had a lot when I was in DeMolay of course.

Q: After you graduated high school what did you do after you graduated?

A: I went to work for Sears Roebuck & Co. and I worked for them approximately nine months and when I was checking to see about advancement I was told that I had my military ahead of me so I asked what would happen if I enlisted in the military and they told me that my nine months would count when I got back so that would mean that I would have four years and nine months, so I enlisted in the Navy.

Q: Tell me about that. Did you have to tell your parents? You were old enough?

A: I was old enough. I was eighteen going on nineteen. Matter of fact by the time I went in I was nineteen.

Q: Where you on your own at the time or were you still living home?

A: No. I was still living with my parents.

Q: Tell me the story of how, what happened, you enlisted, tell me what happened in steps.

A: I enlisted in the Navy. That was in August of 1956 and I left for boot camp on the 16th of August. My boot camp was at Bainbridge, Maryland. When I got there I was in medical hold for two weeks after which they determined that I was well enough to be kept in the service so then I was assigned a company. At the completion of my boot training.....

Q: Where was your boot training?

A: My boot training was at Bainbridge, Maryland. My company was a hall of fame company which meant that we had received many flags during the course of our training in both all different forms of the training period so and left boot camp in November of 1956. I was home for Thanksgiving of that year. I had determined that I wanted to go into Naval aviation and being that I was working for Sears Roebuck & Co., I looked at the aviation storekeeper rate and that seemed to fit the bill so that was the rate I was going for. Now everybody that was going into aviation was then sent to Norman, Oklahoma which was the preparatory school and out at Norman then we were taught aircraft also. Beings it was a prep school we were given basically the same subjects that we were given in high school but how we did in prep school would determine whether or not we would go to an "A" school or not. That was our incentive to do better.

Q: While you were there did you have time off?

A: Oh. Yes.

Q: What did you do when you had time off?

A: Well Norman, Oklahoma was right next to the University of Oklahoma but we would mostly go into Oklahoma City. There wasn't that much to do. We were under nineteen you know so basically I would go around with the guys and we would go here and there. Walgreen's Drug Store had their own counter there. We would go in there and drink coffee or so forth and so on and shoot the breeze and then we would go back. We had to be back in by midnight anyway so and it was a twenty minute ride from the base to get into Oklahoma City.

Q: How long were your classes, like hours?

A: Revelry was at six in the morning and we started classes at eight and we were done by sixteen hundred which is four o'clock. So then after sixteen hundred and then every fourth day we would have the duty so we would have to stay on the base.

Q: What would be your duty?

A: It would depended on, a lot of times it was watches in the barracks, fire watches. Most of these barracks if they caught on fire they would burn down in a matter of minutes so and sometimes you would have a watch from eight to midnight and then they would dog the watches between midnight and four. Dogging it meant that instead of going from midnight to four you went from midnight to two and then from two to four so that you didn't lose a complete night's sleep. Then from four o'clock to six. So then at six o'clock revelry went down again. But and that was pretty much the way it went after we left prep school.

Q: How long was prep school?

A: That was approximately two, two and one half months. We got there in November and we left there in February. When we left in February I met a man there. He had gone to boot camp in Great Lakes. I met him. His name was Bob Sub and we hit it off pretty well. We were both going to go for aviation storekeeper school and he was second in the class and I was third in the class. Then we left there and we went to storekeeper school in Jacksonville, Florida together. We got there in February and we were there until May. When we finished our school in May that is were he was third in the class and I was fourth in the class. Incentive wise when you went to an "A" school they would take all the orders that were coming in and they would put them on the board. Number one would have his pick of all the orders, number two would have what was left, number three what was left, number four what was left. Bob and I ... there were two sets of orders that were at Quonset Point, Rhode Island. One was for a BS squadron and one was for a \_\_\_\_\_. So Bob said to me "suppose I take the BS squadron and you take the\_\_\_\_\_." I said, "fine". So that is what we did. So we left there in May and we went to Quonset Point, Rhode Island together of which we were stationed there approximately two years. The only problem was the BS squadron would go away for about three months at a time. They would go aboard ship and go to the "Med" and they would come back. My squadron was in the hanger right next to his

and my squadron supported his squadron. So we still remain friends as a matter of fact I still talk to him today on the phone every once in a while. He got married just before I left Quonset Point. I had a set of orders to leave when he was still going to be there and he got out of the Navy after four years. I went to Lakehurst, New Jersey to a anti-submarine squadron of blimps so that was interesting thing I got to fly in blimps and I enjoyed that. I was there for almost two years and I decided that I liked the Navy and I was going to reenlist. So I reenlisted for six years in May of 1960. I got married in June of 1960 and in August of 1960 I was on the USS Kittyhawk which was my first ship.

Q: Tell us about that.

A: Now the USS Kittyhawk was under construction at the New York ship building company in Camden. I was stationed in Philly and we would take bus rides over to Camden. I had an office on the second floor in one of the buildings just inside the gate and it was my job to set up the book work and everything else for the aviation stores office on the ship. When the ship was taken out for preliminary trials by the civilians then I went out to sea on it at that time in order to check storerooms to make sure which ones had what for vibrations so we knew what kind of equipment to put into what storerooms so that the electronics would not be put into a storeroom that had a lot of vibrations. So then after that I went out to sea with the civilians about three times before the ship was taken over by the Navy. Then I put the ship into commission. Just before the ship went into commission the executive officer of the ship didn't think that a third class postal clerk was high enough rank to run the post office so he asked the supply officer if he could recommend either a second or a first class to take charge of the post office until they could get a higher rank postal clerk in to take the post office. The supply officer recommended me. Paper work had to be sent through the Washington to get approval from the post office being I wasn't a postal clerk for me to be in charge of the post office. The paperwork came through and I had approximately two weeks in order to read all the postal regulations and so forth as to running the post office before the ship was going to be put in commission. We put the post office in commission and I was in charge of it from April 29 - that's when the post office went in commission until August. In August of 1960 they got a postal clerk aboard so then mine was retracted from Washington and he took charge of the post office and I went back to

S-6. When my job in S-6 -- I would handle the accounting portion of the S--6 division also I handled the issuance of air craft engines so that maintaining the paperwork for the aircraft engines when they were transferred to the other squadrons.

Q: When did the Kittyhawk actually set sail?

A: Okay. We went into commission the 29th of April, 1961. We left Philadelphia in July of 1961. We went down to Norfolk. At Norfolk we loaded our squadrons aboard at Norfolk. We left Norfolk a few days after getting there and we went to Cuba for two and a half months of training. While we were in Cuba after that we left and from there we went to Trinidad to refuel. After refueling at Trinidad we left and we headed south. We stopped at Rio Di Janeiro in Brazil and we had three, four days liberty in Brazil. We left there and we went all the way down to the southern tip of South America around the Horn and up into Valparaiso, Chile again we had another three or four days of liberty and then up into Lima, Peru and there again we had another three or four days of liberty After we left there we went into San Diego. In San Diego we were there for about two weeks. Then we left there and went up into San Francisco and we were put into dry dock in San Francisco for them to go over everything on the ship being it was new. While it was in San Francisco I got transferred from the Kittyhawk to an electronics training unit detachment too in Alamina, California which is right across the bay from San Francisco.

Q: How long were you there?

A: I was supposed to be at Alamina for three years. At approximately one year and a half the squadron was-- the detachment was moved from Alamina to Moffett field which is the southern end of the bay so that meant my family had to move over across the bay to San Bruno and we down there for another eighteen months and I got a set of orders to go the to USS Ticonderoga. The Ticonderoga by now it was 1965 and the Ticonderoga was scheduled to go to West Pack or at that time Viet Nam in February so I was due to get out in May so there was a good chance that I wouldn't be going so when I got aboard the Ti she was out to sea so I went to North Island to wait for her to come in and when she came in I wasn't aboard her two weeks or so and we got a change of orders. The Ticonderoga was going to Nam in September not February so that meant that I would be going.

Q: How was the reaction by the men? Did they think it was coming? You just accepted it?

A: Nobody knew so we just accepted what happened and went. My family-- I had moved them. We had rented a house up in northern California in the same town where her sister lived but being that I was getting out in a couple of months she thought she could do it. As a result my wife decided that she wanted to go back to Connecticut with my family so I had to, with the change of orders, get our furniture and put it into storage and take her back to the east coast. Then I went back out and got on the ship and they took the ship over -- we spent one weekend in Hawaii and then from there we stopped..

Q: Do you remember the base in Hawaii?

A: Honolulu.

Q: But there was a name for it...

A: Yeah, Pearl Harbor. We were in Pearl Harbor and then we went over to Subic Bay and got some supplies while we were over in Subic Bay and then we left and we went over to Viet Nam and we were there for 35 maybe 37 days. Then we left there we ...

Q: What happened when you were there? Did you do bombings?

A: Oh yeah. We would spend so much time in the southern end of Viet Nam and then go to the Northern end. When we would go to the Northern end we would go into the Gulf of Tonkin. The gulf of Tonkin was a narrow channel that went into the gulf. When we would go into the gulf we would rendezvous with two other carriers. The three of us would go in and launch our aircraft turn and come back out. There were gun mounts on either side plus the channel could be mined. We never knew whether they would or not so carriers always took their turn in the barrel. They wouldn't know whether they would try to stop the first carrier or stop the last carrier. So the first time we rendezvous .. we rendezvous with carriers three times. The first time we rendezvous the Ti would go in first, the Hawk would go in second and the Enterprise would go third. The next time the Hawk went first, the Enterprise went in second and the Ti went in third and the next time the Enterprise went in first the Ti went in second and the Hawk went in third so everybody had there turn in the barrel.

Q: Did you ever see any submarines?

A: No but we would be out to sea three hundred miles or so and we would see san pans out there with their antennas and they would be signaling.

Q: What are san pans?

A: San pans are little tiny boats that the Vietnamese would run they would have fires in them and everything else so they could cook and so forth and so on. They were not very big.

Q: What were your sleeping quarters like?

A: They were not bad. They weren't like the old ships. The old ships had more like a hammock type thing. Ours were not. Ours were a solid bunk and two or three high depending on just where it was located. Mine I was up in our workspace really. The office was here and there was like a drape that pulled across here and our living quarters was in there and I was on the top bunk there but my department ..we would work from 8 o'clock in the morning until midnight while we were at sea. We would go to bed at midnight and then be back up at six o'clock in the morning for reveille. Then every third night we would have duty. When you are at sea you always on three section duty.

Q: Did you do like a look out duty?

A: No. It would mean that when you had the duty-- the squadrons worked 24 hours. They had three shifts and if they needed a part in order to work on their plane or something like that they would come to us to draw a part and we would have to get up and make the issue and go down to the storeroom where it was at and the get the part up and issue a out \_\_\_\_

Q: Could you hear the planes?

A: Oh yeah, yeah. Our work space was right below where the planes landed so when they came in they hit the deck and you would hear the wire going out to stop them and so forth and so on.

Q: So how long were you in Viet Nam?

A: We were there from Sept to May and came back in May of 1966.

Q: Did you see any tragedies on the ship?

A: Yeah. We lost seven pilots and one enlisted man. The one enlisted man we lost right up on the flight deck. He was a mechanic and he had to change a part up in the

bomb bay and when he was working on it in order to --- he didn't have the proper wrench to get up in there. All he had was a crescent wrench. In order to get the bolt that he was getting to he had to remove the pin from the bomb ejector and so he was doing the thing and the wrench slipped and he went up and he hit the bomb ejector and it fired right out through his skull. That was the only enlisted man but we lost seven pilots. I lost a real good buddy while we were over there. He was a material officer of a squadron and he used to come in talk to me about getting parts and so forth and so on and getting some information because he didn't know -- he wasn't a supply officer he was a line officer. He was a pilot you know. He went in on a bridge and all that was there was small arms fire and he was going in. They don't know whether he was shot outright and killed or whether he knew that he was so bad that he wasn't going to make it but he never pulled up, he never bailed out. He just crashed. So his name is on the wall. I got his name off the wall and I have it at home on a piece of paper. So when I got back in May I was supposed to be getting out and I got a two month extension for Viet Nam even though I wasn't going to go anywhere. I was staying right there in San Diego. In July I got out. So I didn't do quite ten years. I think I was a week and a half short of ten years.

Q: So then what happened?

A: So then I got out and I went back to Sears Roebuck & Co.

Q: And how long did you work there?

A: About another eight years. I did four years in Connecticut and then I transferred down here to Vineland, New Jersey.

Q: Did they hold up to their bargain?

A: No. Because then I reenlisted. So once I reenlisted they did away with it.

Q: You were also involved with CPR and EMTs? How did you get into that?

A: Oh yeah. I did that after I got down here. When I got down here I was with a hunting club.

Q: Was that when you came to Vineland, when you were working in Vineland?

A: No. I was living in Collings Lakes and I joined a hunting club over there in Jackson Rd.

Q: Around which year, about?

A: About 1972, 1974 somewhere around there and one of the guys in the hunting club we were building a bar and one of the guys fell off the stool and everybody was laughing and saying "look at Red, he can't hold his booze". Red had a heart attack. Nobody knew CPR, nobody knew anything. So then I got involved in that. I tried to join the fire company over there in Collings Lakes but they wouldn't let me because my house was in Folsom and that was a Buena Vista company so I said I'd have to go to Folsom. That was a long way to get to the Folsom Co. so I just - I joined the rescue squad. The rescue squad required that once you joined it you had to become an EMT. So my wife and I both took the EMT program and I enjoyed it. I had already taken a CPR course so then I became a CPR instructor. Then after I took the EMT course I decided I wanted to become an EMT instructor so I applied and took the EMT instructor course and then I found out that a course was being given for Paramedics at the Underwood hospital so I applied for it and they accepted me. I went through the Paramedic course at Underwood Hospital and I became a Paramedic.

Q: Was this after you were married to Kay?

A: No. This was before Kay. Before I even met her. This was in 1976. I didn't meet Kay until 1981. So then after I started working I became a Paramedic. I was working at the Sheriff's Department at the time.

Q: Which one?

A: Cumberland County Sheriff's Department. So then I turned around and I went to the hospital, Mainland. It was a brand new hospital. I went down there and I got a job as a transportation aide down there and working in the ER but then I was offered a job at the casinos, double my salary so I took it.

Q: Does that -- How did you meet Kay, your wife?

A: In the casinos.

Q: All right. Tell us a little bit about Kay.

A: Well quite interesting. I met Kay while she was there in the casinos. We were both married and both our marriages were bad so we seemed to hit it off. We decided that we were going to leave our mates and we would go together. We came to together in 1983 and we have been together ever since.

Q: Can you tell us a little bit about Kay's -- what she did, her background?

A: Kay was a dancer but I didn't know her back then so. Kay and I ,after we met each other hit it off well, came together in 1983 and we have been together since. She had a background of herself being in dance as well as doing off Broadway. She has worked with quite a few people that are well known to everybody today. As a matter of fact the one that has been in the news a lot lately -- Rhoda -- she was in the dance group with her when they were dancing at Radio City Music Hall but she doesn't mention that when she is talking to everybody because that wasn't known but and so.

Q: Did she dance with the Radio City girls?

A: No. She danced with the ballet section of the Radio City but for the finale the ballet group would join in with the Rockettes to fill in the line to make it a longer line. That was part of the thing back then. But basically they did just the ballet.

Q: How did she find Atlantic City and end up in Hammonton?

A: Well as far as Hammonton was concerned we were living in Ocean City and she was looking in the newspaper on Fridays and they had HUD houses in the newspaper and there was one in Hammonton and we came to look at it and that is the house we have now. It's very unusual to see a HUD house in Hammonton for one and number two when we went to look at it the windows weren't boarded up, the door wasn't boarded up or anything else. It had a pad lock on it but that is about it. So we put a bid in on the house. There were nine bids and our bid was the one that was accepted. So we got the house that way and we have been here now twenty five years.

Q: Tell us about your neighbors and about what you do in the fall.

A: As far as my neighbors are concerned I could not have gotten better neighbors if I went around and hand picked them myself. We get together in the fall and have a wine making party with not just the neighbors but other people involved too and just around Thanksgiving time we have the wine tasting so that comes out the same too.

Q: Where are your parents buried now?

A: My mother is buried in West Haven, Connecticut and my father is buried in Brandford, Connecticut. My mother passed away when she was fifty two. My father lived to be in his late seventies. My father always wanted to live in Brandford and my mother never wanted to leave West Haven. There is a space next to my mother for my

father but my father remarried and there is a space next to him for his second wife. The thing is neither one of those spaces will ever be filled.

Q: What was your mother's maiden name?

A: My mother's maiden name was Withom.

Q: Where did your family come from?

A: My great grandfather came from Sweden. He came over here originally when he was nine years old, went back was on the Swedish army and then he met my great grandmother, they were married and they came back over here. He was in his early twenties. They lived over here and they had three children. They had a son and two daughters one of which is my grandmother and I have a five generation picture which is my great grandfather, my grandmother (which is my mother's mother), my mother, myself and my son. So that makes five generations.

Q: My last thing I want to ask you is --If you want to be remembered for one thing what would that one thing would you want to be remembered for?

A: I guess that if somebody needed help and I could provide it that I would never let them go without having it. I think that would be the way I would want to be remembered.

Interviewed by Ann DeCicco 3/13/2013

Transcribed by Carol Effinger 8/23/2014