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# THE SILVER ARROWHEAD

PRESENTED FOR DISTINGUISHED SERVICE TO THE ORDER SINCE 1940

## Captain Jack: He Who Builds a Great Ship

By **TOM REDDIN**  
CLASS OF 1986

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor began at 0740, Sunday, December 7, 1941. At 0745 Navy Lieutenant Jack Obermeyer was awakened in his Waikiki barracks. He and his roommate drove to the naval base to be met by the confusion and unbelievable wreckage of Pearl Harbor. The second attack wave started at 0850. Before the attacks were over at 1000, 2,400 officers and enlisted men had died and 1,178 were injured. Eighteen ships would sink or be heavily damaged.

Jack Arthur Obermeyer was born March 19, 1915, in Jacksonville, Illinois, to Harrison Peter "Harry" and Gertrude "Goldie" Newman Obermeyer. When Jack was only four, his mother died. From Jacksonville, Harry and Jack moved to Indianapolis and Cincinnati before settling in the Bronx, New York, in the 1920s. Harry was a salesman for Hempel Marine Paints. In the Bronx, Harry met and married Irma S. Klein. Harry died in 1969 and Jack's stepmother, in 1983.

In April 1926, Jack joined the Boy Scouts. He became an Eagle Scout on December 19, 1930, earning 45 merit badges. The following year he became an Ordeal member of the Order of the Arrow in Ranachqua Lodge, Bronx Council, at Ten Mile River Scout Camps in Upstate New York. After graduating a year early from Evander Childs High School in 1932, he completed a year of chemical engineering at New York University. In 1933 he was selected to attend the United States Naval Academy.

At Obermeyer's funeral, his Annapolis roommate Mark Jordan gave a eulogy that included, "Very early in his navy career Jack manifested the superior intellect which a modest facade could not hide. There is a saying at the naval academy: "Everyone here was a

'star man' in his own hometown." Each of us arrived secure in the confidence that he was the smartest young man in the world.

Then we met Jack. He not only ranked first in the class for the aggregate of our four-year course; he also accomplished the unusual feat of leading the class for each of those four years, taken individually. I would not have you think that Jack was a "greasy grind." He was a varsity athlete in the demanding sport of lacrosse. He edited our class yearbook. He enjoyed a very active social life. He was a good shipmate, ever ready to lend a hand to those of us who needed help in the subjects he always breezed through. In our senior year he was chosen by our officer mentors for high rank in the military organization of the academy - a selection based, not on classroom performance, but on their evaluation of him as a total individual."

After graduating in 1937, Jack served on the heavy cruiser USS Louisville, followed by an academic assignment at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), where he earned a Master of Science in Naval Construction in 1941. Lieutenant Obermeyer arrived in Hawaii on November 15, 1941, serving through 1945, where he was promoted to Lieutenant Commander, then Commander. His next assignment was to the Boston Naval Shipyard from 1945 to 1946.

On September 15, 1945, he married Joan Grant Dotson in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Together they had daughters JoAnn and Helen. Daughter Helen shared, "My father and I shared a love of sports. He had grown up in the Bronx in the 1920s-30s, and his family apartment was eight blocks from Yankee Stadium. Some of the great Yankee players of that era lived in his building and he was a lifelong Yankee fan."

After Boston, he was assigned to the U. S. Naval Mission in Brazil from 1946 to 1949 as an advisor on construction, ship design, and



**US Navy Lieutenant Jack Obermeyer, circa 1942. Courtesy of daughter Helen.**

shipyard management. Returning stateside, he was assigned to the Bureau of Ships, Navy Department, in Washington, D.C. In 1952 he was reassigned to the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard as the conversion superintendent for aircraft carriers.

While stationed in the D.C. area between 1949 and 1952, Jack reconnected with Scouting

CONTINUED **OBERMEYER**, PAGE 4



BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA®

ORDER OF THE ARROW

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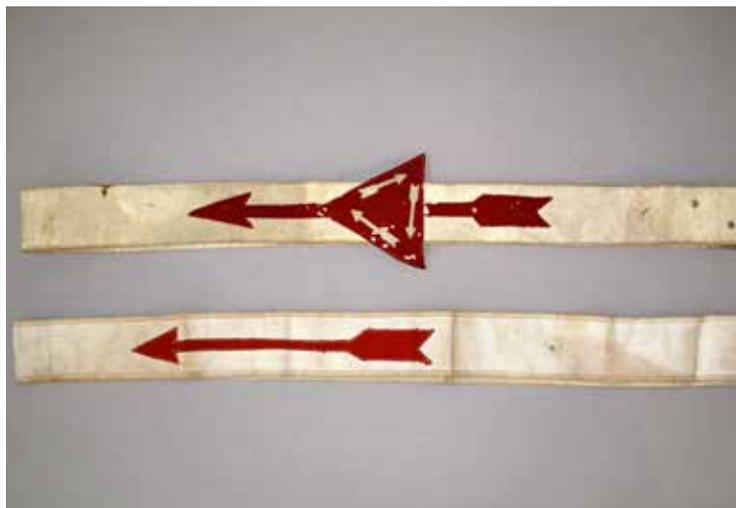
# The memorabilia of Emerson James: The presumptive first African American Vigil Honor member

By **BILL TOPKIS**  
CLASS OF 2012

Emerson James is the earliest known, and presumptively the first African American Vigil Honor member. He was from Woodlawn, on the South Side of Chicago. Over the past decade, with the guidance of John Brown (Class of 1994), there has been keen interest in learning more about Emerson James. With John's assistance, the OA archive identified James in a few photographs, but beyond that, no known tangible artifacts existed.

Emerson James served as a camp director for Chicago Council at Camp Belnap in the 1930s. In Chicago, white Scouts were broken into geographic districts. African American Scouts, regardless of where they lived, were all placed in the Douglas District, the segregated division for Chicago Council. The Scouts of Douglas Division could only attend Camp Belnap, the segregated Scout camp within Owasippe Scout Reservation.

The Arrowmen from the Douglas Division were the members of the Takodah Chapter of Owasippe Lodge. James was an early chapter chief and later adviser for the



1936 Vigil Honor sash and his First Degree sash received in 1930.

segregated chapter. Takodah members Emerson James, along with Horatio W. Isbell and Dr. W. H. Benson became the first known African American Brotherhood members. They took what then involved a blood-rite on November 12, 1932.

On October 25, 1936, Emerson James became the first African American (314th recipient overall) to keep the Vigil. His name, "Netami," (The First), probably selected to acknowledge the significance.

Artifacts from Douglas, Belnap and Takodah are extremely rare and in the case of Camp Belnap, unknown... until this summer. A treasure hunter bought a storage locker in Pennsylvania and the contents were auctioned by a local company with a live feed. Incredibly on the auction block visible online were spectacular personal effects of Emerson James. Professionally he worked for Scouting, starting in Chicago, with a stint in Cleveland, Ohio, and later New York City. He passed away in 1968. Emerson James's contributions to our Order were highlighted at the 2012 and 2015 national OA conference GEO.

The items included his Vigil Honor sash, his First Degree "Chicago" sash, a Camp Belnap brag cloth referencing the Order of the Arrow and a wonderful grouping of photographs. National OA Committee member Mark Chilutti (Class of 1990) and Scott Best (Class of 2015) were able to attend the auction in person and placed the winning bid in person. Afterwards, the auctioneer identified a few more associated artifacts, which were also acquired. One of the additional pieces included Emerson's wonderful "Hoedown" vest, covered with badges of segregated Scouting in Chicago, his professional uniform and the only known patch from Camp Belnap.



Professional Scouter Emerson James (left) with unknown volunteer Scouters, circa 1950s. Courtesy of Bill Topkis.

# CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

My Brothers,

Many of you know that I run an insurance operation based in Phoenix, Arizona. I often encounter stories about customer service, extremely powerful in both good and bad ways. I've always believed that a "wow" customer service story is a powerful, inspirational thing, resonating not only with the customer but with the people whom the customer touches, in turn affecting many more in their personal and professional lives. Just today, as I write this article, I am told of an Eagle Scout and Order of the Arrow member who unselfishly helped immediately following a horrific train derailment in the Pacific Northwest, assisting countless survivors before first responders could arrive.

I have always felt like the Order the Arrow is the epitome of a customer service based organization within the Boy Scouts of America. I am reminded almost daily of the service that we unselfishly give to both our parent organization the Boy Scouts, but also numerous organizations in the communities that we serve.

What I believe all of us know is that providing service as a core component of the Order is simply one of the methods we use to build character and commitment in young Arrowmen on their journey to becoming exceptional men.

In the coming months the order will be asked

to serve Scouting again as the BSA plans for the inclusion of young women in Scouting units. We will no doubt have to modify some components of our structure to accommodate a changing group of young people. I believe that the core principles of the Order will stay intact and we will continue to honor our mission statement and grow our organization.

You will also hear in the coming months that we expect to fill all 8,000 beds at Indiana University for the 2018 national order the arrow conference. Our high adventure programs are expected to sell out again. The Order expects to have a sizable gallery exhibit in the new Scouting Museum which is expected to open in the fall of 2018 at Philmont Scout Ranch.

Your national Order the Arrow committee has been busy, and I can assure you the Order of the Arrow is alive and healthy demonstrating the qualities of an exceptional service organization!

My best to all of you,



Mike Hoffman  
Class of 1986



ON THE COVER: 1960 national jamboree at Colorado Springs. Jack Obermeyer served as the OA service corps jamboree Scoutmaster. Image digitized from a color slide taken by Dr Lou Marchetti (Class of 1961), OA Archive.

# Jack served country as a naval architect

**OBERMEYER, CONT'D FROM PAGE 1**

by serving as a Scoutmaster. By August 1952 he earned Wood Badge beads, and later staffed courses in Idaho, Virginia, New Jersey, and Ohio.

Over several years Jack and Ralph P. Lutz independently lobbied for an OA lodge to be formed as part of the council camping program. Since 1919, National Capital Area Council used another honor camper society, The Clan of the Mystic Oak.

After cultivating friendships, chipping away at resistance, and assuring everyone that the lodge would follow the national rules, the Scout executive and council executive board agreed in late 1951 to replace The Clan of the Mystic Oak with an Order of the Arrow lodge. The council was granted a lodge charter on March 12, 1952. Initially the lodge was named Amanquemack, but would eventually become Amangamek - Wipit Lodge. As chairman of the lodge organization committee, Jack was appointed the first lodge adviser and served until

he was transferred to Bremerton, Washington, in the fall of 1952. A couple months prior to his reassignment he had become a Brotherhood member at a ceremony conducted by Nentico Lodge, Baltimore Area Council.

While serving at the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard until summer 1954, Jack involved himself with the local Scout council as a district chairman and assistant council commissioner. He helped found T'Kope Kwiskwis Lodge, Chief Seattle Council. There are also stories that he helped found Hinode Goya Lodge, Far East Council, which eventually became Achpateuny.

From 1954 to 1958 he was assigned as Professor of Naval Architecture and Marine Engineering at MIT. On July 1, 1955, he was promoted to captain after 18 years of service. During his MIT assignment, Jack served as council commissioner and council president of Sachem Council in Lexington, Massachusetts and in 1954 became a member of the national Order of the Arrow committee. He received the Silver Antelope and OA Distinguished Service Awards in



Jack Obermeyer, circa early 1950s. Courtesy of daughter Helen

1956. Jack received the Vigil Honor on August 14, 1955, from Menetomi Lodge, Sachem Council; his Vigil name is Wikheu Kittoaltewall which is interpreted as "He Who Builds a Great Ship."

In 1958 he returned to D.C. as head of the Preliminary Design Branch of the Bureau of Ships, Navy Department. The next year he became Director of Ship Design and in 1960-1963, Commanding Officer and Director of the David Taylor Model Basin in Carderock, Maryland. During this tour in the D.C. area, Jack earned a Master of Arts in Education from George Washington University in 1962. He also received the Silver Beaver Award in 1960 from National Capital Area Council and served as council commissioner from 1959-1963.

From 1963 to 1967 he served as Commanding Officer, Naval Ship Repair Facility, Yokosuka, Japan. While there, he served Scouting as Far East Council Commissioner. His last duty station was the Naval Ship Systems Command, Washington, where he retired July 1, 1968, after 31 years of exemplary service to his country. The family then moved to Darien, Connecticut, as he accepted a job in the Marine

Engineering Department of Texaco, Inc. in the Chrysler Building, New York City, and later as the Manager of Government and Industry Relations. He retired again in 1985.

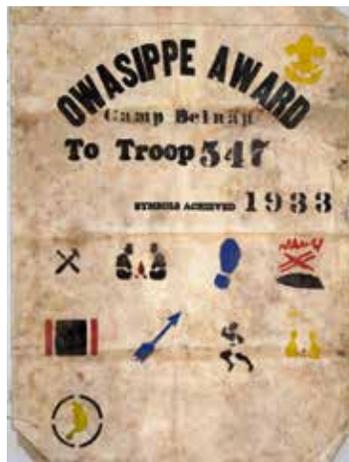
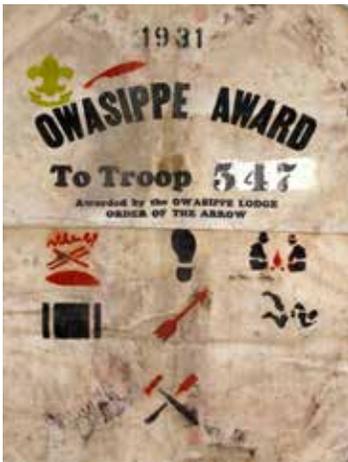
Jack served continuously on the national Order of the Arrow committee from 1954 until his death. This included service as Scoutmaster of the 1960 national jamboree OA Service troop. Following a major, functional reorganization of the committee in 1985, he became one of six vice chairmen (recognitions). He held this position until he died July 25, 1988, in Stamford, Connecticut; he is buried at Arlington National Cemetery, Virginia. Joan died the year before after 42 years of marriage. Jack Arthur Obermeyer was a member of the Boy Scouts of America for over 50 years.

There are countless lives that Captain Jack Arthur Obermeyer touched, influenced, and molded by the life he led, the example he set, the time he spent, and the leadership he gave. His contributions as a naval officer, industry leader, and community servant are all well documented. At the end of the day his was "a life well lived."



Jack and Joan Obermeyer with daughters JoAnn and Helen, circa 1957. Courtesy of daughter Helen.

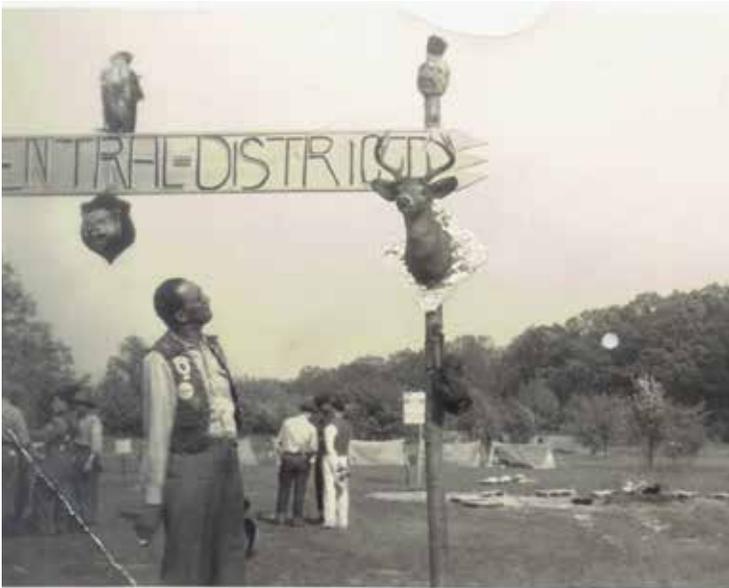
# Emerson James personal effects



1931 (left) and 1933 (right) segregated Troop 547 "brag cloths" with stenciled activities from their summer camp experience, OA award presented by Owaspippe Lodge.



Emerson James name badges.



Emerson James wearing his patch vest.



1940s patch vest worn by Emerson James.

## DSA RECIPIENTS WHO HAVE GONE TO MEET THEIR MAKER



**MICHAEL F. MILER**  
Plano, TX  
Eagle Scout, Professional Scouter  
Class of 1963  
April 19, 2014

**GERALD "BUTCH" BISSON**  
Traverse City, MI  
Silver Beaver  
Class of 1979  
April 7, 2017

**CHARLEY J. WASSON**  
Lubbock, TX  
Eagle Scout  
Class of 1996  
May 10, 2017

**TED L. JOHNSON**  
Fremont, MI  
Eagle Scout, Silver Buffalo  
Class of 1986  
July 3, 2017

**THOMAS E. WATSON, JR.**  
Woodbridge, VA  
Silver Beaver  
Class of 2004  
August 14, 2017

**BRYCE J. FAIRBANKS, MD**  
Salt Lake City, UT  
Silver Antelope  
Class of 1979  
August 27, 2017

**HARRIS M. TANNER**  
Chicopee, MA  
Silver Antelope  
Class of 1967  
August 31, 2017

**JACK CHAMPION**  
Eustis, FL  
Eagle Scout, Silver Beaver  
Class of 1956  
September 12, 2017

**JAMES D. WILSON**  
Clayton, GA  
Eagle Scout, Professional Scouter  
Class of 1988  
May 4, 2017

# One county at a time

By **MARTY TSCHETTER**  
CLASS OF 1996

After teaching this past June at the OA Adviser Symposium at the Philmont Training Center, Larry Mobley (Class of 1988), took off in his rental car for the open road to chip away on an ambitious goal: visit every county in the United States. Out of the 3,142 counties that exist, to date he completed 58%.

Adventure is not new to Mobley. In his twenties, Larry bicycled across the country in a 5,000 mile trek through maritime Canada to Key West, Florida. Subsequent bicycle trips included journeys across

Alaska, Manitoba, and a 500-mile excursion through the deep south of Alabama and Mississippi. It was on these trips on the backroads and through small towns of America where he developed a keen interest in experiencing as much of the unique, rural regions of the United States as possible. As a result, he established his current quest.

Larry grew up in Scouting in the Central Georgia Council and served as Echeconnee Lodge Chief in 1980 and Section SE-4 Chief in 1981-82. He currently serves as Ceremonies Committee adviser for Echokottee Lodge in Jacksonville, FL and serves on the Southern Region OA Committee as the JTE coordinator.



Larry Mobley

## ARROWMEN SERVING SCOUTING AND THEIR COMMUNITY

The **REV. ROBERT THORNTON** (Class of 1981) received the 2017 National Duty to God Award. Robert's life and ministry has been devoted to building positive relationships between individuals and groups in communities where he has served as pastor. His exemplary service and leadership has transcended race, ethnicities, genders and religious affiliation. The award can be presented to up to four individuals per year.



Justin Abshire

On December 2, **JUSTIN ABSHIRE** (Class of 2012) received his second Emmy, this time for the photography category. Justin has a passion to be able to tell stories through the lens of his camera, which provides a different perspective on life and people. The Emmy Award represents a standard of excellence.

Earlier in the fall, Presbyterian College in Clinton, SC dedicated the Loeb History Wing at the recently renovated Neville Hall. The dedication is named after the Bill and Diane Loeb Family. **BILL LOEBLE** (Class of 2000) has provided continued stewardship to his alma mater.



Patrick S. Boyd

**PATRICK S. BOYD** (Class of 2002) is an educator and American politician who is freshman member of the Connecticut House of Representatives, serving since 2017. He represents the Towns of Brooklyn, Eastford, Pomfret, Union and Woodstock composing the 50th district of the Connecticut General Assembly.



Alex Trebek and Kyle Becker

**MAC MCLEAN** (Class of 1988) recently became the president of the Blue Ridge Council in Greenville, SC. Since May 1997 he served as the SR-5 section adviser. Professionally Mac is an attorney at Haynsworth Sinkler Boyd, P.A. in Greenville, SC.

**KYLE BECKER** (Class of 2009) works at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, TN and in December appeared on the game show Jeopardy.

## Retelling Scouting's adventure

By **DYLAN O'BRIEN**  
2017 NAT. JAMBOREE OA EXHIBITS STAFF

We not only "Lived Scouting's Adventure" at the 2017 Jamboree we also preserved Scouting's history with the Jamboree Oral History Project. This project, led by various Order of the Arrow youth members and lead adviser Nik Newman, interviewed 59 people all in the name of history and preservation and was sponsored by the Order of the Arrow, the National Scouting Museum, and the "Green Bar Bill" Hillcourt Foundation.

Those interviewed included renowned Scouts and Scouters such as National Scout Executive Michael Surbaugh, National Commissioner Charles Dahlquist, National Venturing President Michelle Merritt, and even World Organization of Scouting Movement's Secretary-General Ahmad Alhendawi. The Oral History Project also focused heavily on those who have given back to the Order of the Arrow, including Mike Hoffman (Class of 1986),

Rick Bragga, Mackie Zewalk (Class of 2012), Clint Takeshita (Class of 1992), Kay Trick (Class of 2009), and our entire 2017 national officer team. Each interviewee was asked in-depth questions about their Scouting background and history, as well as their personal opinion on Scouting's future and beyond.

The ongoing mission of the Oral History Project is incredibly simple; to create a repository of personal histories that will provide a rich, living tapestry of Scouting and OA history, and, in so doing, further the mission of historical discovery and understanding within local council and lodges. With this mantra in mind, the Oral History Project will continue to focus on preserving scouting's history through audio and video recordings and transcripts, with an intrinsic focus on youth involvement and development.

If you would like to be considered for an interview slot at the national Order of the Arrow conference in 2018, or would just like more information on the project, please email [oralhistory@oa-bsa.org](mailto:oralhistory@oa-bsa.org).



Chief Scout Executive Michael Surbaugh interviewed by 2017 Western Region Chief Manny Lopez