

OBON SOCIETY

~ Connecting Families... Healing Hearts ~



Vern Thompson, 92, U.S. Navy

We are proud to bring you are latest update of OBON activities. Inside you will read about our new name and also several quite remarkable stories; one about brotherly love and the other about reconciliation. You must not miss reading Kazumi's letter (p. 9 & 10) written about the grandfather she never knew. Also, we have the announcement of special recognition to the staff of OBON SOCIETY from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, which should make all supporters feel proud.

Index

Page 2 :

OBON Announcement

Page 3 :

Reconciliation Story

Page 4, 5 & 6 :

Mr. Watanabe's Quest

Page 7 & 8 :

Mr. Glenn Stockdale's Flag

Page 9 & 10 :

The Granddaughter's Letter

Page 11 :

Foreign Affairs Award to OBON

Page 12 :

Contact to OBON SOCIETY

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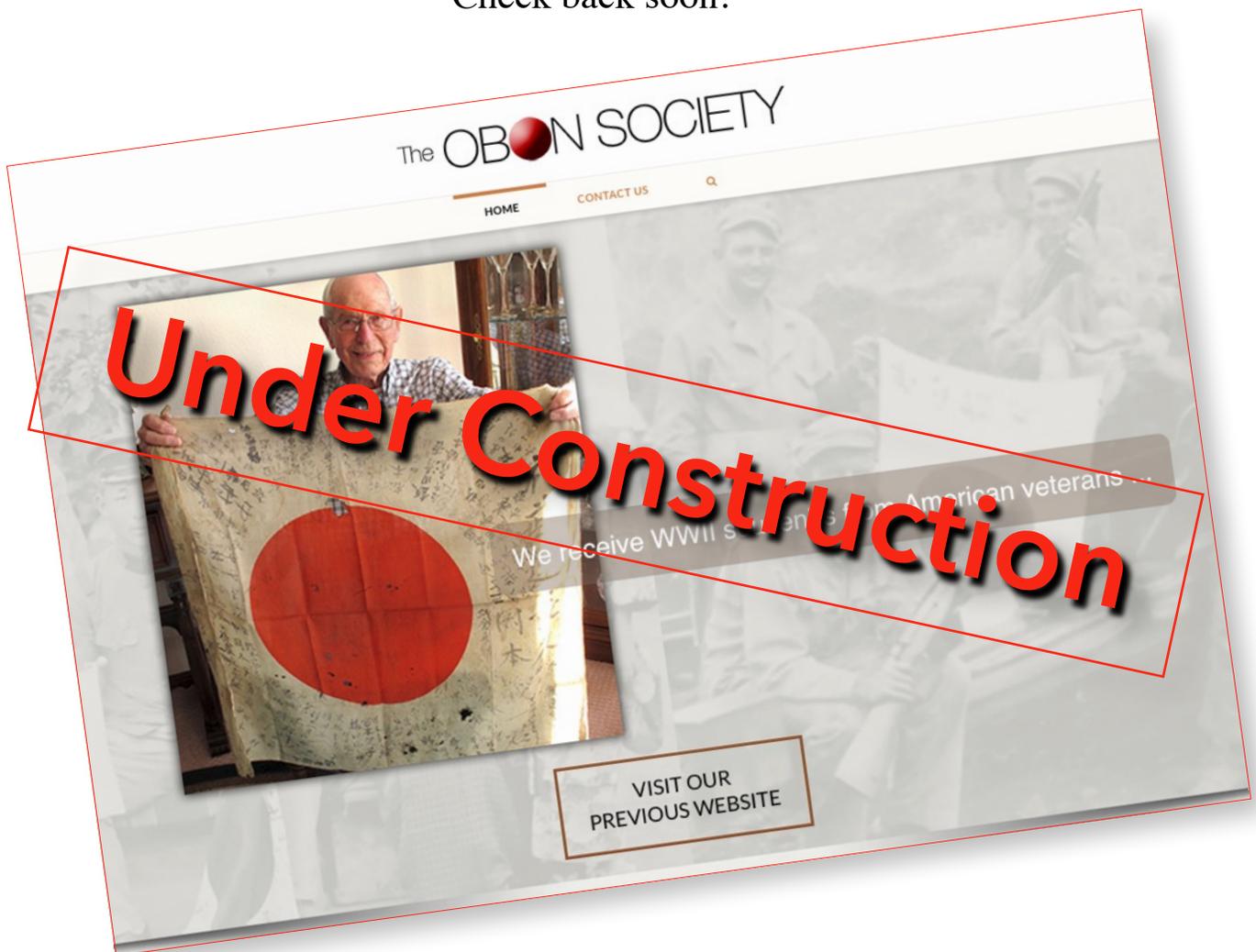
We have not changed. We are committed to the same mission and the same work, it is just that now we have a new name that will serve us long into the future.

OBON SOCIETY

Our new website is under construction.

www.OBONSOCIETY.org

Check back soon!



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Marion Scalasi



Marion Scalasi with friend and captured flag.

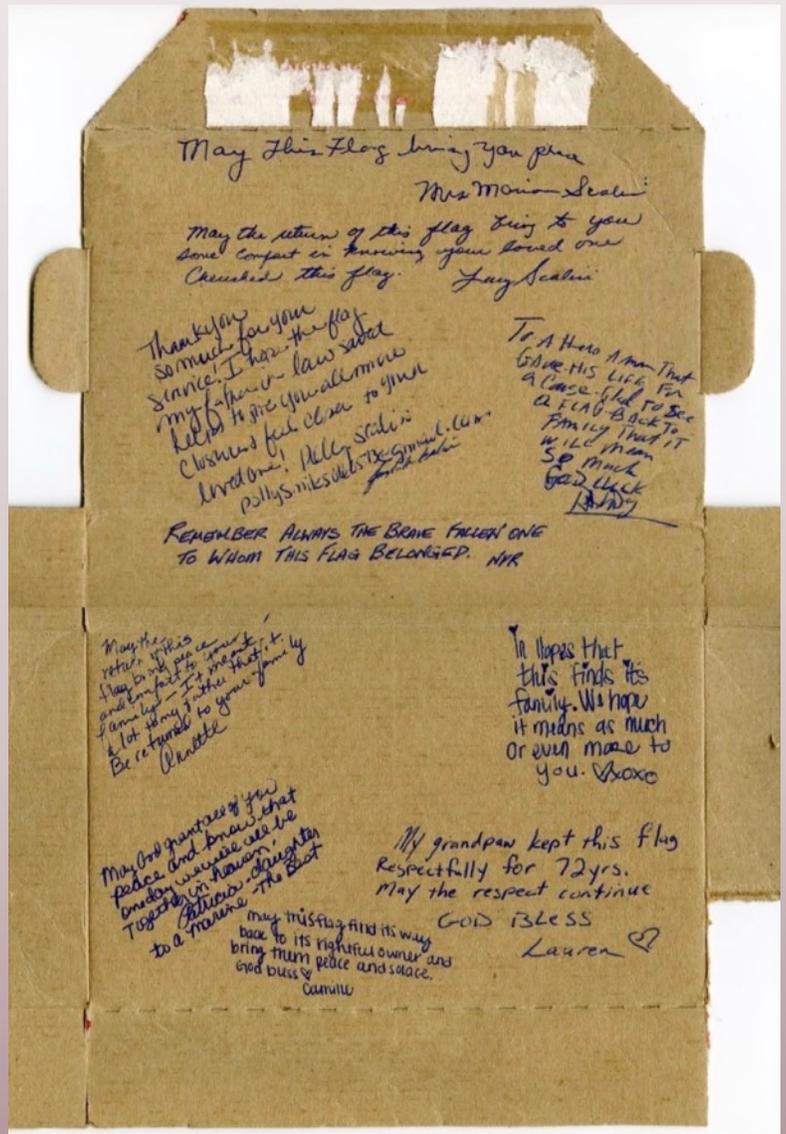
USMC Rifleman Marion Scalasi fought in numerous WWII battles, including the grueling fight for Tarawa Atoll. On November 24th, 1943, one day after the island was *secured*, he, along with other Marines, continued to battle against small groups of determined Japanese soldiers who were fighting till their last breath against the invaders. It was at this time when he happened to find, tucked inside the helmet of a deceased Japanese soldier, this exceptional signed "good luck flag."

Mr. Scalasi brought home this battlefield souvenir and proudly displayed it in his home. Everyone who knew him was aware of it, but he rarely mentioned his ordeal on the battlefield. However, before Marion passed away last November he told his family that, despite the 72 years that had passed, "if possible, efforts be made to return the flag to any descendants of the soldier."

The family contacted OBON SOCIETY and sent the flag to us so the search could begin.

After opening the carefully wrapped mailing we happened to notice some writing on the insides of the narrow box. Upon disassembling it we discovered that several family members had sent their personal, heartfelt messages along with the flag.

This touching example of reconciliation took our breaths away.



The flag is currently under search; OBON SOCIETY scholars are working diligently to sort through the clues and find the proper family.

~ *Mr. Watanabe's Quest (1)* ~

We hear many stories from both America and from Japan, but few stories can come close to Mr. Watanabe.

Tsuruo Watanabe was a young school boy when the war began. His two elder brothers were drafted into the military, which he remembered very well especially since one brother proudly purchased for him a new school uniform as a gift before he left home.



The elder brother was killed in Manchuria; his ashes were brought home by some colleagues and these were given to his grieving mother to bury in the family grave. The second brother (left) simply vanished without a trace.

After the war when ships arrived with returning soldiers Mr. Watanabe remembers his mother traveling to the docks to watch each unloading, waiting to catch the first glimpse of her son. Several years passed as the ships continued to arrive but nothing dissuaded the waiting mother from her search until that day, three years after the war, when a letter arrived from the government along with a small box containing a small piece of coral. The letter stated her son had been killed in Okinawa and there were no remains recovered, but hopefully the coral would provide some comfort.

Great sadness was felt by the family. The mother, in particular, grieved deeply over his missing son and the lack of remains that prevented her from giving him a proper burial in the family grave plot. So Mr. Watanabe began the search for his missing brother. That was fifty years ago.



Mr. Watanabe

His first order of business was to research through government archives for his brother's military unit and locate where they had been assigned. Next he had to decipher where they actually dug in and then unravel their final movements that occurred during the chaos of war.

After years of research he felt he could confidently point to the hillside where his brother must have died. The area was overgrown and concealed by decades of vegetation, but at least he found the general vicinity. Before his mother passed away she asked him to bring his missing older brother back home.

Mr. Watanabe traveled from his home in northern Japan to the tropical Okinawa and began to dig. He did not go just once, he returned there every year, decade after decade. Even after more than thirty years had passed he continued his lonely search for his brother, one shovelful at a time.



Mr. Watanabe excavating in Okinawa

~ Mr. Watanabe's Quest (2) ~

In America, thousands of miles away in the city of Monroe, Connecticut...the Barbier family had purchased a used home from a family named Dugas. It would eventually become the new Barbier family home, but first they had to clear out the trash, newspapers and old rags before they could move in.

As the closets and attics were cleared out and the refuse was disposed, the Barbiers happened to come across one peculiar abandoned item that caught their attention. They didn't know it at the time, but they had found a *Yosegaki Hinomaru*, which the previous owners had left behind. The Barbier family felt it was special, so they put it away where it would not be harmed and kept it safe. That was in 1991.

Twenty-four years later the Barbier family heard a public radio broadcast by Tom Banse, who had interviewed members of a non-profit organization headquartered in Astoria, Oregon that returns these family flags. Suddenly realizing they had something that belonged to someone in Japan, the Barbier family contacted OBON SOCIETY, sent the flag and encouraged the search to begin.



The OBON SOCIETY scholars examined the various names and notations on the flag and using their deep experience and expertise traced its origin back to the island of Hokkaido and eventually to the home of Mr. Watanabe. As impossible as it might seem, this happened to be a *Yosegaki Hinomaru* that once belonged to the brother he had been searching for during the previous fifty years.

When OBON SOCIETY staff contacted Mr. Watanabe he was speechless. He could not believe this miracle was possible. To confirm this once belonged to missing brother the OBON SOCIETY quickly sent detailed images of the flag. Mr. Watanabe had the images enlarged and taped together so he could see the Yosegaki Hinomaru approximately in the authentic size. (see picture right)



At this time Mr. Watanabe was undergoing treatment for cancer. Despite his poor health he promised the OBON SOCIETY staff that as soon as his treatment was finished he would take the flag with him to Okinawa, have his picture taken and send us a print. We appreciated his sincerity and quickly had the flag sent to him, not knowing how much time he had left.

~ Mr. Watanabe's Quest (3) ~

We were absolutely astonished to soon receive a photograph of Mr. Watanabe, with his brother's *Yosegaki Hinomaru*, in front of the war memorial dedicated to his brother's battalion on Okinawa. (see photo right)

After making the epic journey to Okinawa he returned home and visited his parent's gravesite. There he once again unfurled the *Yosegaki Hinomaru* so his mother and father could 'see' that finally the family was all back together again, and none of their sons were missing.



The Barbier family were equally astonished as this story unfolded. They marveled at how this discarded item they had found a quarter of a century earlier had somehow traveled around the world and right into the heart of a long-lost brother who had been searching for most of his lifetime to reunite the family. The email we received from the Barrier's son sums up the family's feelings....

"My mom said, and I think she was spot on, that "This is the most meaningful and important thing we've ever done." I'm blown away; my happiness that it's back with the family and that Tsuruo Watanabe is able to have some sort of closure is beyond words. I'm also really moved that the US and Japan used to be enemies that went to war but now we can have connections on a pure human level. Everyone across cultures wants to be with their family, the fact that we were able to help a family in Japan makes me very emotional.

If you can let Tsuruo know that I am happy and relieved that the flag has gotten to him, that would be great!"

email from Dave Barbier; Oct. 27th 2015
to OBON SOCIETY

~ Glenn Stockdale's Flag (1) ~



Glenn Stockdale had many friends, was a proud veteran and frequented classrooms where he gave presentations about ecology. Thus he served his country in the 41st Infantry Division during WWII and he served it again in the classroom preparing young students for their future.



Many soldiers who had direct exposure to combat and lost good friends were haunted by nightmares for years after the war. Their horrific ordeal never left their thoughts and thus they remained hardened and bitter far beyond any hope of reconciliation.



Like many other soldiers, Glenn returned home after the war with a great battlefield souvenir.... a *Yosegaki Hinomaru*. The stories of how he obtained it were never shared, but whenever the flag was discussed Glenn's opinion was the same, "*Don't send the flag back.*" Glenn was adamant. Even on his deathbed he insisted the flag should not be returned to Japan.

~ Glenn Stockdale's Flag (2) ~

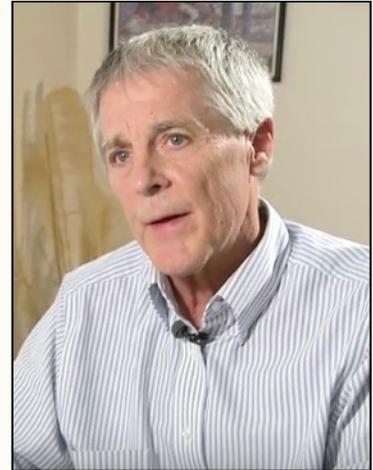
After Glenn Stockdale passed away his children had to settle his estate, including the souvenirs from WWII. These items fell into the possession of his children.

Naturally, his children were torn between the importance of fulfilling their father's wishes, on his deathbed, and the importance of fulfilling their own ideals of compassion, world peace and reconciliation.

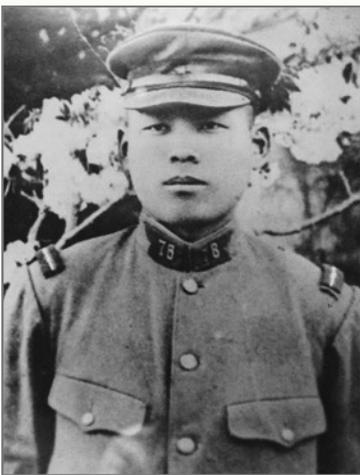
It did not take Terry Stockdale long to decide what to do. He felt that the *Yosegaki Hinomaru* belonged in Japan, back with its family, not here in America.

Terry Stockdale found our humanitarian effort and sent the flag to OBON SOCIETY.

After a thorough search our staff and scholars discovered relatives of the soldier who once carried this flag. We uncovered the fact he had married in 1939 and brought into the world both a daughter and a son before he had been sent to New Guinea.



Terry Stockdale



A deeper search brought us into contact with the son and daughter. They had no memory of their father but nevertheless, upon learning of the existence of his *Yosegaki Hinomaru*, they adamantly declared they would like to have it returned.



Terry Stockdale was so surprised and thrilled with this news he flew to Japan so he could meet the family and personally return the flag his father brought home. The Kishi family gathered to receive the heirloom. The ceremony was simple, but charged with emotion. This was the only trace from their father to ever be returned to the Kishi family.

OBON SOCIETY staff are dedicated to the promotion of peace, reconciliation and friendship between the people of the United States and Japan. Our staff works around the clock searching for families in Japan who belong to the items sent to us by American veterans.

In recognition of this heroic effort the Ministry of Japan selected the **OBON SOCIETY** to receive special recognition for their work. On behalf of their staff and supporters Rex & Keiko Ziak received the award from Consul General Omura in Seattle on January 21st, 2016.

OBON SOCIETY Recognized for its Contributions to Japan-U.S. Relations by Japan's Minister for Foreign Affairs



“On January 21, 2016, the Consulate-General of Japan in Seattle recognized one organization for its contributions to Japan-U.S. relations. In a ceremony held during the New Year's Reception at the Official Residence, Consul General Masahiro Omura presented Rex and Keiko Ziak, founders of OBON SOCIETY, with the Foreign Minister's Commendation in Honor of the 70th Anniversary of the End of the War.

OBON SOCIETY (formerly OBON 2015) is a non-profit organization established in 2009. Since then the organization has actively assisted in the return of yosegaki hinomaru, or war flags, and other artifacts and memorabilia belonging to Japanese soldiers to relatives in Japan. Last year their efforts were acknowledged by the Japanese government when the couple traveled to Japan with a group of U.S. veterans and met with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. With the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II, OBON SOCIETY's work has been recognized as an important symbol of reconciliation, mutual understanding, and friendship between our two countries.

The Foreign Minister's Commendation in Honor of the 70th Anniversary of the End of the War has been awarded to 28 individuals and 14 groups nationwide in recognition of their outstanding achievements in and contributions to the promotion of good relations between Japan and the United States.”

*Official press release sent by the
Consulate-General in Seattle*

Contact to **OBON SOCIETY**

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If you have a flag, or know someone who does, please contact OBON SOCIETY. We will gladly answer any questions and fully explain our process. It will give us great pleasure to research the flag in your possession and return it to its proper family.

OBON SOCIETY

P.O. Box 282

Astoria, Oregon 97103

contact@obonsociety.org

*The **OBON SOCIETY** is a charitable gift-dependent initiate.*

Whether you would like to a one-time donation, occasional donations or even monthly sustaining donations, we will greatly accept your contribution and utilize it wisely. This funding is what makes it possible to connect these families and return personal items at no cost to them.

OBON SOCIETY is an affiliate of Astoria Visual Arts,
a 501(C)3 non-profit organization.

Please send your tax-deductible contributions to:

OBON SOCIETY

P.O. Box 282

Astoria, Oregon 97103

