

# OBON 2015

*Returning personal items to their families.*  
個人の遺留品をご遺族の元へ



EVERYONE HAS A FAMILY  
誰でも一人一人に家族がいます

## OBON 2015 - OBON 2020

### *The First Returning Ceremony*

On March 23rd OBON 2015 will host a special ceremony hosting several veterans who fought in the jungles of the South Pacific face to face with the Japanese. These veterans will present to OBON 2015 battlefield souvenirs they brought home but now want returned to Japan and repatriated back to their families. (see p. 4 & 5)

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# Ron Charest

**OBON 2015** was sent a Yosegaki Hinomaru by Ron Charest of Woodbridge, Virginia. This was a war memento handed down from his father. OBON 2015 scholars were able to locate the family and the item was returned.

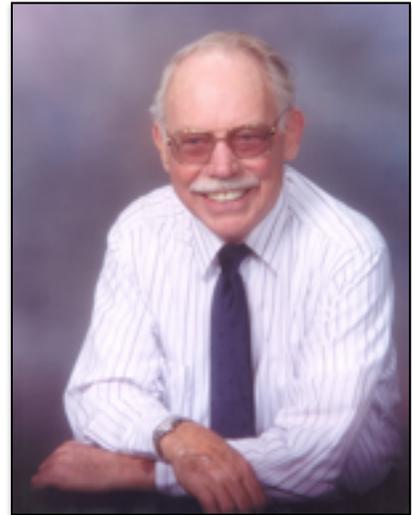
Mr. Charest describes his feelings about returning the flag.

*“As a veteran, once the significance of this flag was explained to me, I had no second thoughts about returning it to the family of the original owner. I knew that would have been what I wanted, had it been my flag.”*



Armand Charest: during WWII

*“I also think getting this flag back to the family of the original owner was what my Dad would have wanted me to do. It was a relief for me to hear the flag had been returned. I like to think my dad is resting just a little bit easier now as well.”*



Armand Charest: Retired

OBON 2015 scholars located the elder brother of the soldier and his wife near Hiroshima and they were eager to receive the flag.



Ron Charest added, *“I deeply appreciate the OBON 2015 team for making it possible to return this flag to the proper owners.”*

# A Unique Bilingual Video

Last fall **OBON 2015** was contacted by a high school student from Los Gatos High School in Los Gatos, California who was working on a project. His teacher had a *Yosegaki Hinomaru* and he thought returning it to Japan would be an ideal “Senior Class Project.” He contacted **OBON 2015** looking for help.



The flag looked suspicious. **OBON 2015** staff sent images to their scholars and they confirmed it was a forgery. It had been created by someone, probably after the war, with the intention of scamming the unsuspecting occupational forces out of their money. (See scholar’s corner, p.5, for more details)

This student, Mayuki Sasagawa, was disappointed, but during followup conversations **OBON 2015** found him to be bright, ambitious and ready to refocus his creative energy into a different direction. He decided to try to communicate the *Yosegaki Hinomaru* story with other young people around the country and tell them about the movement to send personal items back to their families in Japan.

Mayuki decided to make a video. A script was created and with the assistance of his instructor Ann Jordan, Mayuki set to work planning the production. A local public access station provided studio space and Mayuki’s friend operated the video camera.

Mayuki’s video serves two purposes; it communicates his message and it serves as an aid for anyone learning the Japanese language. A link to this unique video is here;

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SOqEP\\_Ju2uA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SOqEP_Ju2uA),

or you can search “Flags of our Ancestors” on YouTube.



Mayuki is a native Californian but his parents were born in Japan. Since Mayuki speaks perfect English *and* perfect Japanese, a clever bilingual video was created showing simultaneously two views of Mayuki, and speaking both languages.

# 41st Infantry Division

The 41st Infantry Division has the unique distinction of being among the *longest serving military units* in all of WWII.

The 41st was a 'Northwest' unit made up of men from Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana and North Dakota. Originally formed in 1917 and serving in WWI, the units were returned to National Guard status after 1921.

In early July of 1940 these Guardsmen began to receive enhance training. By 1941 their numbers increased to 18,000 men and training continued at Fort Lewis, Washington.



The 41st Infantry Division were known as the "Sunsetters." Their shoulder sleeve insignia shows a bright, setting sun.

After Pearl Harbor the 41st Infantry Division was mobilized and sent to the South Pacific. The first group reached Melbourne in April of 1942; within a couple months the entire division was assembled. They trained for combat, including 100 mile marches along the beach. They were told the Japanese would not be difficult to fight and everyone would be back home shortly.



Members of the 41st Infantry Division wading ashore from a landing craft stuck on a submerged sand bar.

By December they were heading for New Guinea; in January of 1943 the 41st Infantry were engaged in the attack on Buna-Gona in one of the first confrontations between Japanese and American troops. It was here the members of the 41st realized the tenacious Japanese would be a determined, unflinching opponent. Also they learned that the tropical jungle was filled with disease, rot and danger of the type they had never imagined.



# 41st Infantry Division



Left: Members of the 41st Infantry Division emerge from the jungle after two weeks of intense fighting.

Right: Two members of the 41st show off the battlefield souvenirs they had taken during a pause in the fighting.



Members of the 41st pause for a photo from their foxhole home dug in the hard, coral ground.

The 41st Infantry Division fought in numerous battles around New Guinea including Salamaua, Hollandia, Aitape, Wakde Island and Biak, then on to the Philippines where they fought at Palawan and Zamboanga. After the Japanese surrender the 41st Infantry Division was deployed to Hiroshima as part of the occupational force.

Now, seventy years after the end of the war, the feelings have changed. Many veterans of the 41st no longer carry hatred or distrust towards the Japanese.

The Division headquarters heard about **OBON 2015**'s efforts to return personal family items back to the Japanese so they included a story in their newsletter. Several *Yosegaki Hinomaru* emerged from the homes of these veterans with instructions to send them back to Japan.

On March 23rd, members of the 41st Infantry Division will gather in Astoria, Oregon for a *Returning Ceremony* at which time they will officially hand over to **OBON 2015** items they brought home. This is the first occasion where a veteran group will officially return battlefield souvenirs for repatriation back to Japan.



Left: Mr. Leslie "Buck" Weatherill of the 41st had brought home a souvenir flag from the war. In 2013 Buck sent this flag to **OBON 2015** in hopes of finding the family.

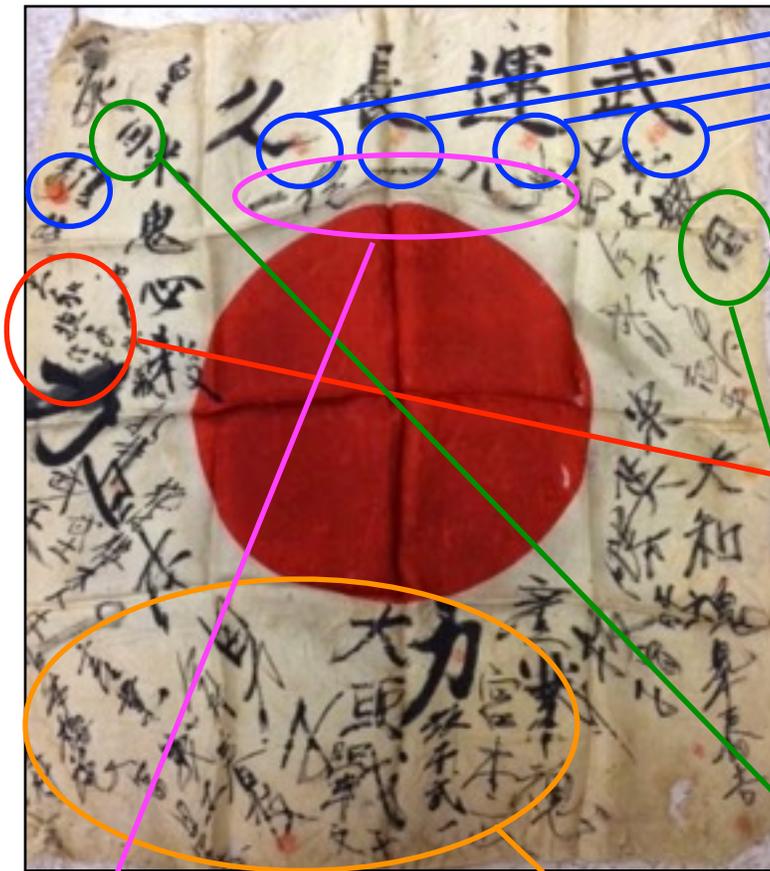
Right: **OBON 2015** found the soldier's older brothers; a nephew received the flag on their behalf.

Right, bottom: The original owner of the flag, Mr. Shigeyuki Yoneyama had grown-up in the Yamanashi Prefecture, in central Japan. He died on March 13th 1945 at Zamboanga in the Philippines.



# The Scholar's Corner

The *Yosegaki Hinomaru* given to the teacher at Los Gatos High School appeared authentic to the average person, but this is where true scholarship makes a difference. **OBON 2015's** researchers immediately noticed numerous problems with this flag some of which were inconsistent with the 1940's era in Japan and others which were out-right wrong.



Some families took their flag to shrines where they received a red shrine stamp. Here someone stamped a hanko repeatedly across the flag trying to impersonate a shrine stamp. Clearly this was done to fool some unsuspecting souvenir buyer.

This says...."Yamato Nadeshiko Nobuko" 『大和撫子 信子』 .  
Translated it means "a beautiful Japanese woman named Nobuko". This is never done. Our scholars have never seen anyone praise themselves on a *Yosegaki Hinomaru*. The focus is always entirely pointed towards the recipient.

This character "国" came into use after WWII. The character used during the 1940's was a different style "國". This is a modern style of writing and this gave our scholars a clear proof the flag was not authentic and in fact created some time after the war.

Here appears a slogan that was common in that era "一億一心" (100 million of people with one heart) but it is written left to right. This is backwards. No Japanese writer would have written like this.

Here (and other places) the scholars noticed the exact same penmanship with the exact same brush. *Yosegaki Hinomaru* were created by dozens of people, all writing their names and messages. in their own hand, often with different brushes at different times. This clearly shows one person filling in as much as possible.

# Contact OBON 2015

OBON 2015 needs your support. Please.

OBON 2015 is an affiliate of Astoria Visual Arts,  
a 501(C)3 non-profit organization.  
Please send your tax-deductible contributions to:

**AVA/OBON 2015**  
**P.O. Box 282**  
**Astoria, Oregon 97103**

Your contributions will help us reach more families  
and return more personal items.

**If you have a flag, or know someone who does, please contact OBON 2015. 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 2015**  
P.O. Box 282  
Astoria, Oregon 97103  
[contact@OBON2015.com](mailto:contact@OBON2015.com)

