

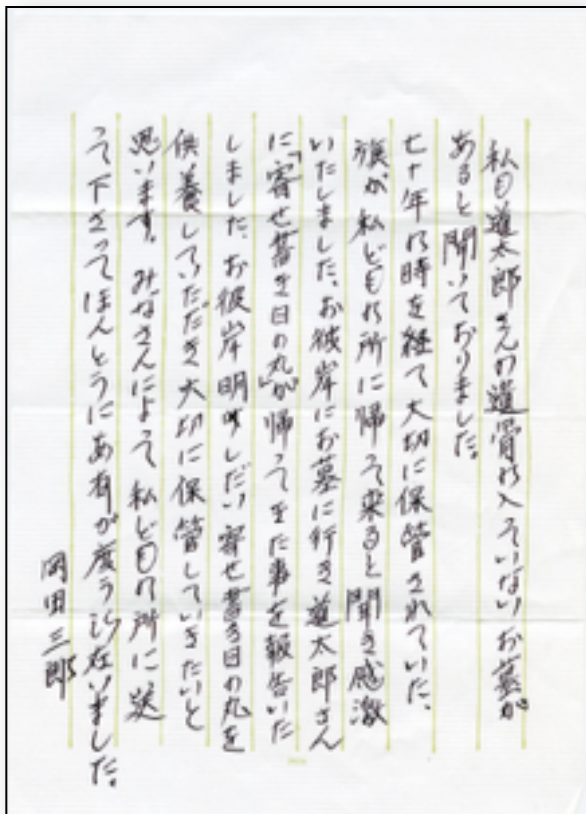
Profile of a Return



OBON 2015 received this flag from a resident of the Virgin Islands. The Japanese veteran's association, whom OBON 2015 has a close relationship, was able to trace the flag back to its home where we found Mr. Okada, a nephew of the missing soldier. He proudly received the packet sent containing the *Yosegaki Hinomaru* of his long lost uncle.



Mr. Okada wrote OBON 2015 a thank you letter (see below). He told us no remains of his uncle ever returned to Japan, which makes this flag a precious treasure.. He took this flag to the family shrine to show his ancestors the spirit of an *Okada* had finally returned. And he said that his family will keep this and preserve it as an heirloom.



Taiwan

A History: As their sailing ships approached the shoreline in 1544, the Portuguese traders declared this to be a “beautiful island” pronounced “*ilha formosa.*” The name stuck; *Formosa* was written on most every western map for hundreds of years.



The island had been an independent *tributary state* to China but these foreign traders brought commerce which attracted a migration of Han Chinese in the 1600s. They quickly merged with, or displaced the native population.

The native’s called these Portuguese and Chinese “*Tayouan*” which translates as “*foreigners.*” Eventually a settlement was tagged with this name and that was later corrupted into the word “*taiwan.*” It is apparently from this indigenous language that we have the modern name of “**Taiwan**”.



As the Chinese “*Quig*” government became weakened from the sale of opium and aggressive European colonists, a war broke out between China and Japan over another *tributary state*, Korea. It was a short fight; Japan won. As part of the peace settlement the control of Taiwan was given to the Japanese in 1895.

OBON 2015 received this curious *Yosegaki Hinomaru* that contained an intense stain in the upper left-hand area. Even more surprising was the writing which turned out to be a combination of Japanese and Taiwanese/Chinese. We did not have any idea who created this flag....or why.

Some research into the subject revealed that during the war for the Pacific many Taiwanese young men volunteered to fight for the Japanese against the Euro-Americans.

Today this episode is concealed and disputed, but public records show that more than 200,000 young Taiwanese men served to defend Japanese territories.



The OBON 2015 scholars connected with other Japanese citizens who have a knowledge of Taiwan. Soon a community of volunteers in Japan and in Taiwan emerged to help search for the home of this flag.

The citizens of Taiwan found this to be a great curiosity and thousands followed along each day as the search continued. Even the media reported about the search.

Taiwan

Eventually the family belonging to Mr. Wu De-chuan was located and they readily declared they wanted their grandfather's flag returned. A small delegation of Japanese volunteered to carry the *Yosegaki Hinomaru* to Taiwan, uncertain of who they would meet or what the reaction would be. Among these Japanese was Mr. Mr. Hideki Nagayama, a Tokyo based newscaster and strong supporter of the Taiwanese.



To their surprise, on May 9th a large crowd greeted them and assembled in a public building. Speeches were made and the history between Japanese and Taiwanese was recited.



During these speeches it was learned that this young Taiwanese man, Mr. Wu De-chuan had joined the Japanese Navy. He deployed to sea and later returned to Taiwan at which time to met his future wife. They married and had a child. Then, apparently, he was called back into active duty. It was during this second deployment that he lost his life. An estimated 30,000 Taiwanese died fighting for Japan.



The family brought this photograph to the returning ceremony. Mr. Wu De-chuan is pictured in the third row from the bottom, second from the right and is the only person shown wearing a dress suit and tie. He died August 20th, 1944, near Shanghai at the age of 28.

Taiwan

The soldier's two grandsons (white and blue shirt holding flag, right) received the flag accompanied by many relatives.



The *Yosegaki Hinomaru* returning ceremony was held in a community center where speeches and stories were exchanged followed by a traditional meal supplied by the community.



Afterwards, the *Yosegaki Hinomaru* was carried to a local shrine where prayers were made, welcoming the spirit of the lost young man back to Taiwan. From there they proceeded to the family's residence to introduce the spirit back home. Family portraits, including this lost grandfather, adorned the walls of the family home.

The following day the family, accompanied by all the Japanese representatives, traveled to the family gravesite to introduce the *Yosegaki Hinomaru* to their ancestors.

The Japanese were warmly received by the Taiwanese and treated with extraordinary kindness and respect. Everyone involved in the ceremony was deeply moved, and felt they had all made new lifelong friends. The Taiwanese family now wants to travel to Japan to express their gratitude for returning this family treasure.

Thank you for your Support



Name of the soldier: Mr. Giichi Okamoto. He survived the war and returned home alive. Presently Mr. Okamoto lives in Shizuoka Prefecture. He is 94 years old.

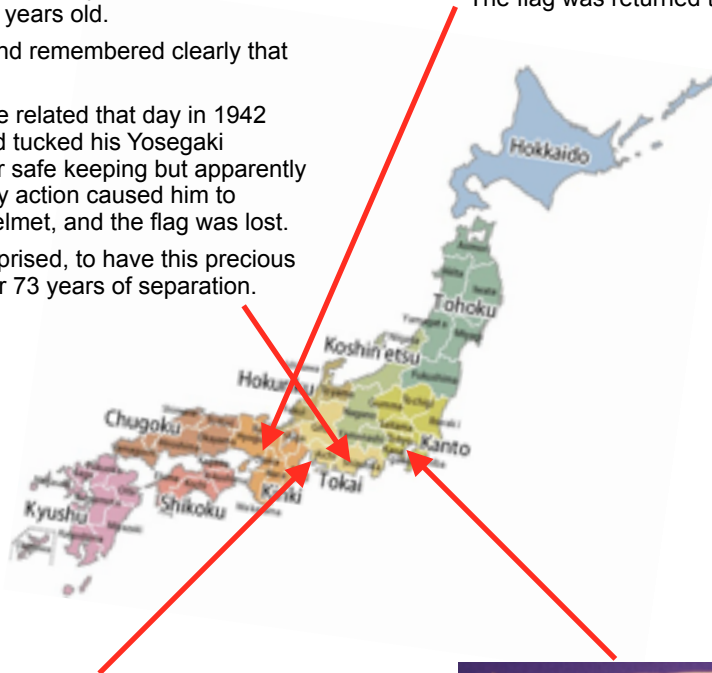
He is the eldest brother of 8 and remembered clearly that day he had lost his flag.

In a telephone conversation he related that day in 1942 when he was in China. He had tucked his Yosegaki Hinomaru inside his helmet for safe keeping but apparently an explosion or chaotic military action caused him to become separated from his helmet, and the flag was lost.

He was very pleased, and surprised, to have this precious keepsake returned to him after 73 years of separation.



Name of the soldier: Mr. Toyokazu Sakai
The flag was returned to his sister in Osaka, Japan.



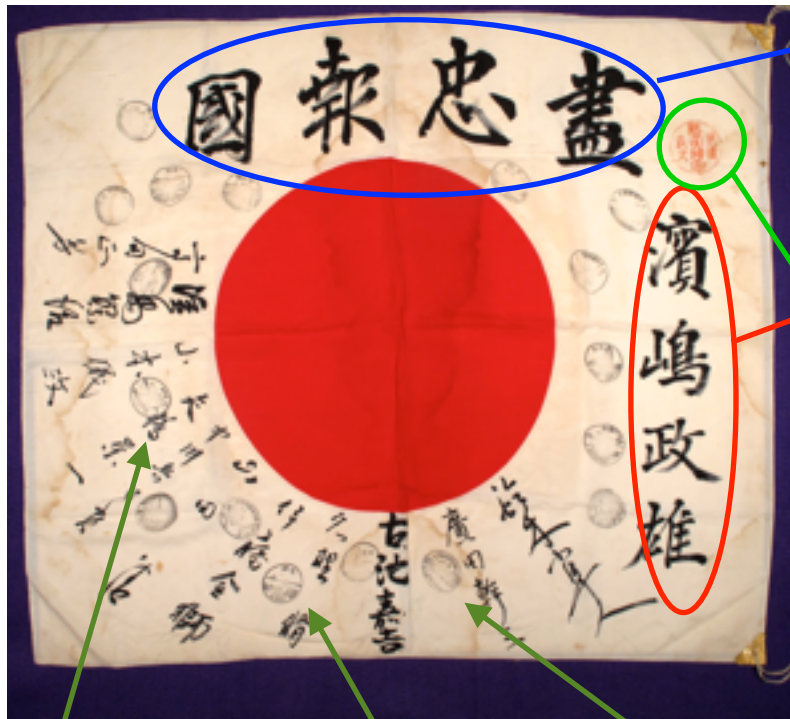
Name of the soldier: Mr. Shingo Nakamura
The flag was returned to his son in Nagaoka, Japan.



Name of the soldier: Mr. Michitaro Okamoto
The flag was returned to his nephew in Saitama, Japan.

The Scholar's Corner

This Yosegaki Hinomaru came to OBON 2015 from a family living in California. It had belonged to their grandfather; he was a soldier of the U.S. 25th Infantry division and fought in the battle of Leyte in the Philippines. This flag was covered with curious circular stamps, which OBON 2015 had never before seen.



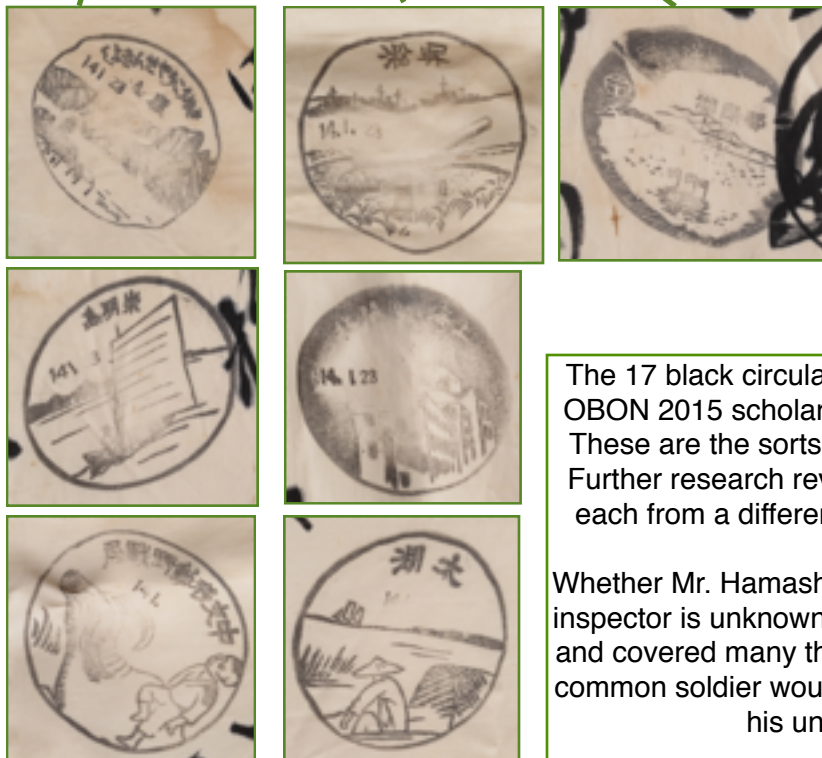
This writing says "Jin Chu Ho- Koku" which translates as "Be loyal and faithful to the country; do your best."

Name of the soldier:
Mr. Masao Hamashima.

The circular red stamp indicates this flag had been taken to a shrine. OBON 2015 identified the stamp as belonging to the famous "Atsuta Shrine" in the city of Nagoya.



Atsuta Shrine; Nagoya



The 17 black circular stamps on this flag were quickly identified by OBON 2015 scholars to be postal cancellation stamps from China. These are the sorts of cancellations that appear on mailed letters. Further research revealed they were from military post offices and each from a different prefecture, all gathered during the month of January in 1939.

Whether Mr. Hamashima was a pilot, a railroad engineer or an postal inspector is unknown. What is known is that he traveled a great deal and covered many thousands of miles in a short time. It is unlikely a common soldier would have had the access or the time to embellish his unique keepsake in this novel way.

Contact OBON 2015

Seventy Years - Seventy Flags

This year **OBON 2015** will return to Japan Seventy Flags in recognition of the Seventy Years having passed since the end of the hostilities between Japan and America.

The American families want these personal items returned back home.

We Need Your Help

We are accumulating as many flags as possible now to meet our objective.

If you have a flag, or know of someone who does, please contact **OBON 2015**.

Or, if you can contribute any amount to help cover the cost of travel and accommodations, we would greatly appreciate your financial support.

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

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

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