

# 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: Our apologies.

This monthly newsletter has been delayed and the newsletters from the previous couple months have *gone missing*, as they say.

We are very sorry.

As you will see in the following pages, we have been busy with our work and the advancement of our cause.

### Table of Contents

**Page 2:** WWII Veterans

**Page 3:** The Journey

**Page 4:** Tokyo, Japan

**Page 5 & 6:** Museum Visit

**Page 7, 8, 9 & 10:** The Return

**Page 11:** A Senator's Letter

**Page 12:** Contact OBON 2015

# WWII: 1941-1945

On the website from the **NATIONAL WWII MUSEUM** there is an interesting fact. It states that in 1945 there was a total of **12,209,238** US Military Personnel in active duty. This last summer we had the pleasure of meeting six of those men, and got to know them very well.



Ed Johann



Paul Boeger



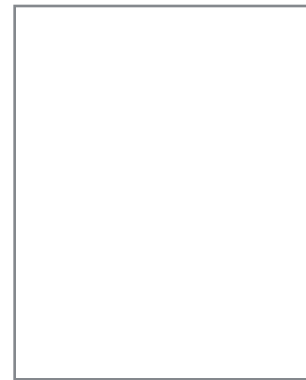
Harold LaDuke



Vern Thompson



Dallas Britt



Eldon Shields  
(photograph unavailable)

Since this was the **70th Anniversary** of the end of WWII, and we had been planning to visit Japan on this special occasion to make a significant return of *Yosegaki Hinomaru*, it seemed only appropriate that we would ask some unofficial *ambassadors* to accompany us.

Japan is a long ways away. It takes nearly 10 hours in a commercial jet to get there, which is a challenging trip for even a young, vigorous person. But when we asked these Veterans if they would be willing to accompany us, they all readily agreed. **And the youngest among them was 89 years old!**

# The Journey

The six veterans, along with their accompanying family member (or friend), gathered with us in Tacoma for a restful night at the Holiday Inn Express. The next morning we loaded into shuttles heading to SeaTac Airport. (Below) Dallas Britt fumbles as he tries to take a group self-portrait using, for the very first time in his life, his son's smart phone.



(L to R front) Harold LaDuke, Dallas Britt and Paul Boeger.  
(L to R middle) Dave Britt, Verna Brady (escorts)  
(L to R back) Tammy Winterfeld and Keith Boeger (escorts)



The TSA passed our group through security with great respect and kindness. We arrived at the boarding gate well ahead of departure time.

(below) Delta kindly gave each veteran isle seats so they could stretch their legs. Here Rex Ziak checks in with Eldon Shields.



Vern Thompson gets cozy for the long flight.

(below) Keiko Ziak made frequent visits to check on the veterans throughout the long flight. Here she jokes with Ed Johann.



# Tokyo Japan

The last time any of these men were in Japan was in 1946. Some things had changed; some things hadn't, but everything was new, surprising and interesting to these veterans.



# History Museum Visit

We tried to give our veterans as varied of an experience as possible. We offered to take them shopping, to shrines, to parks even on the high speed train. We were a little hesitant to mention a history museum with an exhibit on WWII from the Japanese perspective, knowing this could disturb some veterans, but everyone enthusiastically declared they wanted to go, so we made arrangements for the visit and it turned out to be one of the high-lights of the entire trip. The Museum director accompanied us throughout the visit, giving our veterans a V.I.P. tour and interpretation.



(L to R) Eldon Shields, Dallas Britt, Ed Johann, Paul Boeger, Harold LaDuke, Vern Thompson

Behind is a fully restored Japanese Zero. The men knew this plane very well and declared it was designed so well that it took several years for the Americans to catch up with it's speed and maneuverability.



Some of the men had very specific questions. Vern Thompson had seen a ship sunk by a two-man submarine, which was later discovered hiding beneath the ship he was serving on and this experience never left him.



He finally found the display of a model two-man submarine and now he could re-live and re-tell his story of witnessing destroyers launch depth-charges all around his ship in an effort to sink that submarine.

# History Museum Visit

Eldon Shields, of the U.S. Marines, had fought on several islands in the Pacific during which time they were periodically harassed by a Japanese plane the Marines called “Betty.” Now, presented with a full array of models Eldon hoped to see up close what this “Betty” looked like.



Of course, the “Betty” was not a name used by the Japanese. But Keiko jumped in to translate and after a few deeper questions the museum director determined Eldon was possibly talking about the Mitsubishi G4M Type 1 attack bomber.



Later Eldon discovered a display with translations of letters written home by Japanese soldiers. He read several letters and declared, “Those sounded exactly like the letters I wrote home.” He continued on reading each letter in the display and summed it up by saying, “I could have written any one of those letters.”

# The Return

The purpose of our trip to Japan in August of 2015 was to make a significant return of *Yosegaki Hinomaru*. The veterans were completely invested in this project and were eager to serve as unofficial *Ambassadors of Peace and Reconciliation*.

Dallas Britt knew the location of one of these flags which he was able to retrieve and bring along to return. (below; left) Eldon Shields, Dallas Britt and Paul Boeger enjoy a story while Dallas unveils the flag he brought from home. (below; right) Keiko translates for the veterans the kanji messages and names written more than 70 years ago.



The Veterans and their accompanying escorts display 14 of the 70 flags OBON 2015 planned to return.

# The Return

From the very beginning **OBON 2015** had planned to deliver the 70 *Yosegaki Hinomaru* to Tokyo and place them into the care of Japanese officials. However, never did we ever imagine we would reach the Prime Minister of Japan!

Somehow, completely independent of any involvement or encouragement from the American Embassy or the U.S. State Department, **OBON 2015** reached out to the Prime Minister's office through letters and conversations and after much review we received an invitation to meet.



The Prime Minister's official residence and office is surrounded by a tall wall and thick vegetation which keeps it from view by the public. Upon passing through a security gate we entered a large courtyard with a modern, five-story glass building at one end. This is where the Prime Minister resides and works, where important Cabinet Meetings are held and where foreign leaders are received. We pulled in front, passed dozens of reporters and were escorted upstairs to a receiving room to wait.



We were following very specific instructions. Only two veterans could attend the Prime Minister's meeting along with two escorts. The 70 flags were to be presented inside 15 white boxes piled in three rows, five boxes high. One flag was to be exposed, folded on top, but without any name showing.

The air was tense with anticipation, which was only intensified by a large crowd of reporters and television crews peering at us through the doorway.



# The Return



The Prime Minister's arrival brought a firestorm of photographer's flashes. He greeted Rex & Keiko Ziak and both veterans. Rex addressed the Prime Minister for several minutes explaining our mission and how the American families hope this brings closure to the bereaved Japanese families, the healing of old wounds and peace. Rex presented the Prime Minister with one representative flag. (L to R group portrait) Navy Veteran Harold LaDuke; Army Veteran Dallas Britt; Keiko and Rex Ziak; Prime Minister Abe; Minister of Health, Labor and Welfare; Member of the House of Councilors and Chairman of the Izokukai.

Prime Minister Abe directly addressed Rex & Keiko Ziak and the OBON 2015 community.



*"I would first like to express my gratitude to Mr. and Mrs. Ziak and the supporters of OBON 2015 for your effort in reuniting Yosegaki Hinomaru flags to Japanese families. As you know, most bereaved families do not have any memorabilia, not even the remains of their fallen soldiers. Returning of the hinomaru flags will have so much significance to those families.*

*I am deeply moved to see how Japan and the U.S., who were once enemies, can reunite in this way as Mr. and Mrs. Ziak, along with the U.S. veterans, have brought back the Yosegaki Hinomaru to Japan.*

*As I spoke at the joint session of the U.S. Congress in July about the "Alliance of Hope," I strongly believe the two countries must never fight again but work together to build world peace. It is my sincere hope that, as the returning of the hinomaru flags represents, we not only look back on what happened 70 years ago but at the same time make sure we move forward and strive to establish peace in the world."*

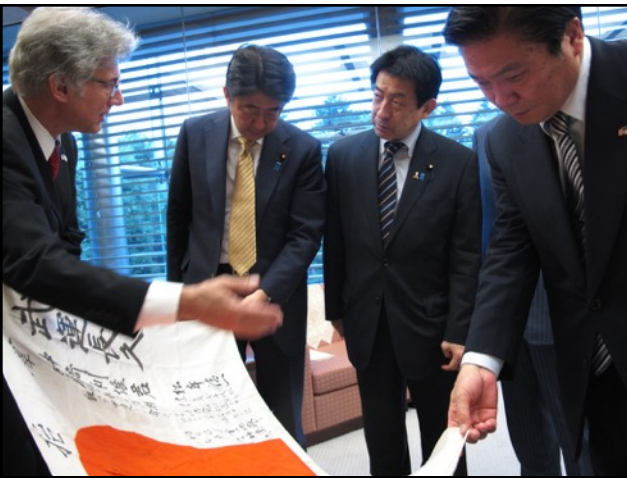
*Prime Minister Shinzo Abe  
August 4th 2015*

# The Return

At the conclusion of Prime Minister Abe's speech the media was escorted out of the room and the large double doors closed. Immediately the formal atmosphere became relaxed and the Prime Minister unbuttoned his coat. Mr. Abe is a warm and gracious gentleman. He sprang to his feet, unfurled the exposed flag and began to study the writing.



The Prime Minister had noticed on the flag the writing of a child which said, *"Father, please be well and strong."* Earlier when addressing OBON 2015 the Prime Minister said, ***"I can picture the soldier's children, along with his friends, and family members pouring their prayers into this flag as they wrote their names and messages on it."***



Prime Minister Abe is fully aware that even today there are 1,140,000 Japanese soldiers listed as *Missing In Action*. This loss affects tens of millions of Japanese citizens. The return of these personal items is virtually the only hope any bereaved family member has of ever experiencing closure over their loss.



These are some of the families who received personal items from OBON 2015 this summer.

# A Senator's Letter

MARIA CANTWELL  
WASHINGTON



United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4705

August 11, 2015

Keiko and Rex Ziak  
AVA/OBON 2015  
P.O. Box 282  
Astoria, OR 97103

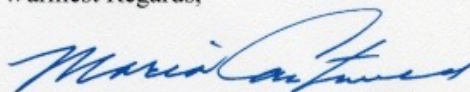
Dear Keiko and Rex,

Please accept my best wishes as you return from your mission to reunite Japanese families with artifacts taken during WWII by United States soldiers. These important pieces of memorabilia provide a bridge between Japanese and American cultures and your mission to return them strengthens the bond between our two nations.

The *yosegaki hinomaru* you transported back to Japan will bring peace of mind to many families. It is clear the U.S. veterans who traveled with you were also transformed by this experience. Thank you for making the extraordinary effort to build peaceful and strong relationships with families of Japanese veterans and putting a spotlight on your efforts to reunite these families with their lost heirlooms.

Your hard work and dedication has made a positive impact in many lives, both in the United States and Japan. The journey you undertook to reunite families with the flags taken from their loved ones will continue to strengthen the partnership between our countries and provide an outlet for American veterans to work through their experiences during WWII and its aftermath. Thank you again.

Warmest Regards,



Maria Cantwell  
United States Senator

PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER

# Contact OBON 2015

If you can contribute any amount to help cover the cost of travel and accommodations for these veterans, we would greatly appreciate your financial support.

Or if you would like to help sustain our effort we will put your contribution to good use.

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

P.O. Box 282  
Astoria, Oregon 97103

[contact@OBON2015.com](mailto:contact@OBON2015.com)



Rex & Keiko Ziak, along with all the OBON 2015 staff and volunteers would like to thank our six veterans for risking their health and comfort to travel along with us on this peaceful 70th Anniversary of the end of WWII.

This is a perfect example of why these men and women are called the *Greatest Generation*.

(L to R front) **Paul Boeger; Vern Thompson; Eldon Shields.**

(L to R back) **Harold LaDuke; Dallas Britt; Ed Johann**

And we would like to thank all members of the Armed Forces  
for their service, sacrifice and support.