

# 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 Moving Forward

August was a busy month for OBON 2015. We struggled to keep up with the contacts we received.

OBON 2015 expects this demand to grow over the upcoming months.

This monthly newsletter will keep you informed about current situations and give you some background to OBON 2015's efforts. Please forward it to whomever you think might be interested.

## Table of Contents

**Page 2:** Embassy Letter

**Page 3:** PT 109

**Page 4:** Portrait of a Classmate going to War

**Page 5:** The Scholar's Corner

**Page 6:** OBON 2015 FAQ

**Page 7:** Contact OBON 2015

# THE OBON 2015 STORY

## The American Embassy in Japan

Earlier this year OBON 2015 received a letter from the American Embassy in Japan admiring our efforts to return personal items taken as battlefield souvenirs.

Their letter spoke glowingly about OBON 2015's reconciliation between families, but then included one sentence that referred to the famous story of President Kennedy and PT 109.

Ambassador Kennedy often speaks publicly of her father's efforts to encourage reconciliation and friendship between the United States and Japan. Indeed, President Kennedy invited the commander of the boat that destroyed his PT boat to his Presidential inauguration. In real and tangible ways, OBON 2015 continues President Kennedy's spirit of reconciliation and friendship. Your program is a powerful symbol of the true warmth and deep partnership our two nations now share.

January 10, 2014; Letter from American Embassy in Japan to OBON 2015



Above: PT boats running at high speed.

Right: John F. Kennedy as a Navy officer; c. 1942 or 1943.



The reference to President Kennedy's inauguration was surprising. Unaware of what was being discussed, OBON 2015 researched the story.



*“In real and tangible ways, **OBON 2015** continues President Kennedy’s spirit of reconciliation and friendship.”*

The Solomon Islands became a strategic battlefield during the war in the Pacific. Japanese ships delivered supplies in the night; American torpedo boats tried to intercept and destroy them.

On August 2nd, 1943, in the middle of the night, the destroyer Amagiri, captained by Lt. Commander Kohei Hanami, collided with a small torpedo boat. This collisions sliced the American boat in half, killed several crewmen and threw the others into the water, miles from the nearest land.

Undeterred by this disaster the American commander led the survivors on a long swim to the nearest island, towing behind him an injured man. From there this commander attracted the attention of search boats who found and rescued the survivors.

Seventeen years later that same American commander was elected president of the United States. In an extraordinary display of respect between fellow servicemen and reconciliation between nations, John F. Kennedy invited Kohei Hanami to his January 20th 1961 Presidential inauguration in Washington D.C.



Lt. Kohei Hanami



Japanese destroyer “Amagiri”



Crew of PT 109;  
Lt. Kennedy standing right.



President John F. Kennedy



## PORTRAIT OF A YOUNG MAN GOING TO WAR

OBON 2015 receives a wide range of *Yosegaki Hinomaru* that sometimes include unexpected names. We expect to see names of family and neighbors, but sometimes the *Yosegaki Hinomaru* contain scribblings that look like teenage shenanigans and fun.

These *Yosegaki Hinomaru* are most likely the result of teenage students being called up to duty. Many college and high school students had to leave their studies to serve their country.

For example, on February 26th, of 1945, in preparation for the anticipated invasion of their homeland, the Japanese government called up 1.5 million able-bodied men between the ages of 15 to 60 years of age. No doubt at this time many students left the classroom and put on a military uniform.

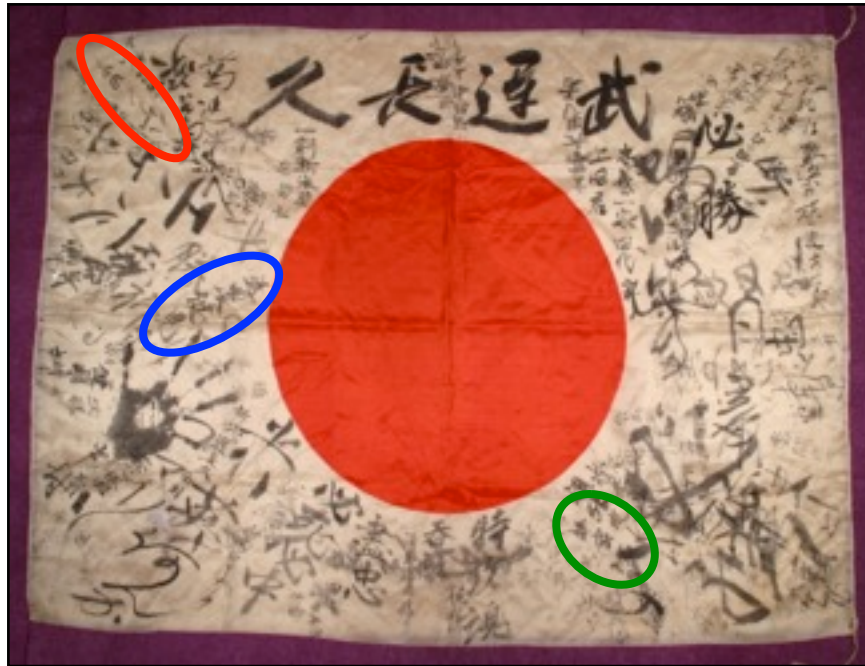


College friends make a portrait with a classmate holding a *Yosegaki Hinomaru* across his lap.

# The Scholar's Corner

This *Yosegaki Hinomaru* contains scribbling and messy writing that resembles the inside of a school yearbook.

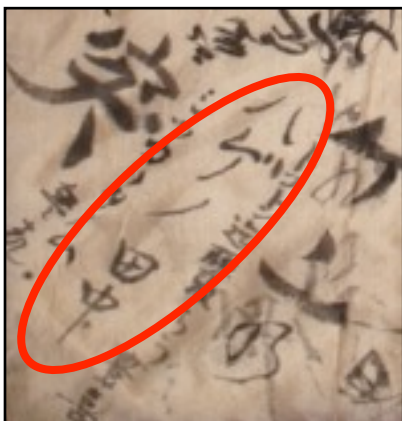
Close examination by OBON 2015 scholars reveals that it was largely the work of teenagers.



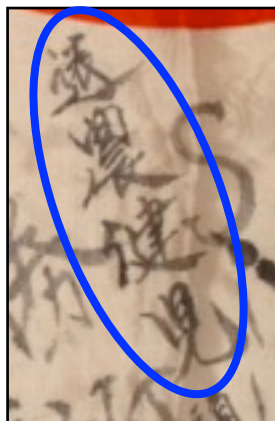
Clearly the writing of **“Bald Headed Tanaka”** was done by a close friend who intentionally wanted to tease and offend his classmate. This phrase might possibly have been making fun of his short haircut that was required when anyone was conscripted into the military.

**“Onno Man”** sounds like nonsense, however OBON 2015 scholars realized it might be a clue. Deeper research revealed a school in Fukuoka called **“Onga NoGakkou”** which happened to be the school this young man attended.

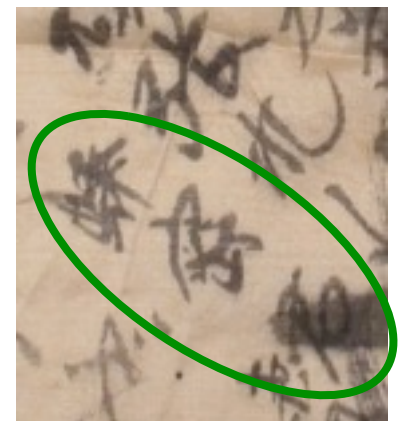
**“Mr. HoneyBee”** was possibly a clue. OBON 2015 scholars discovered Fukuoka was known for honey production and beekeeping and it would have been a logical area of study. Or it might be a joke about the family's business.



Bald Headed Tanaka  
(ハゲノ田中)



“Onno Man”  
(遠農健児)



Mr. HoneyBee  
(蜂蜜君)

Clearly these references, as well as many others, are the work of teenagers. Typical *Yosegaki Hinomaru* given by family, colleagues at work or other adults do not contain such play.

In addition, the general messy and casual appearance of this *Yosegaki Hinomaru* resembles teenage graffiti, which is another indication of who created it.

# OBON 2015 F A Q

## OBON 2015 FAQ

### What is the biggest challenge OBON 2015 faces?

Clearly our biggest challenge is communication with the people who are in possession of these flags and telling them about our efforts to return these “battlefield souvenirs” to their families in Japan.

### What is the second biggest challenge?

Contacting the family in Japan. Many Americans do not realize that other parts of the world do not permit strangers to call or contact a private citizen and Japan is one of the most strict.

### How strict is Japan?

Well, for example, there are no phone books in Japan. Even if you know someone’s name and the city where they live you cannot call or contact them. If you go to the police department, they will turn you away. If you go the Post Office or Registration office you will get the same response. They will all tell you they cannot give away anyone’s address or phone number.

### When did this begin?

Japan’s Privacy Act ( 個人情報保護法 ) was signed into law in 2003.

### How can OBON 2015 find families?

OBON 2015 has a close working relationship and the full support of the “Izokukai” ( 遺族会 ) which is basically the equivalent of a Japanese Veteran’s Association. They have extensive records of everyone serving in the military and their closest relatives. Also, they can inquire about government records that private citizens cannot access.

In addition to this, OBON 2015 works closely with a sect of priests who are dedicated to the fallen soldiers and their families. They too have extensive records on every Japanese soldier who died in the war.

OBON 2015 has gained their trust and support of these official Japanese agencies and this gives us the ability to find the families of soldiers.





# Contact OBON 2015

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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