



OBON SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER 2024

The USS MISSOURI: Part One

Last July we received an email that made our jaws drop with surprise. The opening paragraph seemed unbelievable.

Aloha,
My name is Frank Clay and I am Curator of the Battleship Missouri Memorial. We have a yosegaki hinomaru in our collection that our organization would like to have returned to the family...

The final paragraph and logo proved this wasn't a prank.

I'm happy to provide more details, but please let me know if you're able to assist us and how we would proceed. We have a strong relationship with the Japanese Consulate in Hawaii, but wanted to consult with your organization since you've helped a fellow museum ship successfully repatriate a flag.



The famous battleship USS MISSOURI was reaching out to OBON SOCIETY! We were stunned, but also deeply honored.

The "USS MISSOURI" is synonymous with America's victory over Japan. This ship was selected by President Harry S. Truman to serve as *stage* where the Japanese would sign the Unconditional Surrender. (*Missouri was Truman's home state; his daughter Margret christened that ship when it launched*)

Bremerton, Washington had been the home of the MISSOURI until 1999 at which time it was moved to Hawaii and strategically positioned facing the USS ARIZONA memorial.

The USS MISSOURI and the ARIZONA became the physical "bookends" of WWII, showing both the beginning and the end of that horrific war.

But now, the USS MISSOURI was reaching out to OBON SOCIETY with a Yosegaki Hinomaru to return.

We knew this was a transformative moment.



We responded and began a conversation that continued over the next several months. We exchanged more than 50 emails back and forth as we discussed how to “deaccess” the Yosegaki Hinomaru from their collection and then, *where* and *how* to transfer it to OBON SOCIETY and begin the search.

Most items are mailed directly to us but in this situation we felt it was such a monumental occasion that we had to go to Hawaii receive the flag directly from them. Unexpectedly, a couple days before departing we were alerted that two more Yosegaki Hinomaru had been located so now they would transfer a total of three flags into our care.

Most people going to Hawaii pack swimsuits and sandals with intentions to sit under a palm tree and view the blue waters. We had no time for that. Our luggage contained formal-wear and polished shoes. This trip was all business...with two nights at the airport hotel.

*Travel was made possible through
the generous support of the
William E. Wockner Foundation.*



On October 3rd we arrived at the prearranged place and were met with military personnel in a van who drove us to Ford Island, an active military base. Ford Island contains the pier where the huge ship is moored. The entire itinerary was pre-arranged and scheduled by the professional staff aboard the MISSOURI.

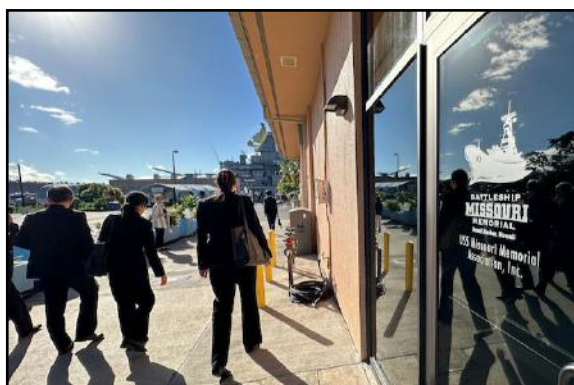
As we crossed the bridge to Ford Island we had our first glimpse of the USS MISSOURI. Directly in front of the massive ship was the Memorial of the USS ARIZONA.



We were approaching hallowed grounds and the most famous ship in all of WWII.



Our guides quickly whisked us directly aboard the massive battleship.



We passed waiting visitors, crossed historic decks, climbed up gangways and finally passed through an unassuming doorway that looked like all the others. However, this was a special room. This was the Captain's "In Port" Cabin.

Inside we were greeted by the Missouri staff who placed elegant, fragrant leis around our shoulders.



Along one side of the room, spread out for everyone to see, were the three Yosegaki Hinomaru.



A news crew from NHK in Los Angeles flew over to film the transfer ceremony; Rex and Keiko Ziak of OBON SOCIETY supplied analysis of what details they noticed upon first viewing the flags.

President & CEO Mike Carr of the MISSOURI addressed the gathering, followed by Curator Frank Clay, President & co-founder of OBON SOCIETY Rex Ziak and Kordell Kekoa who is a Hawaiian Kahu. (*"Kahu" means "Priest" among the native people of Hawaii*)



They then gathered, according to Hawaiian tradition, for a special blessing for the spirits of the Japanese soldiers as they begin their journey home.



Following these speeches and ceremonies curators Frank Clay and Molly Hagan, who manage the USS MISSOURI collection of artifacts, began to fold and package each flag.



Everyone in the room sensed the importance of this moment. All conversation ended.



Each flag was carefully folded along the existing creased lines, then wrapped in archival tissue paper and placed inside a box for easy transportation.



The room was hushed.

Everyone held their breaths as the final flag was prepared for its next journey. You could have heard a pin drop.



The folding of each flag unexpectedly became the most compelling part of the ceremony.



Everyone seemed to sense these pieces of fabric were actually much more. These small flags were the only existing remains of someone who probably never came home but whose family is still alive in Japan. And waiting. The staff of the USS MISSOURI gave them the most respectful send off imaginable.

Without delay the flags were passed into the possession of OBON SOCIETY. The USS MISSOURI was assured the search for family would begin very soon.



We concluded the ceremony with a final group photograph of the Japanese Consul General, Hawaiian priest, OBON SOCIETY, USS MISSOURI staff and representatives from the Japanese Self-defense Force.



We were then invited to an exclusive VIP tour, conducted by Frank Clay.



It was a busy day aboard the USS MISSOURI, which receives an average 1500 visitors daily. People were everywhere, wandering individually or following tour guides who explained the ship's hardware, history and military triumphs.

Members of OBON SOCIETY slipped away and stepped back inside the Captain's Cabin. The room was empty and quiet now, except for the housekeeping staff who were tidying up and putting everything into order.



The dominate feature in the room was the enormous conference table. It was large enough to seat more than 16 individuals. This room had been gutted and renovated back in 1984, so its appearance is different now from how it looked during WWII. However, photos from that era show an enormous table in precisely the same location, which might possibly be the same table that exists there today.



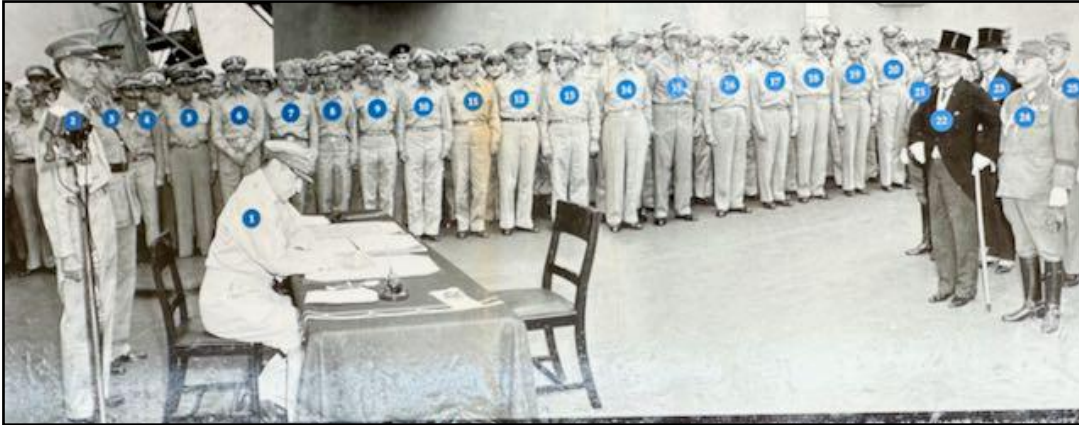
If so, this table had been witness to history. This is likely the table where General Douglas McArthur, Admiral Nimitz, Admiral Halsey, Captain Murray and other sat to discuss the upcoming surrender of Japan.

There were many details that these men needed to be discuss.
Who would sign the treaty first? Which representative from what country would sign next?
Should the British sign the treaty before the Canadians? Should the Chinese sign before the Russians?

McArthur decided to use six different pens for his signing of the treaty. Each pen would be given away, but who should receive the first? And the second? And third?

Who would stand behind McArthur? Who would stand alongside, and in what order?
Many of these historic decisions might have been discussed across the top of this table.

For instance, McArthur insisted that the Japanese arrive, sign the treaty and leave the ship within twenty minutes. This was complicated by the fact that Foreign Minister Shigemitsu had an artificial leg from above the knee. Walking required the use of a cane. Climbing ladders and steep gangways would be slow and extremely hazardous. Every movement had to be planned and timed to the exact minute.



McArthur also planned that the ship be anchored and specifically aligned in the Yokohama Harbor at the moment the treaty was signed. This took hours of discussions and meticulous planning.



McArthur even directed that special cards to be printed and given to every sailor on board the Missouri who witnessed the signing of the treaty. After a card had been distributed to every crewman McArthur ordered the print shop to destroy the printing plates so no forgeries could ever be made.

Molly Hagan showed us one of these historic cards from their archives.

All this planning occurred among the men seated around this table.



But now, seventy-nine years later, all that had passed.

Most young Americans today are enamored with Pokemon, Nintendo, Sushi, Karaoke, Anime, Manga, Ghibli studio and a host of other Japanese creations.

They cannot imagine Americans fighting with the Japanese.

The history of WWII is now fading beyond the distant horizon of our memory.



On this day, resting on the corner of that table, sat a box containing three Yosegaki Hinomaru. They had been selected out from their USS MISSOURI's archive and had begun their journey home to their family in Japan.

Seventy-nine years ago General McArthur, Nimitz, Hasley and Murray would never have imagined such a turn of events.

Coming Next: USS MISSOURI: Part Two.

The search begins



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OBON SOCIETY is a Oregon based, non-profit 501(C)(3) organization

Note: 12:00 Noon Hawaiian time is.....

3:00 PM in Seattle, 4:00 PM in Denver, 5:00 PM in Dallas, 6:00 PM in Atlanta
7:00 AM in Tokyo, 1:00 AM in Helsinki, 11:00 PM in London, 9:00 AM in Sydney, 1:00 AM in Nairobi



FLAGS OF THEIR FATHERS



WITH REX ZIAK, OBON SOCIETY CO-FOUNDER



OCT. 24, 2024 | 12:00 PM HST | VIA ZOOM

Join us for a special virtual event presented by the OBON SOCIETY on a journey of peace and closure. Learn about the non-profit's humanitarian work dedicated to the reconciliation of families by returning non-biological human remains taken during times of war. Hear about their success stories and the recent work done with the Battleship Missouri Memorial. Q&A session to follow the talk.

**COST: \$10
FREE FOR MIGHTY MO MEMBERS**

USSMISSOURI.ORG/MOJOE

The USS MISSOURI MEMORIAL invites you to attend their up-coming on-line virtual lecture:
Here is the link

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/flags-of-their-fathers-tickets-1029352459917>