

Flags: Each flag has the name of a soldier, personal messages

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prepared by the Japanese soldiers’ families and friends before sending them off to war.

Now 70 years later, the American soldiers and their families are realizing their souvenirs, known as yosegaki hinomaru, are actually deeply personal items belonging to the Japanese families.

“This feeling of sending these back to the family, restoring the family and giving them closure is this human feeling that is existing,” Ziak said. “We are now looking at a more international movement. All of that will be headquartered out of Astoria.”

Exhibit opening

The Columbia River Maritime Museum is partnering with the nonprofit by hosting an exhibit with the collected flags. The exhibit, “A Peaceful Return,” opened Friday and will remain at the museum for at least two years.

During an opening ceremony of the exhibit Friday, Astoria resident Ellen Kachel-Bewley surprised the group by bringing a Japanese flag her father, Victor Kachel, brought home after serving in World War II. The flag was in a cedar chest, and Kachel-Bewley knew it had some meaning to the Japanese.

“I knew it as a signature scarf, a memento for good luck,” she said.

Each flag has the name of the soldier, and personal messages such as “good luck and be brave,” or “be well.”

“It’s somewhere between a love letter and maybe inside a high school yearbook, where friends have written messages,” Ziak said.

Japan trip

After meeting many veterans through returning the flags, Ziak and his wife decided to invite some veterans to accompany them on a trip to Japan. The purpose of the trip in August was to return 70 flags in honor of the 70 years since the end of World War II.

The Ziaks invited six veterans, four from Oregon and



Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian

Visitors browse through the collection of yosegaki hinomaru on display at the Columbia River Maritime Museum Friday. The yosegaki hinomaru are common flags covered in well-wishes by a Japanese soldier's family and friends. The soldiers carried these flags with them into battle during World War II. The flags were taken by American soldiers as prizes after battles and brought back to the United States after the war.

two from Washington state, to go on the trip. Ziak said he hoped to return the flags to a meaningful person in Japan, so he reached out to Japan’s Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

To the Ziaks’ surprise, the prime minister responded to their request and agreed to meet them and two of the veterans in the same room where foreign leaders are received.

The group had to follow specific instructions. The 70 flags were to be presented in 15 white boxes piled in three rows, five boxes high.

“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,” Ziak said.

Ziak addressed the prime

minister explaining the mission of the nonprofit and presented him with one of the flags.

Through a translation provided by Ziak, the prime minister told the group, “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.”

After the prime minister addressed the media, Ziak said, the formal atmosphere became relaxed and the prime minister unbuttoned his coat

and began studying the writing on the flags.

The prime minister noticed one flag had the writing of a child that said, “Father, please be well and strong.”

“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,” the prime minister said.

Invisible aspect

Ziak named the effort OBON 2015 a few years ago focused on this year, the 70th anniversary of the end of WWII. Obon is the name of the Japanese season when ancestors’ spirits are honored.

He announced Friday the group is relabeling itself the



Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian

Visitors read about the history of the yosegaki hinomaru.

OBON Society and looking toward the year 2020, which happens to be when Tokyo hosts the summer Olympics.

Despite the new name, the goal remains returning the

flags back home. “There is a visible aspect of what we are doing and there is an invisible part, the emotional part returning the battlefield souvenirs,” Ziak said.

Perrin: ‘I’m just trying to create a healthier county’

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Michigan. Already, Perrin said, she has networked with local business about ways to help their employees be healthier.

Her official title is worksite wellness coordinator. She spends much of her time networking, attending public meetings and working with CHART, the Community Health Advocacy and Resource Team. In addition, Perrin has represented the county at health conferences in Grants Pass and Portland.

Her first big project as a VISTA volunteer is helping the city of Astoria create a worksite wellness program. She is in the process of writing grants for the city.

“Hopefully the policy will go in front of the City Council soon,” Perrin said.

She has until April to accomplish as much as she can as a VISTA member. Along with her daily responsibilities, Perrin said, she is able to come up with her own projects.

One project she wants to do is work more with the Clatsop County Northwest Coast Trails Coalition.

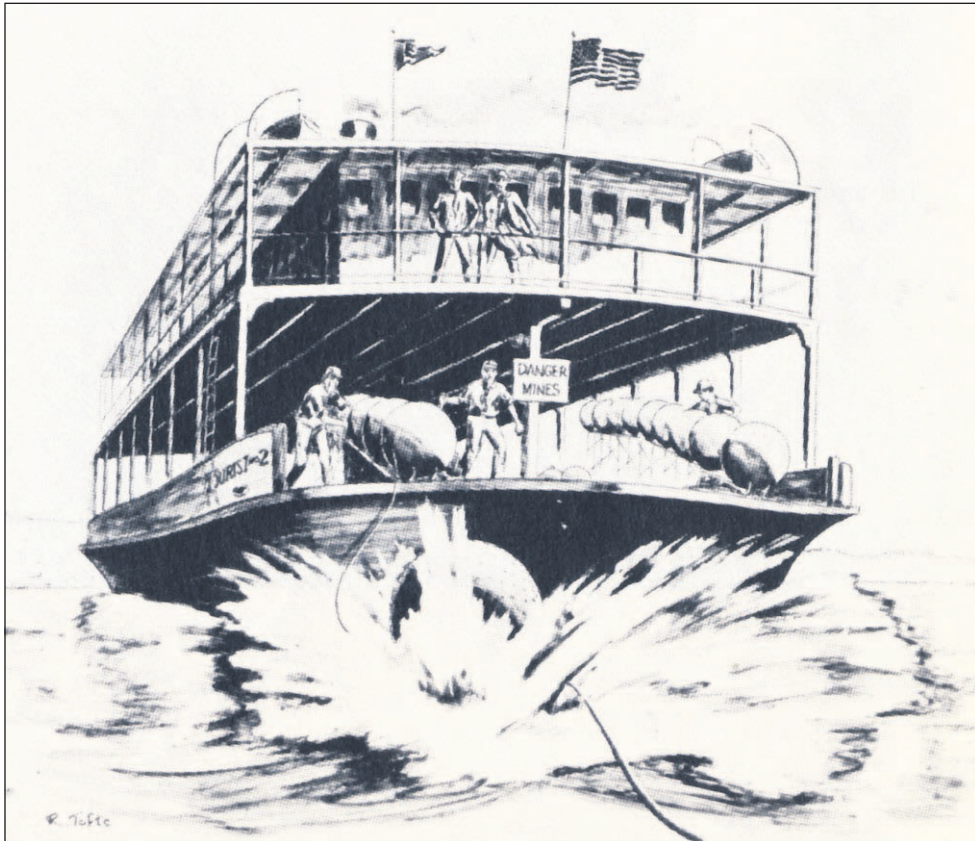
“I grew up in Michigan. Being able to pull off to the side of the road and just go hiking somewhere is new to me,” Perrin said.

At the end of her time in Clatsop County, Perrin hopes to leave the community healthier than when she arrived.

“I hope there are a few more worksite wellness programs,” she said. “I’m just trying to create a healthier county. I know it is broad, but that is the goal.”

— Kyle Spurr

Ferry: Tourist No. 2 is the last surviving Astoria ferry



Daily Astorian file

Tourist No. 2 was drafted for national defense at the start of World War II, used to lay mines to block Japanese access to the Columbia River. This drawing was reproduced in the 1966 dedication booklet for the Astoria-Megler Bridge.



Courtesy of Clatsop County Historical Society

Tourist No. 2 transported tourists and their cars across the river.

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Once everything checks out, Lint, who said the ferry really belongs in its hometown, will sail the ferry to Astoria before winter and moor the vessel at a city pier. The Coast Guard would then be asked to inspect the rest of the frame, and the community would have a chance to see the ferry and work out a plan to reclaim it.

Meanwhile, a new nonprofit, Friends of the Astoria Ferry, is forming to raise the funds and community support needed to help fix up the ferry, buy it from Lint and maintain it. Lint, who is waiting to see what the repairs will cost, did not disclose a final price.

Though still unincorporated, the Friends group has five board members, including City Councilor Cindy Price, and hopes to end up with seven to nine members.

Right now, their plan is to turn the Tourist No. 2 into a passenger boat for sightseers and a part-time charter service.

During the fair-weather months, the ferry would travel 3 to 4 miles along the riverfront and remain docked the rest of the year, though still open to the public. Occasionally, the ferry would be rented out to businesses for private parties and excursions. User fees would help keep the ferry staffed, insured and operating in Astoria.

“We think it’s just this super-unique opportunity to combine community spirit, maritime expertise, preservation of the riverfront and general entertainment,” Price said.

‘Helluva deal’

The Tourist No. 2 — a three-deck wooden-hull ferry 110 feet long, 40 feet wide, 40 feet tall that can

accommodate at least 185 people — is the last surviving Astoria ferry. For more than four decades, the vessel transported riders and their cars 4 1/2 miles across the Columbia River — a service that the Astoria Bridge rendered obsolete.

Next July, the city will commemorate the bridge’s 50th birthday — and, by extension, the 50th anniversary of the Tourist No. 2’s last voyage as an Astorian ferry service. But whether the ferry’s last run in Astoria will remain its final run there will depend on whether the Astoria community steps up to welcome it back.

The vessel was Coast Guard-certified through 2012, “so the chances are very likely that it’s in perfect condition,” Lint said.

A few weeks ago, Lint legally rechristened the ferry “Tourist No. 2”; for years, it had gone by the name “MV Kirkland.”

Robert “Jake” Jacob — the majority owner of the Cannery Pier Hotel, who would pay the shipyard fees and, possibly, the inspection fees — has a message for the skeptics.

“It’s the same thing as the trolley: Everybody wondered who would insure it, who would ride it, who would paint it, who would drive it,” he said. “Now everybody knows that the trolley is part of Astoria, and locals and tourists love it.”

Anyone interested in joining the Friends board can email Price at astoriaferry@gmail.com. People can also visit the Tourist No. 2’s official websites, astoriaferry.com and astoriaferry.org, which have links to the ferry’s Facebook page.

“I just think a historical city with the original ferry boat is a helluva deal,” Jacob said.