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The Long Voyage: The Golden Rule and Resistance to Nuclear Testing in Asia and the Pacific

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Recently, when a battered, 30-foot sailboat, the *Golden Rule*, came to rest in a small shipyard in northern California, the event did not inspire fanfare. But, in fact, the *Golden Rule* was far more important than it appeared, for the small ketch had helped inspire a widespread struggle against nuclear testing, particularly throughout the Asia-Pacific region.

The long voyage of the *Golden Rule* began thanks to the efforts of Albert Bigelow, a retired World War II U.S. naval commander. Learning of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, Bigelow had been not only awestruck, but horrified. "It was then," he recalled, "that I realized for the first time that morally war is impossible." In the postwar years, Bigelow and his wife joined the Society of Friends and, in 1955, housed two of the 25 Hiroshima Maidens, who had been brought to the United States for reconstructive surgery. Working with the American Friends Service Committee, Bigelow sought to deliver a petition against nuclear testing to the White House, but was rebuffed by U.S. government officials.

Hiroshima Maidens

Other people, too, were growing restless with the escalating preparations of the great powers for nuclear war, and especially with nuclear tests, which sent vast clouds of radioactive fallout scudding around the globe. In 1954, the irradiation of a Japanese fishing boat, the *Lucky Dragon #5*, by a U.S. hydrogen bomb test in the Pacific led to a furor in Japan and the formation of a mass ban-the-bomb movement, Gensuikyo (the Japan Council Against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs). In 1957, Britons founded the National Council for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapon Tests, which the following year was folded into an even larger organization, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. In the fall of 1957, activists in the United States launched the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE) that, like its overseas counterparts, quickly grew into the largest peace and disarmament organization in the country.

As part of this uprising, Bigelow and other pacifists, in late 1957, organized a small group, Non-Violent Action Against Nuclear Weapons, to employ direct action in the struggle against the Bomb. After the announcement of U.S. government plans to set off nuclear bomb blasts near Eniwetok in the Marshall Islands -- an island chain governed by the United States as a "trust territory" for the native people -- the moment of truth had arrived. Bigelow and other pacifists decided to sail a vessel of protest, the *Golden Rule*, into the testing zone. Explaining their decision, Bigelow declared: "All nuclear explosions are monstrous, evil, unworthy of human beings."

In January 1958, Bigelow and three other crew members wrote to President Dwight Eisenhower of their plans. "For years we have spoken and written of the suicidal military preparations of the Great Powers," they observed, "but our voices have been lost in the massive effort of those responsible for preparing this country for war. We mean now to speak with the weight of our whole lives."

Although the Boston *Herald* thought the crew members "Thoreauesque," the U.S. government's response was considerably more hostile. As the *Golden Rule*, captained by Bigelow, made its way across the Pacific, anxious officials from the State Department, the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC), and the U.S. Navy conferred on how to counter the pacifist danger. The U.S. commander-in-chief in the Pacific warned that this group of "Communists or misguided humanitarians" wanted to "stop tests by preventing us from firing . . . or if we did fire and killed a few people . . . create additional anti-atomic test support." Secretary of State John Foster Dulles worried that cordoning off a large area on the high seas would "have serious international repercussions," while too lenient a policy toward protesters might open the way to participation by Japanese antinuclear groups. Ultimately, the administration decided to have the AEC issue a ban on entry to the test zone by Americans and to pressure the Japanese government to block entry by its citizens.

The *Golden Rule*

In this context, Bigelow and his crew faced formidable obstacles. After the arrival of the *Golden Rule* in Honolulu, a U.S. federal court issued an injunction barring continuation of its journey to Eniwetok. Despite the legal ramifications of disobeying the injunction, the pacifists decided: "We would sail -- come what may." And they did. Overtaken en route, they were arrested, brought back to Honolulu, tried, convicted, and placed on probation. But these were men with a mission, and not easily deterred by the awesome power of the U.S. government. Defying the terms of their probation, they set sail once again on the *Golden Rule*. And once again they were arrested on the high seas, returned to Hawaii, tried, and -- this time -- imprisoned with sixty-day sentences.

Even so, the U.S. government was beginning to lose control of the situation. Among those who met the crew members of the *Golden Rule* in Honolulu and attended their trial for contempt of court were Earle and Barbara Reynolds, a married couple, and their two children. Traveling around the globe on their hand-built sailboat, the *Phoenix*, they were heading back to Hiroshima, where Earle Reynolds, an anthropologist, had coordinated research for the Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission, established by the U.S. government to gather data on the effects of the atomic bombs. Greatly impressed by the crew members, as well as convinced that the U.S. government had misreported the deadly effects of radioactive fallout and had no right to restrict travel on the high seas, the Reynolds family decided to complete the voyage of the *Golden Rule*. On July 1, 1958, Earle Reynolds went on the radio to announce that the *Phoenix* was entering the U.S. test zone "as a protest against nuclear testing. Please inform appropriate authorities." The U.S. Coast Guard boarded the *Phoenix* the next day, arrested Reynolds, and returned him to Hawaii for trial. Here he was convicted and sentenced to two years in prison.

These dramatic events heightened popular protest against nuclear testing. Picket lines sprang up around federal buildings and AEC offices all across the United States, including those in Boston, Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Washington. Signs declared: "Stop the tests, not the *Golden Rule*." Reynolds, out on bail before a higher federal court ruled in his favor -- and, implicitly, in favor of his predecessors -- embarked on a speaking tour that included 58 major talks, 20 other meetings, 21 radio programs, and eight television appearances. SANE dispatched telegrams to political leaders declaring that it joined the *Golden Rule*'s crew members "in protesting against [the] unrightful use of [the] Pacific Ocean for nuclear weapons testing, and against [the] Atomic Energy Commission's exercise of authority which it does not rightfully possess." Norman Cousins, SANE's founder and co-chair, helped finance the voyage of the *Golden Rule* and lauded its activities and those of the *Phoenix* in his magazine, the *Saturday Review*.

No longer able to hold the line against public opposition to nuclear testing, the nuclear powers began a reluctant retreat. In late August 1958, Eisenhower announced that, as of October 31, the United States would suspend its nuclear tests and would join other nuclear powers in negotiations for a nuclear test ban treaty. Although these negotiations dragged on for years, the U.S., Soviet, and British governments did halt their nuclear tests. Their testing moratorium collapsed in the fall of 1961, when the Soviet government led the way by resuming nuclear tests. But popular protest resumed and, in the summer of 1963, resulted in the signing of the Partial Test Ban Treaty, banning nuclear tests in the atmosphere.

Even as the nuclear powers began to back away from nuclear testing, the influence of the *Golden Rule* persisted. In November 1958, the crews of the *Golden Rule* and of the *Phoenix* traveled to Geneva to urge U.S., British, and Soviet negotiators to sign a comprehensive test ban treaty. Although Bigelow wrote a book about his protest in the Pacific (*The Voyage of the Golden Rule*, 1959) and participated in further antinuclear protests, his most famous subsequent venture occurred as one of the first Freedom Riders, when -- once again defying the authorities by traveling into forbidden territory -- he boarded a bus to the Deep South with other challengers to racial segregation. Along the way, he managed to block a white racist assault on young John Lewis (today a member of the U.S. House of Representatives) by absorbing the blows himself. Later on the trip, Bigelow narrowly survived a firebombing of the bus by a racist mob outside Anniston, Alabama. Jim Peck, another pacifist crew member of the *Golden Rule*, also became a Freedom Rider and was severely injured by white racists. Like Bigelow, Peck continued his antinuclear activities, in his case as a staff member of the War Resisters League.

For their part, the Reynolds family returned to Japan. As a result of the notoriety Earle Reynolds had attained thanks to his protest activities, he had lost his standing in the U.S. academic community, including his earlier position at Antioch College. But, in 1960, he began teaching at the Hiroshima Women's College, and soon thereafter published a memoir about his controversial journey into the U.S. nuclear testing zone (*The Forbidden Voyage*, 1961). In 1962, he co-founded the Hiroshima Institute for Peace Studies, which was affiliated with Hiroshima University.

During these years, Reynolds also resumed his seaborne activities against nuclear explosions. As a protest against nuclear testing by the Soviet Union, Reynolds captained two additional voyages, the first by the *Phoenix* to Nakhodka (on the Pacific Ocean) and the second by the *Everyman III* to Leningrad (on the Baltic Sea).

The voyage of the *Everyman III* was particularly dramatic. In the aftermath of great power test resumption in late 1961, the Committee for Nonviolent Action (CNVA, the successor to Non-Violent Action Against Nuclear Weapons) dispatched protest vessels to the test sites. In 1962, the U.S. government arrested the crew of *Everyman I* only fifteen miles outside San Francisco. But *Everyman II*, departing from Honolulu, succeeded in sailing through the U.S. Pacific test zone for days before U.S. authorities, hamstrung for a time in securing a court injunction, hauled its crew members off to prison. Taking on Soviet testing as well, CNVA launched *Everyman III* from London in September 1962, and the following month the 48-foot ketch, captained by Reynolds, arrived in Leningrad. Refusing to allow antinuclear leafleting, Soviet officials gave the crew the choice of sailing away or being towed out to sea. From the standpoint of

the crew, neither was satisfactory. Therefore, to the dismay of the Soviet authorities, some crew members began to sink the vessel in the harbor while others grabbed leaflets and leaped into the near-freezing water in an attempt to swim ashore. Eventually, the vessel was towed away, with Reynolds and the other pacifists kept on board in captivity.

As Earle Reynolds became ever more involved in antinuclear ventures, he encountered growing difficulties with Gensuikyo. Unable, because of his legal problems, to attend Gensuikyo's 1959 and 1960 World Conferences Against A& H Bombs, he sent his son, Ted, in his place. Ted reported that the conference resolutions were thoroughly biased against the West and toward the Communist bloc, for the proceedings were dominated, increasingly, by the Japan Communist Party. Even so, when Professor Yasui Kaoru, chair of Gensuikyo, invited Earle Reynolds to attend Gensuikyo's August 1961 world conference, he accepted the offer. "I knew that many people in Japan and elsewhere shared my doubts of the integrity of Gensuikyo," he recalled. But "I hoped to be of some influence in persuading the conference to adopt a more balanced and objective viewpoint." He felt encouraged along these lines by growing opposition to Gensuikyo's pro-Communist line shown by the National Liaison Council for Regional Women's Organizations, the National Council of Youth Organizations, and the General Council of Japan Trade Unions (Sohyo). But, as months passed, Yasui grew increasingly irritated by Reynolds' refusal to follow the party line and, that August, had him expelled from the world conference.

In fact, the relationship of Reynolds -- and of many non-Communist groups -- to Gensuikyo was simply untenable. This proved particularly true when it came to the issue of nuclear testing. At its 1961 conference, the delegates had passed a resolution declaring that the first government to resume nuclear tests should "be denounced as the enemy of peace and mankind." Consequently, when the Soviet Union resumed nuclear testing only two weeks later, Gensuikyo was thrown into turmoil and never managed to issue the promised statement of condemnation. Critics of all nuclear testing began gravitating to Gensuikyo's non-Communist rivals, Kakkin Kaigi (the National Council for Peace and Against Nuclear Weapons) and, later, Gensuikin (the Japan Congress Against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs). As for Reynolds, he emerged as a sharp critic of Gensuikyo. The Reynolds family, he explained, did "not believe in blind loyalty to an organization. Our loyalty is to our fellow man, all over the world. Our loyalty is to peace."

Meanwhile, Barbara Reynolds became a formidable peace and disarmament campaigner in her own right. Bearing messages and petitions from thousands of Japanese and Americans assailing nuclear testing, she joined her husband and children on the voyage to Nakhodka. Then, after her return to Japan, she embarked on a lengthy Peace Pilgrimage with two "Peace Pilgrims": a female hibakusha (victim of the atomic bombing) and a boy orphaned by the atomic bombing. Together, they brought the story of Hiroshima's suffering to twelve nations, including all of the nuclear powers. Although Barbara Reynolds tried to arrange a meeting of the Peace Pilgrims with President Kennedy, the White House rejected the offer. The antinuclear trio also received a cool reception in Moscow, where Barbara Reynolds and the Japanese Peace Pilgrims turned up at a large conference organized by the World Peace Council, the Communist-dominated body of peace organizations, in July 1962. Here they were marginalized, refused permission to speak, and abandoned at the behest of the Japanese delegation, which viewed them as suspiciously independent. Back in Hiroshima, Barbara Reynolds helped organize the World Friendship Center, a place where visitors from around the world could meet hibakusha and work for peace. In 1964, she departed with a large group of hibakusha on a World Peace Study Mission to eight countries and 150 cities.

World Friendship Center collage with Barbara Reynolds

Although both Earle and Barbara Reynolds remained active thereafter in the peace and nuclear disarmament movement, the initiative in the campaign against nuclear testing now passed to another organization inspired by the *Golden Rule*: Greenpeace. During the Vietnam War, a large number of draft resisters, military deserters, and their families had fled from the United States to Canada. In Vancouver, British Columbia, a number of these antimilitary Americans met Canadian peace and ecology activists and, in the late 1960s, began to discuss what should be done about U.S. nuclear explosions, then being conducted underground on Amchitka Island, in the Aleutians. After a number of frustrating meetings, Marie Bohlen, one of the Americans -- inspired by the example of the *Golden Rule* -- suggested that "somebody sail a boat up there and park right next to the bomb." The local peace community considered this an excellent idea.

Accordingly, in mid-September 1971, a group of committed Canadian and American activists, determined to block U.S. nuclear tests, sailed out of Vancouver on their voyage to Amchitka aboard a rusting fishing trawler, the *Phyllis Cormack*. To symbolize their peace and environmental concerns, they renamed the boat, for the purpose of the voyage, *Greenpeace*. While at sea, an activist journalist read a collection of the legends of North American Indians, including one predicting that the destruction of the earth brought on by white people's greed would ultimately lead to all races of the world uniting as Rainbow Warriors in defense of the planet. The participants in the voyage found this concept deeply moving, as did numerous Greenpeace activists in later years.

Indeed, this small effort, like the voyage of the *Golden Rule*, served as the catalyst for an international movement. Although the U.S. coast guard halted the *Phyllis Cormack* and arrested its crew as they neared the test site, thousands of supporters cheered the crew members upon their return to Vancouver. Furthermore, two organizers of the venture, Jim Bohlen and Irving Stowe, quickly found another ship and crew to continue the voyage. Although this second Greenpeace vessel failed to reach Amchitka before the U.S. government exploded a nuclear weapon there, the movement was spreading. A former Canadian businessman, David McTaggart, convinced Canada's Greenpeace group that he should sail his yacht, *Vega*, into France's nuclear testing zone around Moruroa in French Polynesia. Accompanied by crew members from Britain and Australia, McTaggart arrived there in June 1972, dropping anchor in

international waters. Ordered into action by the French government, a French minesweeper rammed and crippled the *Vega* that July, but McTaggart -- like his predecessors -- was a stubborn individual. A year later, he returned to the test site in his repaired ship, whereupon French sailors, at the order of their government, stormed aboard, beating McTaggart and other crew members savagely with truncheons. Even so, the movement was unstoppable, and Greenpeace groups emerged around the world. In 1973 and 1974, they waged a concerted campaign against French nuclear testing in the Pacific and dispatched yet another yacht, the *Fri*, into the test zone and on a "Peace Odyssey" throughout the Pacific.

Although Greenpeace embarked on a number of purely environmental ventures, it continued its activities against nuclear testing, particularly in the Pacific. Campaigning for a nuclear test ban during the early 1980s, Greenpeace protested at Moruroa against French nuclear testing, at Leningrad against Soviet testing, at the Nevada test site against U.S. testing, and in a balloon above the Berlin Wall against four power nuclear testing. In an effort to call attention to the struggles of Pacific islanders to free themselves of great power colonialism, it publicized and supported efforts to create nuclear-free zones. In July 1987, Greenpeace launched its most ambitious antinuclear program yet: a Nuclear Free Seas campaign. Even though Greenpeace, like its predecessors, relied upon small-scale, sensational actions rather than upon mass mobilization, by late that year it had three million members in seventeen countries in North and South America, Europe, and the South Pacific.

Greenpeace balloon above the Berlin Wall

Not surprisingly, the nuclear powers fiercely resisted these efforts. In July 1985, French secret service agents attached underwater mines to the hull of the Greenpeace flagship, the *Rainbow Warrior*, as it lay at anchor in the harbor of Auckland, New Zealand. The ensuing explosions killed a Greenpeace photographer and set off a major international scandal. In December 1989, when Greenpeace sought to repeat its nonviolent disruption of a U.S. government test of the Trident II missile in the Pacific, U.S. government warships repeatedly rammed and nearly sank the advancing Greenpeace vessel in an attack that lasted almost four hours.

The *Rainbow Warrior*, 1985

But the Rainbow Warriors remained undaunted. In the mid-1990s, they threw themselves into the campaign to halt nuclear testing and secure a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). When the French government, in 1995, announced that it was resuming nuclear testing in the Pacific, public resistance was widespread, with Greenpeace playing a catalytic role. In Papeete, the capital of Tahiti, an estimated 15,000 people turned out to welcome the arrival of the *Rainbow Warrior II*, then en route to another protest at Moruroa, and to call upon the French not to test. Making the CTBT its top priority in 1996, Greenpeace organized demonstrations, confrontations, and even a protest voyage to China, whose government finally announced that it would join a worldwide moratorium on nuclear testing.

Of course, the participants in these dramatic ventures on the high seas -- from the *Golden Rule* to the *Rainbow Warrior* -- were part of a much larger antinuclear campaign. This campaign, waged by the world nuclear disarmament movement, included organizations like SANE, the Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign, and their successor, Peace Action, in the United States; the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in Britain; the Interchurch Peace Council in the Netherlands; Gensuikyo and Gensuikin in Japan; and the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific Movement among Pacific islanders. Working together, these and other organizations had a very substantial impact, including the signing of the CTBT in September 1996. Addressing the United Nations General Assembly shortly after its historic vote of support for the treaty, Madeleine Albright, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, declared: "This was a treaty sought by ordinary people everywhere, and today the power of that universal wish could not be denied."

Although U.S. Senate in 1999 refused to ratify the CTBT , this world agreement to halt nuclear testing is far from dead. Indeed, the CTBT, supported by the Obama administration, is once more on the political agenda in the United States. And if this treaty to terminate nuclear explosions is finally implemented by

the world community, it will provide a major victory for the antinuclear campaign, as well as a fitting end to the long voyage of the Golden Rule.

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