

“Six Letters from Japan”

By

Chuck Overby

Introductory comments for “letters” from his 2007 Japan Trip.

[emailable version]

It was my good fortune to be able to return to Japan, from May 23 to June 29, 2007 for my ninth lecture trip since 1992 -- in support of Japan’s beautiful war-renouncing wisdom – Article 9. My travels this time ranged from Hokkaido in the north, through the main island, Honshu, to Okinawa in the south. Kadena air base on Okinawa is the place where my crew and I many times lifted off in our 70 tons of B-29 violence, bound for North Korean targets. In Hiroshima I had a luncheon visit with Hiroshima’s Mayor Akiba at which time we discussed his passionate interest in eliminating all nuclear weapons from Planet Earth, and in keeping Article 9 alive as a model for all nations and as a gift for all humanity.

Japan’s most recent former Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, strongly wished to destroy Article 9 so that Japan could once again become a so-called “normal nation” -- meaning one that can once again send its armies around the world using its military fist to get its way -- as frequently does the USA. The USA, stupidly thinking that it can perpetually control Japan’s military, encourages Japan to kill Article 9 so that the USA can use Japanese soldiers in wars of our choosing, rather than using our own soldiers. Article 9 is seen in Asia as Japan’s apology for what it did in World War II. Thus these efforts to kill Article 9 frighten all of East and Southeast Asia who have not forgotten Japan’s 1930s imperial aims and its World War II behavior. Because of Article 9 – no person on Planet Earth has been killed by Japanese soldiers under a national right of belligerency, since the end of World War II. What an amazing record compared to the USA, the USSR, and many other militarily and economically powerful nations.

A colleague and friend, Ohio University journalism professor Dru Evarts, was able to get one of our local newspapers, *The Athens News*, to publish my weekly “Letter from Japan.” A few editorial changes, with which I do not agree, appear in these letters from time to time – changes such as sometimes calling Article 9, “Title 9” – and bluntly saying, without understanding the subtleties of that complex process, that Article 9 was forced down Japan’s throat after World War II. These, however, are minor little details. I am so grateful to my friend and colleague Dru and to Terry Smith, *The Athens News* editor, for their help in enabling me to share a tiny bit of my exuberantly meaningful 2007 five weeks in Japan.

Five of my six letters were published in the *Athens News*. All six of them were ultimately printed in the Athens Unitarian/Universalist Fellowship monthly newsletter – June 2007 to January 2008 issues.

These six “Letters from Japan” in this their “emailable” version are basically what I originally wrote -- without the editorial changes mentioned above.

Finally I must also thank my great chief 2007 Japanese trip organizer, Ms. Yoko Takada, for her amazing competency and creatively thoughtful effort in making this trip such a meaningful adventure.

Peace,

Chuck Overby, Ph.D.
Ohio University Emeritus Professor
Industrial and Systems Engineering
Internationalist, Registered Professional Engineer, Eco-Engineer
World War II and Korean War Veteran—combat pilot in Korea
Veterans for Peace [VFP] member

Overby's first letter -- May 2007 -- from Osaka Japan

Friends and colleagues in Athens and Ohio University --

My friend, Journalism professor Dru Evarts, has stimulated me with the possibility of being able to share a little of the excitement of my five week lecture tour in Japan. I arrived in Osaka on May 24, 2007. She said that if I would write a few pieces along the way on my adventure, she would try to get local Athens newspapers to print them. This is the first of several, depending on how time on a busy schedule allows me to do so.

My first lecture on this tour took place on May 26th at Kansai University in Osaka Japan with about 300 persons in attendance -- townspeople, university faculty and students. We are next headed to Kyoto, Hiroshima, and Nagoya -- then on to many other Japanese cities. I hope to have lunch with Hiroshima's Mayor Tadatashi Akiba on June 1 or 2.

On this trip I am trying to encourage Japanese people not to allow Article 9 of their constitution to be emasculated by their government. Much push to destroy Article 9 also comes from the United States government.

Article 9 reads as follows ---

"Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes.

In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized."

This clause in Japan's constitution has been the reason why, since the end of World War II, no person on Planet Earth has been killed by Japanese soldiers under the right of belligerency. Compare this record with that of most other major economic powers -- USA, USSR, Russia, England, France, to name a few.

Some of us think that Article 9 is such profound and beautiful wisdom for all humanity, that we cannot allow Japanese and US governments to destroy it. In fact we think that an Article 9 clause ought to be in every nation's constitution. This is my message as I travel across Japan from Hokkaido in the north to Okinawa in the south.

Borrowing from the idea of "Doctors Without Borders", "Engineers Without Borders", and "Magicians Without Borders", the title of my paper is -- "Imagine the Magic of an Article 9 Without Borders."

I will be speaking at several Japanese universities, and in general public lectures in many cities. I will also have an opportunity to discuss with some Japanese engineers and scientists -- their potential to contribute to "oil resource war" prevention, and pollution and "global warming" prevention -- through the adoption and use of "Green Technology By Design." (GTBD)

I brought with me to Japan over 1,500 folded origami peace cranes. My cranes connect "Little Boy" and "Fat Man," with Sadako, and Article 9 of the Japanese constitution, "Little Boy" and "Fat Man" were the two nuclear bombs that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, and Sadako was the little Hiroshima Japanese girl who died 10 years after the war from bomb induced leukemia. The reason for the "connection" mentioned above is that I see Article 9 as all humanity's cry for an end to that gross, brutal, dominantly masculine obscenity called "war."

Athens Unitarian Fellowship friends and two neighbor boys Jonathan and Christopher were my very much appreciated "crane folding team.

Peace,

Chuck Overby

Friends, colleagues, and students at Ohio University,

My friend and colleague, Journalism professor Dru Evarts has indicated that I should write some folksy stuff on my contacts with my Japanese friends on this five week lecture trip across Japan. Unfortunately this is not a tourist or a "folksy" trip. I am here in Japan on very serious business -- to encourage Japanese people to work very hard to keep their government and our USA government from destroying Japan's beautiful war renouncing Article 9.

This serious effort however is periodically punctuated with delightful parties full of fun, food, and conviviality all of which is enhanced with a bit of great Japanese, Asahi, Kirin, or Sapporo beer. These events, which usually follow in the evening after each speech, warm me to feel some "community" with my Japanese friends. At these parties each person around the tables democratically has her or his brief say on the events of the day. What a nice Japanese cultural phenomenon.

After leaving Kansai University on May 27th we traveled to the beautiful old Japanese city, Nara, a place I had not previously visited in my many trips to Japan -- then on to Kyoto for two days, May 29 and 30. In Kyoto I presented my paper, "Imagine the Magic of an Article 9 Without Borders" to a Ritsumeikan University class of some 300 students, and visited the Ritsumeikan University Peace Museum. Then on May 31st we headed for Hiroshima.

In Hiroshima, June 1 and 2, I -- [1] presented a paper at the 7th International Society for Universal Dialogue (ISUD) on the need to spread war-renouncing Article 9 to the entire world; [2] visited the Hiroshima Peace Museum and Peace Park where my trip organizer, Yoko Takada, and I placed a chain of the Athens Unitarian Fellowship folded origami crane at Sadako's statue, and; [3] had lunch with Hiroshima Mayor Tadatoshi Akiba.

Mayor Akiba holds a Ph.D. in mathematics and has taught at Tufts University in the USA for several years. As a person and as current mayor of Hiroshima, the first city to be vaporized and incinerated by a nuclear weapon -- he is completely dedicated to the total elimination of nuclear weapons from the face of Planet Earth. Mayor Akiba is also committed to keeping the Japanese and US governments from destroying this "all humanity's cry for and end to war" -- Article 9. Thus, you might understand how delightfully meaningful I found our June 2, 2007 luncheon meeting.

Mayor Akiba also hosts a significant effort to encourage the development of a "peace culture" to replace the dominant *cultures of violence" that so much afflicts us as a species on Planet Earth. This effort is headed by a US citizen, Steven Leeper, who is Chairperson of the Board of Directors of the "Hiroshima Peace Culture Foundation."

After Hiroshima, we headed to Nagoya where I have several lecture and other kinds of meetings -- including one with several of Nagoya University's engineering and science faculty and students -- on the possibility of our using our beautiful engineering and scientific skills to help -- [1] prevent "resource wars", [like the dominantly oil-resource-war currently being fought in Iraq by the USA]; [2] prevent ecosphere pollution; and [3] prevent global warming. All this is possible if only our cultures seriously ask us as engineers and scientists to get busy doing more of these kinds of "good things." This we in America presently do not do. These "good things" are possible if our cultures seriously ask us, as engineers and scientists, to shift gears and do less in the design and creation of things for killing and destruction -- military stuff. I will report on these Nagoya and future meetings around Japan in my third -- "letter from Japan."

Peace,

Chuck Overby

Overby's third letter -- 12 June 2007 --- from Sapporo Japan

Hello once again Athens friends, and colleagues, and students at Ohio University. I am writing this third note from Sapporo, Hokkaido Japan.

In my last letter I neglected to say something on my June 2nd discussion with Hiroshima's Mayor Akiba -- about the recent assassination of Nagasaki's Mayor Ito. The late Mayor Ito, as the mayor of Nagasaki, the second Japanese city to have been vaporized with a nuclear weapon -- was also a significant advocate, [1] for the elimination of all nuclear weapons from Planet earth and [2] to keep the Japanese and US governments from killing Japan's war renouncing Article 9. Mayor Ito's assailant, a gang member whose car had been damaged by city equipment was arrested at the scene of the crime. However, there is some feeling by some Japanese people that Ito's assassination may have had a political dimension to it because of his strong position on eliminating nuclear weapons and saving Article 9. These kinds of feelings are a little like those that some people in America still have about the assassinations of President Kennedy, his brother Bobby, and the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr..

Hiroshima mayor Akiba is thinking of making a trip to America to help educate US citizens on what it means to have a city vaporized by a nuclear weapon. In view of what happened to Nagasaki's Mayor Ito, I worry a little about Mayor Akiba's health and safety as he continues to push for nuclear weapons elimination from Planet Earth -- and to keep Article 9 from being killed by Japanese and US governments.

This past week I have been involved in numerous presentations and other activities in support of Article 9 -- [1] a public lecture sponsored by the Nagoya Article 9 Society--Japan Net and Aichi University [250 attendance] -- [2] a Nanzan University class of 40 students -- [3] a Nanzan high school class of 50 students -- [4] a Nagoya University discussion session with 20 faculty engineers and scientists on, "oil-resource-war" prevention, pollution prevention, and "global warming" prevention by using GTBD [Green Technology by Design] as one of Japan's contributions for world peace and justice with Article 9 as Japan's badge of honor -- [5] a public lecture at Nagoya University sponsored by the Nagoya University Article 9 Society [300 attendance] -- [6] a Nagoya YWCA discussion meeting with 20--25 women -- [7] a visit to the new Nagoya city Peace Museum with discussion [20 persons] -- Seto City discussion with Seto city council members followed by a peace march with me in costume as a "war--addicted" Uncle Sam. Seto City is a city near Nagoya that is famous for its beautiful ceramic

work -- dishes and art objects, etc. [8] a dinner and discussion session with a Nagoya GAIA group [15- 20 people] -- [9] a public lecture in Iida City [200 attendance] -- [10] a public lecture and a peace march in Ueda City, again with me in costume doing some performance art as "war--addicted" Uncle Sam [120 attendance] -- and finally [11] a public lecture in Nagano City [500 attendance]. Nagano is the beautiful place in the mountains where the Winter Olympics were held a few years ago

After an evening lecture in Sapporo on June 12, I leave for Kushiro -- also in Hokkaido.

My Japanese Article 9 loving friends are so thoughtful and kind in looking after me as I roam their islands on my quest for peace and justice seeking an "Article 9 Without Borders" for Planet Earth.

Peace,

Chuck Overby

Hello once again Athens and Unitarian friends and colleagues and students at Ohio University --

I am writing this from Tokyo. Since my last "letter from Japan" I have made public presentations on "An Article 9 Without Borders" in Hokkaido, Japan's northern most major Island - June 12th in Sapporo, [180 attendance] and June 13th in Kushiro 120 attendance]. We traveled from Hokkaido back to Nagoya for a discussion meeting on June 14th with several young adults so as to understand their opinions on current Japanese and US governmental attempts to destroy Article 9.

On June 15th I attended photojournalist, Ryuichi Hirokawa's dramatic photographic show in which he explored the awful reality of life in the horribly conflicted Israeli - Palestinian situation. Hirokawa is the chairman and editor in chief of a most meaningful journal, *Days Japan*, a magazine dedicated to photo-journalism that will help citizens more clearly understand the bestiality and insanity of war, violence, human rights abuse, environmental degradation, etc. around the world. This kind of photo-journalism is almost completely absent in most all United States media, thus contributing to American citizen ignorance as to the reality and brutality of our operations in Iraq and elsewhere around the world where we apply our military forces to problems, almost all of which have no military solutions what-so-ever.

We arrived in Tokyo the morning of June 16th for an early afternoon Tokyo high school presentation on "Imagine the Magic of an Article 9 Without Borders" [over 100 attendance] -- then to a conviviality gathering of several Japanese friends, most of whom have spent time in Athens.

On Sunday June 17th, for the first time in my nine trips to Japan since 1992 in support of Article 9 -- loud audio amplified speakers outside the lecture hall protested my lecture. These groups are right-wing Japanese nationalist chauvinistic people who strongly wish for Japan to kill Article 9 so that once again Japan can be a so-called "normal nation." "Normal nation" means one that can operate around the world, getting its way in international relations with military power -- as often does the USA.

In my opinion if Japan and the USA kill Article 9, this action will destabilize much of East Asia and help to launch a new dangerously stupid arms race in this region of the world. Of course arms races are good for the stockholders of US weapons companies who smile all the way to the bank as weapons sales climb. Unfortunately for Japan, the destruction of Article 9 will simply make it easier for the USA to use the Japanese SDF [Self Defense Forces] rather than US soldiers to do the killing and destruction in wars of United States choosing around the globe.

I am having fun in passing out my signature, flapping winged origami peace cranes. In my air travels around Japan I have given cranes to the stewardesses and have had them ask me to teach them how to fold them. I have also shared my cranes with Japanese airline pilots, earning some credibility with them when they learn that I too am a pilot of large airplanes -- a Korean War B-29 pilot. Thus I spread the message about the great importance of Japan's wonderful Article 9's renunciation of war -- one crane at a time, much as did Johnny Appleseed as he planted apple seeds around America.

After leaving Tokyo on June 20th we go to Osaka again and then to Okinawa and Akita before heading home.

Peace,

Chuck Overby

Editor's note: This is the fifth column sent from Japan by Athens peace activist Charles Overby, professor emeritus of engineering, who devotes his life to trying to keep Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution alive and encouraging other nations to adopt it. It reads in part: ". . . [T]he Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat of use of force as a means of settling international disputes." Overby is a veteran of both World War II and the Korean War, in which he was a combat pilot

Looking out over the blue and green coral reef bay of Naha, Okinawa's capital, I see beauty and peacefulness from the hotel room in which I am writing this column. But the view from another window of this room is not so peaceful – the controversial United States Futenma Air Base.

Not only has Futenma caused bad relations here for the United States, it is about to be replaced by a new U.S. base to be built at Henoko Bay, a few miles north.

Most Okinawan people seem angry at the idea of the new Henoko base for a variety of reasons – (1) too many U.S. bases already on Okinawa—some 38, according to scholar Chalmers Johnson, in his book, *The Sorrows of Empire* (2004), (2) disruption of the natural sea habitat and other ecological concerns, and (3) social and cultural pollution—rapes and other forms of violence, rampant prostitution, and general societal disruption caused by the concentration of such large numbers of U.S. soldiers on this small Okinawan island chain. Okinawa is about 0.6 percent of Japan's total land area and yet it is home to about three-fourths of all the U.S. military bases in Japan.

I think that most Okinawans would like to have their government remove all military bases from Okinawa—both U.S. and Japanese bases. They see the "bases," especially U.S. bases, as foul fountains of pollution, damaging almost everything in their land, from the ecospheric to the social and cultural habitat.

Unfortunately, as is frequently also the case in the USA, the Japanese government ignores the wishes of its people and plows along on a course opposed by a majority of its citizens. Such phenomena leave me with much concern as to the health of democracy in both countries. I will say more about my four days on Okinawa in my next and last column from Japan—including some reflections of once again seeing those long Kadena Air Base runways from which my crew and I lifted off many times in our 70 tons of B-29 violence bound for North Korea over a half century ago.

After Okinawa I travel to Akita, a few hundred kilometers northwest of Tokyo for a public meeting and an Akita University class discussion. I will also visit there with friends and family of the late Dr. Hiroshi Katsumori, a former Chubu University vice president and one of the pioneers who in the early 1970s helped to build that "bridge across the Pacific"—the Chubu University-Ohio University exchange program. This is a bridge that I crossed in spring 1981, and one that significantly changed the course of my life. Because of this opportunity, I first learned about Japan's Article 9, saw Hiroshima for the first time, and absorbed much for use in my quality systems engineering teaching responsibilities – and that also relate to my passion for Article 9's wisdom.

On that 1981 Chubu exchange program I discovered much about how Japan almost drove the U.S. automobile industry out of business in the late 1970s and early 1980s with their "quality and reliability by design" automobiles.

Now some of you might wonder – how does Japanese "quality and reliability by design" relate to my passion for keeping Article 9 alive. Well, it turns out that this 1981 Chubu experience was very helpful in enabling me to recognize and articulate my ideas for "green technology by design" [GTBD] – as a way of creating and designing technology systems that can help to prevent -- [1] ecospheric pollution, [2] the fighting of oil and other kinds of resource wars [water for example], and [3] global warming, etc. If Japan's engineering and scientific competence can almost drive the US auto industry to bankruptcy in the 1970s and 80s – I suggest in my lectures that perhaps Japanese engineers and scientists might be able to demonstrate a most significant non-violent, non-military contribution to world peace and justice – and at the same time help to save Planet Earth -- by doing GTBD.

If we as a species can keep Article 9 alive and encourage Japan, with Article 9 as its badge of honor, to demonstrate these kinds of non-violent non-military contributions for world peace and justice -- then we will have made a significant step toward our survival as a species.

I think that we in the USA are addicted to seeing a military solution to many of our problems on Planet Earth -- when in reality most of the problems we face have no military solutions what-so-ever. I therefore urge that we encourage Japan to keep Article 9 strong and healthy, rather than try to kill it, and for Japan to demonstrate this kind of world-class leadership so that we might find better ways than war and violence to try and cope with our problems.

Peace,

Chuck Overby

I write this, my sixth and final “report from Japan,” while I recover from jet-lag,” shortly after returning to Athens. This one will mostly deal with my Okinawa visit from June 22—26, 2007.

Japan’s Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s path and mine fortuitously crossed in Naha airport on Friday, June 22. We arrived almost simultaneously -- each to do our own thing – I to argue for keeping Article 9 alive and well as a needed model for all nations on Planet Earth, and Abe to commemorate the June 23, 1945 official end of the “Battle of Okinawa” that killed more than a quarter of Okinawa’s civilian population (estimated at 140,000), along with roughly 70,000 Japanese and 13,000 U.S. soldiers.

Abe and I did not hit it off very well from the start. My Okinawan hosts had planned a small press conference for me – but I was no match for Abe. The reporters who were to interview me were nowhere to be found – they were all covering the Prime Minister. I did catch up with Abe the next day at a large protest against him where many armed police worked to keep the protesters away.

Abe was born after World War II and thus has had no war experience. He is a conservative prime minister who wants to destroy Article 9 so as to enable Japan to become a so-called “normal nation” – meaning one that is free to once again send its military beyond Japan’s borders. Prospects for this frighten all Asian and Southeast Asian countries who have not forgotten Japan’s World War II brand of militarism - and who see signs of it resurfacing once again with Abe, and his wish to kill Article 9.

Abe is disliked on Okinawa because of his passion for greater alliance with the USA and for the Japanese Ministry of Education’s recent order to remove references from history books on how Japan’s World War II military encouraged Okinawan civilians to commit suicide.

I was moved to be back on Okinawa where, over a half century ago, my B-29 crew and I lifted off from Kadena Air Base on our 10 to 12 hour North Korean night-bombing missions. It was usually daylight when we returned. I fondly remember the welcome early- morning sight as we passed over the tiny island, Ie Shima, off Okinawa’s northwest coast -- the first land to be seen after hours over the East China Sea.

On this visit to Okinawa I was happy to plant my feet on this little “welcome home” Ie Shima island – and even spend a delightful night there in a Japanese Tatami-Mat Peace Hostel in meaningful community with eight other of our Japanese tour group. This Peace Hostel is part of an Okinawan US Base Removal Retreat facility that honors the memory of one of Okinawa’s pioneer Base Removal activists.

The famous reporter, Ernie Pyle was killed on Ie Shima on April 18, 1945. A small monument at the site of his death commemorates Pyle as that war correspondent who was a special friend of the ordinary GI.

In an earlier “report from Japan” in this series, I commented on the environmental, social, and cultural pollution on the island caused by having large concentrations of foreign soldiers in such a small area. Rapes and prostitution are a problem on the island. This kind of pollution has a long history on Okinawa. With the help of a local Okinawan historian, we were able to locate the grave of William Board, the first U.S. soldier to have raped an Okinawan woman in 1854. Board was a sailor from Commodore Perry’s 1853 and 1854 somewhat arrogant mission to “open Japan.” The Okinawans drowned Board. His grave lies in a private small Naha cemetery that commemorates Perry’s voyages. Perry stopped in Okinawa on his way to Tokyo in 1853 and 1854.

Kadena AFB was not easy to see because of a very high wall around parts of the base near the runways. This wall reminded me of the humongous wall that Israelis have been building to separate themselves from their Palestinian neighbors. Fortunately, an ingenious Okinawan entrepreneur, recognizing the lucrative market potential for “peeks over the wall,” has set up a three story restaurant near the takeoff end of the runways. From this vantage point I was able to remorsefully relive many takeoffs as we roared, off to make the rubble bounce in North Korea.

Speaking of walls around U.S. bases – it was easy to know when you were near one of the 38 U.S. Okinawan bases. All of them are fenced by large concrete-post barbed wire with the wire on the top angling out and away – to keep Okinawans out. These fences reminded me of the concrete-posted Auschwitz fences that my wife and I saw several years ago when we spent a week at an Auschwitz conference. At the Auschwitz death camps the top of the barbed wire fence is bent in to keep the victims in – whereas on Okinawa the top of the fence is bent out – to keep the victims out. Many Okinawans feel that they are victims of a U.S. occupation of their beautiful little tropical paradise.

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to share a tiny bit of this meaningful 2007 Japan experience with you all. Thanks to all who have helped to make this possible.

Peace,

Chuck Overby.