



OBON SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

September 2025

Washington D.C.

Anniversary of the First Day of Peace

Part One

During a visit to Japan last winter I saw a phenomena that I had never imagined possible.
The bright sun suddenly appeared in the middle of a snowstorm.
I have seen snow, and I have seen sunshine...but not together.



This “hot and cold” contrast reminded me of our recent visit to Washington D.C.

Our purpose for going to D.C. was to welcome and accompany a group of Japanese gentlemen, all in their 80's, who were traveling 14 hours by plane for the single purpose of showing respect to the Americans who lost their lives in WWII. Each of these men shared a similar childhood history.



They were all born in the latter 1930's or early 1940's, which means they were innocent little children during the time of WWII.



These men suffered the unfortunate fate of having their fathers drafted into the military, killed and no remains were ever found and returned for burial. Only a few have any memory of their fathers; most were left with only a family portrait such as this image below.



Of course thousands of American children suffered the same fate. Their fathers were killed in the war too. However, in America we honored and respected the deceased and we supported the widowed wives and children. None of this was available to the Japanese families after the war.

Nevertheless, the most painful hardship these men describe is the lack of closure. These men had no father in their lives and no grave they could visit. The Japanese culture, infused with Buddhist tradition, has deeper respect for the deceased than what people from the American culture can imagine.

For example, our traditional funeral rites here in America involves two ceremonies; one in the church and another at the grave site. The Japanese reverence for deceased relatives exceeds even our wildest imagination. In Japan a traditional funeral involves *fifteen* separate ceremonies.

A perfect example of this Japanese reverence for the deceased can plainly be seen during the final months of WWII. On April 1st, 1945, following weeks of heavy bombardment, the Americans landed 60,000 Marines on Okinawa. Their invasion was followed by tens of thousands more. Twelve days later the U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt died.

This news spread around the world and despite the war that raged across Okinawa, with hundreds of citizens being killed every hour, Japan's Prime Minister Kantaro Suzuki sent this message, via shortwave radio, to the Americans.

Today, the United States is fighting a superior war against our country because of the excellent leadership of your late President. I send my deepest condolences to the sorrow of the American people. However, I do not believe that Mr. Roosevelt's death will change America's continuing war effort against Japan. We will also fight harder than ever against the hegemony of your people.

It is hard to imagine such a message being transmitted by any other nation in a time of war. In fact, the German author Thomas Mann, who was living in exile during the war, heard of the message from Japan and wrote:

In Japan, a country of the Orient, there still exists a spirit of chivalry, a deep respect for death and a firm dignity. Compared to the noble spirit of Japanese people, we Germans should be ashamed".

This "*spirit of chivalry*" and the "*deep respect for the death*" is what brought these gentlemen to Washington D.C. They traveled from the other side of the world to show their sincere grief for the fallen Americans.



Chairman Toshiei Mizuochi leads the group as they await their transportation to the hotel.

The radical time difference is brutal on anyone who makes this journey. Nevertheless, these men were up early, dressed and on a bus going to Arlington National Cemetery before 8:00 A.M. (*Noon in Washington D.C. is 1:00 A.M. in Tokyo*)



They passed rows and rows of grave stones marking the sacrifices in battle. The Americans have lost a total of 1.2 million soldiers in all our wars (including our Civil War) since 1775, whereas the Japanese lost 2.4 million during WWII alone. In other words, the Japanese lost twice as many young men in half a dozen years as our nation has suffered in 250 years.



Our bus arrived at the Memorial Amphitheater and we walked to the entrance steps.



Ten men (including one granddaughter) made the long journey. Only four are allowed to participate in handling the wreath; the other six men watched from the sidelines.



The Chairman of the Bereaved Family Association, Mr. Toshiei Mizuochi, wrote a letter that he personally delivered to the State Department and Senators during his visit.



His letter said...

"The children of war dead who are the core members of our organization are now in their 80s. The earnest wish of many of these elderly children is, "We don't want war to happen again. We lost our fathers in the war, and we don't want anyone else to have to go through the same pain we did, with wounds that will never heal."



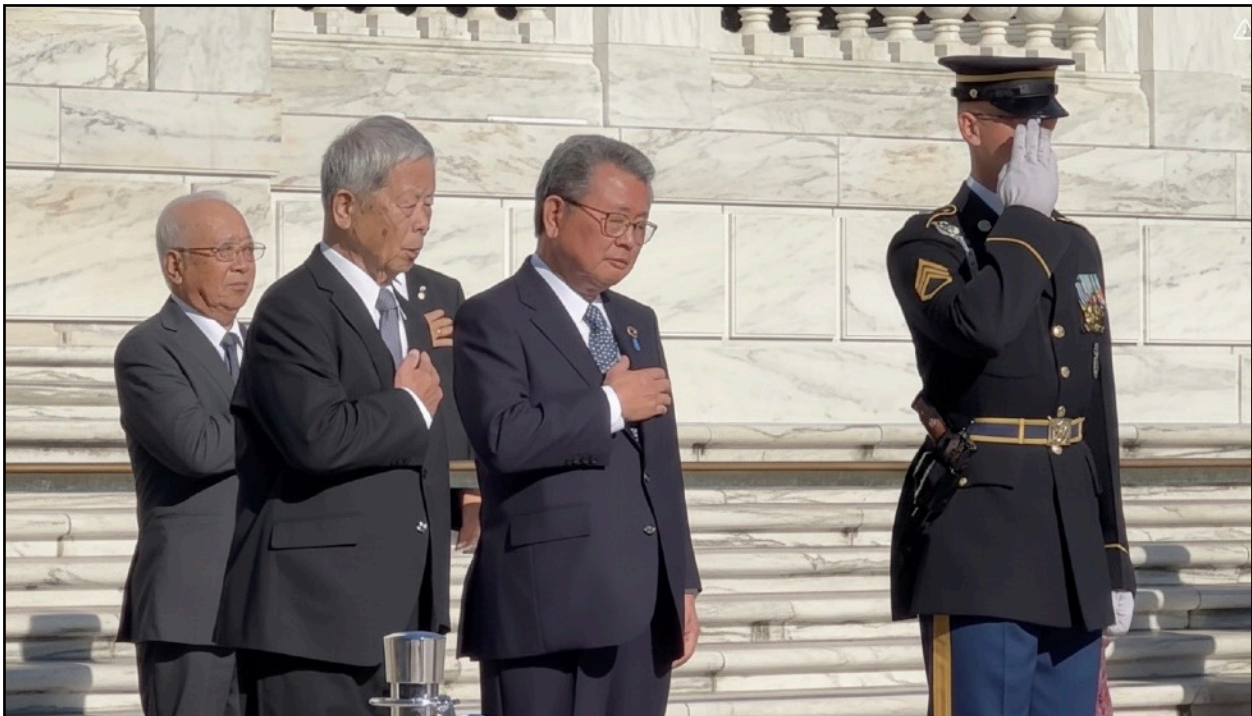
"In our country, more than 3.1 million people were sacrificed in the Pacific War. Those who remained mourned and reflected on those enormous sacrifices, worked hard, and single-mindedly desired a peaceful society, and today's peace and prosperity in our country were built through that."



"Although we do not have much power, we hereby pledge to continue to appeal to the strong and earnest wish that "we never want anyone to go through what we went through again," to pass on the memory of the war to the next generation, and to make honest efforts to build a permanently peaceful society."



"I lost my father in the war, was isolated due to the social changes that followed the end of the war, and suffered a brutal postwar life with my mother. These are deep wounds that I have harbored in my heart."



The daughter of one American WWII veteran who attended this ceremony rhetorically asked;

"What culture produces people who will pray at the graves of those who killed their relatives? Stunning. Almost incomprehensible to me."

September 3rd, 2025 marked the 80th Anniversary of the First Day of Peace between America and Japan.

The Japanese pledged to be peaceful, and in these past 80 years, their record is unblemished. No Japanese citizen has killed or harmed any other person from any other nation in the world. Their vow of creating a peaceful society has proven to be true and remains impeccable.

Ironically, in direct contrast, on that same day, while they were in Washington D.C., the White House announced they had decided to rename of our *Department of Defense* by changing it back to its former title, the *Department of War*.

The news story said this title change would restore the “warrior ethos” to the American military and help us shift towards a more offensively-oriented and lethal military approach to solving world problems.

These bellicose words drowned out Mr. Mizuochi’s peaceful declaration. The appeal for peace is personal...*“We lost our fathers in the war, and we don't want anyone else to have to go through the same pain we did, with wounds that will never heal.”*

Unfortunately, no news or media covered the story of these Japanese gentlemen’s journey to Arlington. It is as if it didn’t happen. Their words of peace have evaporated like a snowflake in the hot sun.



Stay tuned for Part Two of OBON SOCIETY’s trip to D.C., where we’ll share more about our meetings with Senate staffers and what unfolded beyond the Hill.

Thanks to the generous supporters who made this journey possible!

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