

## Challenging the U.S. Nuclear Tests: The Golden Rule Sails Again

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### Abstract

*In January 1958, Andrew Bigelow and three other anti-nuclear activists attempted to sail the 30 foot ketch, The Golden Rule, from California into the U.S. nuclear testing zone in the Marshall Islands to try to stop nuclear testing. While on a stopover in Honolulu, a U.S. federal court issued an injunction barring the voyage of the Golden Rule into the nuclear test sites. Despite the injunction, the four crew members attempted to sail twice and were arrested by U.S. federal law enforcement officials, tried, convicted and given sixty-day sentences and imprisoned. 55 years later, The Golden Rule, was found in a small shipyard in Eureka, California and her historical significance recognized. The boat had suffered the ravages of time and was in terrible shape. She is being carefully renovated by members of Veterans for Peace who intend to sail the boat on the West Coast as an educational vessel that personifies opposition to militarism and the use of nuclear weapons. Using documents from the Quaker House in Honolulu, the saga of The Golden Rule is a part of the rich history of maritime Hawaii.*

**Keywords:** Pacific Nuclear Testing, Protest Ships, Marshall Islands, AEC, Greenpeace

### Introduction

In 2010, Larry Zerlang, the owner of a boatyard in Eureka, Northern California, hauled out of a nearby bay a 30 foot double-masted Alpha 30 sailboat that had broken loose of her moorings and sunk during a big storm. Her underside had been punctured in two places and her deck was severely marred. She had been stripped of her engine, mast, cabin, rigging and masts. In searching the name of the boat, Golden Rule, Zerlang came upon a remarkable history of courage of the boat's crew over sixty years before, who left as their legacy, the founding of the international environmental action organization, Greenpeace. In 1958, four Quaker men opposed to the testing and use of

atomic and nuclear weapons, attempted to sail the boat, the *Golden Rule*, into the U.S. nuclear bomb test site near Eniwetok in the Marshall Islands. The boat's captain, Andrew Bigelow, a World War II U.S. Navy Lieutenant Commander, had been horrified by the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. In 1955, he and his wife learned first hand the effects of the atomic bombs when they housed two of the 25 Hiroshima Maidens, who came to the United States for reconstructive surgery for injuries caused by the dropping of an atomic bomb on the city of Hiroshima, Japan. Bigelow wrote, "I looked at the scarred faces, the grotesque deformities of lips and eyes, and the odd skin, and I felt as if I had been kicked in the stomach! I cried, 'My God, how awful!' Somehow, seeing those young women, who had been nine and thirteen years old when bombed, for me pulled everything together. Nuclear testing is a crime against mankind," said Bigelow.(Reynolds,P., 1958).

In the late 1950s, the U.S. and the Soviet Union tested large atmospheric nuclear weapons that produced radioactive fallout that turned up in cows' and mothers' milk. Public concern around the world grew, particularly in Japan which was receiving fallout from both Russian and American nuclear testing. From 1945-1962 the United States conducted 216

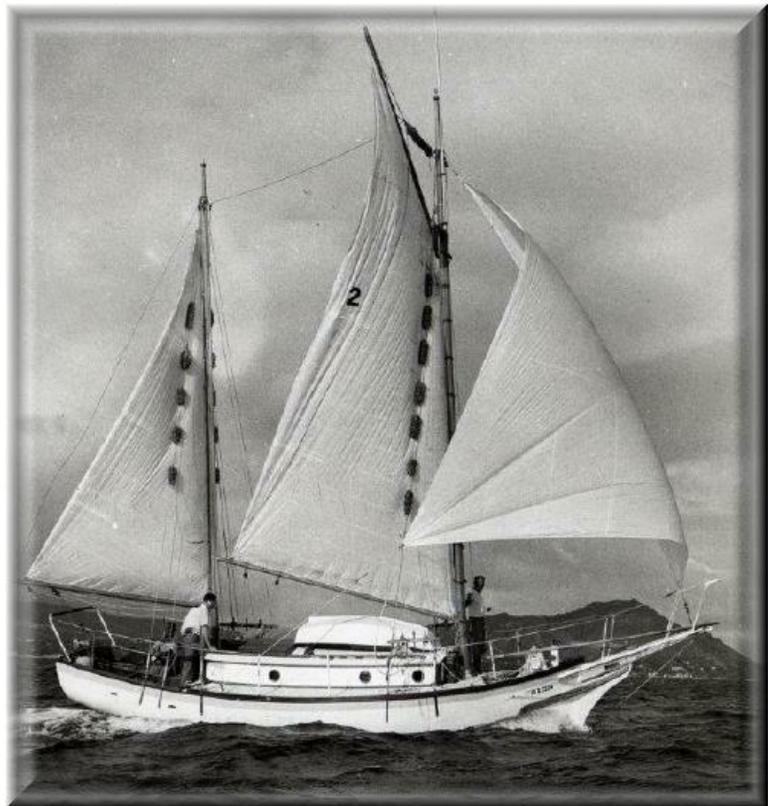


Fig. 1 *Golden Rule* sailing off Diamond Head.

aboveground nuclear tests; from 1949-1962, the Soviet Union conducted 214 aboveground tests; from 1952-1958, the United Kingdom conducted 21 aboveground tests; from 1960-1974, France conducted 46 aboveground nuclear tests; from 1964-1980, China conducted 23 aboveground nuclear tests and South Africa conducted one

aboveground nuclear test in 1979(Johnston, 2001).

Following the lead of anti-nuclear activists in Japan who formed the Japanese Council Against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs (Gensuikyo) and in Great Britain who founded the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), in 1957, activists in the United States formed the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE) that became the largest peace and disarmament group in the country. Stating that “All nuclear explosions are monstrous, evil, unworthy of human beings,” in late 1957, Bigelow and other Quakers formed another group, Non-Violent Action Against Nuclear Weapons, to conduct direct actions to stop the testing of nuclear bombs. One of their first decisions was to sail a protest boat into the Pacific nuclear test area—and that boat was the *Golden Rule*. In January 1958, Bigelow and the *Golden Rule*'s three other crew members wrote to President Dwight Eisenhower of their plans to sail into the nuclear test site: "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". They hoped their act would encourage fellow citizens to speak up about their concerns about nuclear weapons (Wittner, 2010).



Fig. 2 *Golden Rule* with Coast Guard ship.

On March 25, 1958, Bigelow, George Willoughby, 43, William Huntington, 50, engineer, and had studied for the ministry; after the voyage, he returned to teaching at a Friends school in New Hampshire (Oliver, 2013).

James Peck, although not a Quaker, had been a long-time practitioner of nonviolent

direct action, a conscientious objector in World War II, and a fierce advocate of racial equality. He fought for civil rights for African Americans while in prison during the war,

and in the U.S. Navy and merchant marine. In 1938, he was a founder of what would later become the National Maritime Union. Peck, who was badly seasick on the first attempt to sail from California, joined the crew in Hawaii. Both Peck and Bigelow later were among the original 13 Freedom Riders who in 1961 risked their lives to desegregate interstate public transportation in the American South. Peck was savagely beaten by a Ku Klux Klan mob, and Bigelow placed his own body between a mob and John Lewis, absorbing some of the blows intended for the man who would later become one of Georgia's U.S. Congressional representatives.



Fig. 3 Golden Rule newspaper article from Honolulu Quaker House scrapbook.

Lewis recounted the story at the 2012 Democratic National Convention. In 1961, “Albert Bigelow and I tried to enter a white waiting room, we were met by an angry mob that beat us and left us lying in a pool of blood. Some police officers came up and asked us whether we wanted to press charges. We said, ‘No, we come in peace, love, and nonviolence’” (Slosberg, 2013).

As the Golden Rule sailed across the Pacific, the State Department, the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC), and U.S. Navy officials discussed how to counter the challenge to nuclear weapons by concerned citizens. The U.S. Commander-in-Chief in the Pacific said 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 was concerned that sealing off a large area on the high seas surrounding the test site would "have serious international repercussions," while too lenient a policy toward protesters might open the way to participation by Japanese antinuclear groups. U.S. intelligence agencies swapped data on Bigelow, including information on his private telephone conversations and legal plans(Reynolds, P, 1958).

While the Golden Rule was on the high seas, the Eisenhower administration had the AEC issue a ban on entry into the nuclear test zone by Americans and pressured the Japanese government to block entry by its citizens. After arriving in Honolulu, Bigelow received from the port captain a copy of the local notice-to mariners that incorporated the AEC ban. Bigelow responded, "The nuclear weapons tests violate God's law. I believe a man must obey all laws that do not conflict with those of God. But if a conflict arises he must be prepared to violate the laws of the nation". At the request of the U.S. government, the U.S. federal court in Honolulu issued an injunction barring continuation of the Golden Rules' journey to Eniwetok. On April 24, a U.S. marshal served the crew a warrant to appear in federal court on May 1. Despite the legal ramifications of disobeying the injunction, the group decided: "We would sail -- come what may" (Bigelow, 1959).

On May 1, after consultation with their Honolulu lawyers and reinforcements from the mainland including A.J. Muste, a renowned anti-nuclear and civil rights activist, the crew sailed the Golden Rule out of the AlaWai harbor in Waikiki for international waters, three miles off Honolulu. But, one and one-half miles short of the international border and 1798 miles short of Eniwetok, a 40 foot Coast Guard patrol boat ordered the Golden Rule crew to stop for inspection. The Coast Guard cited Bigelow with having the boat's registration numbers on the bow, three eights of an inch too short and not drawn parallel to the water. With warrants already issued, the Coast Guard arrested the crew and took them to the one hundred year old Honolulu jail where they refused bail. The Honolulu evening newspaper, the "Star Bulletin," wrote that the crewmen were facing "their final test of fortitude. Imprisonment in the Honolulu jail comes under the heading of cruel and unusual punishment. If the quartet can still maintain its composure, the men are made of stern stuff". After six days in jail, the four appeared in Federal Court. The judge found them guilty of criminal contempt, and sentenced them to sixty days in jail and a year's probation. The judge suspended the jail time. That evening the newspaper ran an article stating that nuclear testing in the Marshall Islands had begun again (Bigelow, 1959).

Actions around the United States against nuclear testing increased due to the news of



Tough down.

*Fig. 4 Golden Rule lifted onto blocks for repairs.*

Maryland, picketing of the AEC offices continued. Five hundred Californians signed a petition asking that they be allowed to share the sentence of the Golden Rule's crew (Wittner, 2010).

In early June, the crew of the Golden Rule announced they would defy the injunction again. Bigelow was arrested and jailed for conspiring to violate a federal injunction. Huntington took over as captain and sailed the Golden Rule out of the AlaWai harbor. The crew managed to sail past the three mile international line before the Coast Guard caught up with them and towed the Golden Rule back to the harbor. The crew was tried again, convicted and imprisoned for sixty-days.

### **Reynolds Family Sail the Phoenix into the Nuclear Test Center**

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, their two children Jessica and Ted, and NiichiMikami, a Japanese sailor and shipwright from Hiroshima. They had sailed around the world on their hand-built sailboat, the Phoenix, and were returning to Hiroshima, Japan, where Earle Reynolds had coordinated anthropological research for the Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission, established by the

U.S. government to gather data on the effects of the atomic bombs dropped on two Japanese cities. The Reynolds were impressed by the goal of the crew members of the Golden Rule, as Reynolds was convinced that the U.S. government had misrepresented the deadly effects of radioactive fallout in Hiroshima and of subsequent testing of atomic and nuclear bombs. Reynolds also believed that the U.S. government had no right to restrict travel on the high seas. The Reynolds family decided to complete the voyage of the Golden Rule. On June 11, 1958, they quietly set sail from Honolulu for the nuclear test area in the Marshall Islands. On July 1, 1958, Earle Reynolds announced to the world by radio that the Phoenix had entered the U.S. nuclear test zone "as a protest against nuclear testing. Please inform appropriate authorities" (Reynolds, E., 1961).

The U.S. Navy boarded the Phoenix the next day, arrested Reynolds, and flew him to Hawaii for trial. His wife, his son and the Japanese sailor, sailed the Phoenix back to Hawaii from the Marshall Islands on a difficult voyage against prevailing winds and currents that took 60 days. Reynolds was convicted in Federal court and sentenced to two years in prison. These dramatic events heightened popular protest against nuclear testing. 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 (Reynolds, E., 1961) 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. Appearing on CBS television, AEC chair Lewis Strauss implied, as he frequently did when discussing opponents of nuclear weapons, that the opposition was a part of a Communist conspiracy. "At the bottom of the disturbance there is a kernel of very intelligent, deliberate propaganda" (Wittner, 2010). With worldwide public opposition to nuclear testing, the nuclear states slowly changed their policies. In late August 1958, President 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 eventually halt their nuclear tests. Their testing moratorium collapsed in the fall of 1961, when the Soviet government resumed nuclear tests. But because of continuing popular protest, in the summer of 1963, the three countries signed the Partial Test Ban Treaty that banned nuclear tests in the atmosphere. Even as the nuclear powers began to back away from nuclear testing, the influence of the Golden Rule and the Phoenix persisted. In November 1958, the crews of the Golden Rule and of the Phoenix traveled to Geneva, Switzerland to urge U.S., British, and Soviet negotiators to sign a comprehensive test ban treaty (Wittner, 2010).

### **Actions Against Nuclear Weapons by other Protest Ships**

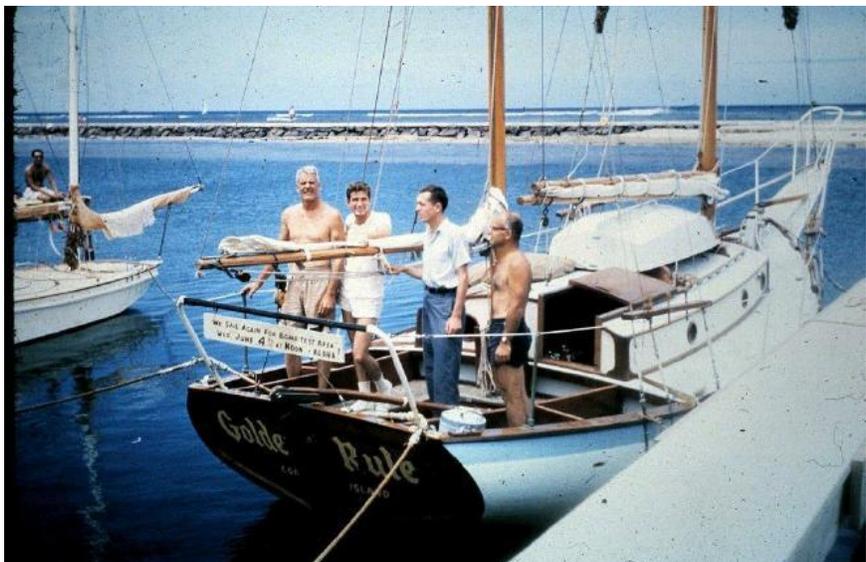
In the late 1960s, a group of American and Canadian peace and ecology activists met in Vancouver, British Columbia to discuss how to stop U.S. nuclear explosions being conducted underground on the Aleutian island of Amchitka in Alaska. Inspired by the example of the Golden Rule and the Phoenix, the group decided to “sail a boat up there and park right next to the bomb”. In mid-September 1971, these activists sailed the fishing trawler, the Phyllis Cormack to Amchitka, where they were stopped by the U.S. Coast Guard. They returned to Vancouver where they were met by thousands of supporters who formed an organization they called Greenpeace. Over the next forty years, Greenpeace ships have challenged nuclear weapons in ships named Rainbow Warrior and now challenge pollution of the oceans--most recently against oil drilling in the Arctic in a ship named the Arctic Sunrise that is still held by the Russian government. Its crew was released from Russian jails in late 2013 after 100 days imprisonment. This was not the first time the Russians had dealt with protest ships. As a protest against nuclear testing by the Soviet Union, Reynolds captained two additional voyages, the first by the Phoenix to Russian port of Nakhodka on the Pacific Ocean and the second by the Everyman III to Leningrad, Russia on the Baltic Sea.

After nuclear testing resumed 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 were kept on board until their release by Soviet authorities (Wittner, 2010).

### **The Golden Rule Sails Again**

The journey of the Golden Rule as a protest boat ended in 1958 in Hawaii with her sale to an undisclosed buyer. Where she sailed from 1958 to 2000 is a mystery. In the early 2000s, she was purchased by Eureka, California doctor Laurence Badgley who docked her for six years at Woodley Island Marina before anchoring her on his property off the peninsula south of Fairhaven, California. In 2009, she broke loose and washed up on the beach. Marina owner Leroy Zerlang and his son towed her off the beach, repaired her and re-anchored her off Badgley's property. In 2010 another storm sank her. Zerlang raised her and brought her to his shipyard where he was going to cut her apart. Local shipwright David Peterson said she could be repaired and Zerlang advertised in the



*Fig. 5 Golden Rule with crew at AlaWai boat harbor.*

area for individuals or groups interested in helping with the restoration. Fredy and Sheri Champagne, members of the Northern California chapter of Veterans for Peace, heard of the salvage of the boat and its history and asked if Veterans for Peace could restore her. Over the past three years, a team of dedicated craftsmen and volunteers have slowly repaired the Golden Rule. Contributions to the restoration have come from around the world. The story of the Golden Rule has sparked a renewed interest in citizen activism for the abolition of nuclear weapons.

Jessica Reynolds, the daughter of Earle Reynolds, has located the remains of her family's boat, the Phoenix, also in the San Francisco Bay area, but there are no plans yet for her restoration (Oliver, 2013).

Restoration of the Golden Rule is 90 percent complete. She will set sail again in 2014 as an educational vessel for disarmament of nuclear weapons and for peace.



*Fig. 6 Golden Rule with new stern and name.*

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I would like to acknowledge the work of the Northern California Veterans for Peace chapter, and in particular Fredy and Sheri Champagne, for their vision of a restored *Golden Rule* as an educational vehicle to teach about nuclear issues, restoration coordinator Chuck DeWitt, master shipwright David Peterson, and volunteers Dennis Thompson, Mike Gonzalez and Breckin Van Veldhuizen. Lawrence Wittner and Skip Oliver have conducted excellent research on the ship and written informative articles.

## Endnotes

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## **Biography**

**Ann Wright** *is a retired U.S. Army Reserve Colonel and a former U.S. diplomat who resigned in 2003 in opposition to the Iraq war. She has been interested in ships used as vehicles to protest governmental policies since she sailed as a passenger on one of the six ships on the 2010 Gaza Freedom Flotilla and was an organizer of the Audacity of Hope, the U.S. Ship to Gaza, in the 2011 Gaza Flotilla.*