

Dear Friends,

I. Sendai International Airport

On March 11th Japan was struck by a three-fold disaster causing the loss of nearly 20,000 lives. In the following days and weeks, 19,703 members of the US Forces, 140 aircraft and about 20 naval vessels including the USS Ronald Reagan took part in “Operation Tomodachi.” Thanks to their help and the dedicated efforts of thousands of volunteers, in just 8 months we can see great strides in recovery and revival. I would like to tell you the story of Sendai International Airport.

Sendai International Airport is located about one mile from the Pacific Ocean and has about 10,000 feet of runways. The tsunami that struck the airport was over 20 feet high and damaged the first floor of the main terminal, bringing all functions to a standstill, sweeping away hundreds of motor vehicles and covering the subway link completely.



Photos courtesy of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Flooding at Sendai International Airport

II. Operation Tomodachi

On March 12th, US Forces surveyed the area from aircraft and satellite images, and identified the airport as a strategic location for a hub for relief efforts in the region. They persuaded their Japanese counterparts to make reopening the airport a top priority. At first, the Japanese authorities couldn't imagine how they could possibly convert the airport into a hub, as the runways were still underwater.



Photo courtesy of the Japanese Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism: Sendai International Airport still partially submerged

On March 13th and 14th, the water gradually receded, but left an enormous amount of debris on the runways. The Airport Authority and Japanese Forces started clearing enough space for a helicopter to land by 7:00am on March 15th. By 10:00am, the first helicopter landed and they had cleared nearly 2,000 feet of runway. By 10:00pm they had cleared about 5,000 feet, or roughly half, of the total runway space.



SENDAI, Japan – Lt. Gen. Kenneth J. Glueck (third from left), commanding general, III Marine Expeditionary Force and commander of Marine Corps Bases Japan, meets with Lt. Gen. Eiji Kimizuka (far right), commanding general, North Eastern Army, Japan Ground Self Defense Force, to coordinate aid and relief for the people of Japan March 15. (U.S. Marine Corps Photo by Lance Cpl. Jason Chatman/Released)

On March 16th, US 353 Special Operations Group from the US Marines stationed in Kadena, Okinawa made a successful landing at the Matsushima Air Base with no ground support with an MC130 airplane equipped with special electronics for difficult flying and landing conditions. They brought combat controllers, some of whom were driven by the Japanese Self Defense Forces to Sendai International Airport to provide air traffic control there. Another MC130 was then able to land at Sendai delivering equipment needed to establish aerial port operations, supplies for the surrounding areas, fuel and the 353rd SOG commander. Thanks to this specialized assistance, the runways could more effectively be cleared. By March 18th C130 aircraft were able to begin landing at the airport delivering vital supplies including water, food, medicine and blankets to be distributed to the surrounding areas by helicopters and trucks.

On March 20th, a C17 Globemaster capable of carrying 77 tons of cargo arrived at Sendai Airport from Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson in Alaska with more supplies to distribute to the surrounding areas. Marines and Soldiers slept on cots on the second floor of the terminal with their Japanese counterparts, and worked hard to clean up and restore function to the airport. In the two weeks that followed, 1,175 tons of relief supplies and 15,000 gallons of fuel were delivered on 86 flights to Sendai Airport by US Forces.



III Marine Expeditionary Force/MCI Pacific, flickr.com



(U.S. Air Force Photo)



III Marine Expeditionary Force/MCI Pacific, flickr.com

By March 30th, all 10,000 feet of the runways were made available. Air traffic control was handed over from the US 353 Special Operations Group combat controllers to Japanese Airport Authorities on April 5th. As they left they saw a note made from logs and pine tree driftwood laid out on the sand on the beach: “Arigato.” Thank you.



(U.S. Air Force Photo)

The Sendai International Airport was reopened for commercial flights on April 13th, just a month and two days after it had been shaken by the earthquake and overrun by the tsunami.

III. Boeing 787 Dreamliner Made in Partnership with Japan

On September 26th, 2011 Boeing Everett employees delivered the first long-awaited 787 Dreamliner to All Nippon Airways, the launching customer. Boeing and ANA shared a joyful ceremony on the 26th, and a touching farewell early the next morning when the airliner departed for its new home.

In Japan, eager airplane enthusiasts gathered, waiting in passionate welcome at Haneda Airport in Tokyo on September 28th to catch a glimpse of the Dreamliner. The Japanese felt honored that they participated in the design of the aircraft, production of the carbon fiber material and wings and 35% of total component production. The next generation of passenger jets, and key parts of it were built in Japan. It is sure to dominate global markets in coming decades.



Photo courtesy of Boeing: 787 Delivery, Sep. 26, 2011

IV. A Special Flight for Children in Tohoku

ANA began commercial operation of the 787 on November 1st, but just before that, on Sunday October 30th, they sent their first Dreamliner to Sendai International Airport. They invited 232 children from tsunami-stricken areas of Miyagi and Fukushima Prefectures, some of whom had lost homes and families. They were very excited as the airplane made a low altitude circle over the airport before landing to pick up its special passengers.

Photos courtesy of ANA



ANA staff welcomed the children aboard the aircraft for a one-hour flight around the Tohoku Region. As they prepared for takeoff, the ground crew waved. Some children looked at the mountains from a whole new perspective out of the large Dreamliner windows. The entertainment systems claimed the attention of others as they watched anime at high altitudes for the first time. The children were able to look around the kitchen and take pictures inside the plane, and each received a certificate showing that they were passengers on the Revival Tour flight.

Photos courtesy of ANA



The children experienced unbelievable trauma and loss in the spring, but the fall and Sendai International Airport brought special memories to be treasured for a lifetime.



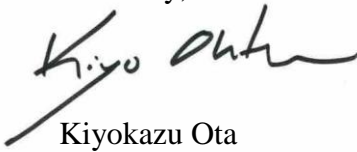
Photos courtesy of ANA

In Closing

In eight months time, the Sendai International Airport became a symbol of revival and hope for the future.

We are so grateful to the US Forces and volunteers who helped us through this heartbreaking crisis. We are overcoming it thanks to our current partnership. The Boeing 787 Dreamliner took many difficult years to complete, but through dedicated partnership, our collective dreams are now flying high. The younger generation taking to the skies in the next generation of aircraft is beautiful evidence that we can shape an even brighter future.

Sincerely,



Kiyokazu Ota
Consul General of Japan in Seattle

November 21, 2011

Photos courtesy of ANA

