

Father and Son

Remembering David B. Magee and his father Rev. John Magee

By Walter Ko❖

New York Times March 16 2013 printed the obituary of David B. Magee (1926-2013). He was a friend of Chinese people. His father Rev. John Magee (1884-1953) was an American honored by Chinese people for his courage and for the film footage he had taken with his movie camera in December, 1937. We are truly indebted to both the father and the son for what they have done.

At the Toronto, Canada Biennial Conference of Global Alliance of Preserving the History of WW II in Asia in 1998, I met Mr. David B. Magee. At the podium, he spoke in standard Mandarin Chinese: “I am Ma Tai Wai, I am Nanking❖ Chinese! Not a foreign devil”. His father, Rev. John Magee had been in China for Christian missionary work for many years. On December 13, 1937, the invading Japanese Army attacked and captured Nanking. Rev. Magee was the Chairman of International Red Cross Committee and a committee member of the Nanking International Safety Zone. Ignoring the warning from American Government, he decided to remain in the city along with other foreigners. He risked his life in documenting with his Bell & Howell 16 mm movie camera the war crimes and atrocities committed by the invading Japanese army in burning, slaughtering, raping and looting, thus creating a “living hell” out of Nanjing.

This film of bloody deeds done by the Japanese army was iron-clad evidence and eye-witness proof of the Rape of Nanking. Included in the 105 minutes of documentary were the blood-soaked bodies with 37 bayonet stabs of Ms. Lee Xiuying and Xia Shuqin whose entire family was killed.

In addition, there were many scenes of necks being chopped, killings after rapes, and refugees being burned. Rev. John Magee successfully smuggled the film out of China and eventually brought it to America. Later Life

magazine printed the horrible pictures of the Rape of Nanjing. After WWII, he went to the Tokyo International Tribunal to testify with his witness account for docket record. With this powerful story, I decided to encourage David to donate the camera and film back to Nanking to counter Japan’s denial of the Rape of Nanking.

Mr. Lou Reda has been an independent film producer. He made the documentaries of “Murder Under the Sun, Japanese War Crimes and Trial” and “History Undercovered: The Rape of Nanking”. With Lou’s help, I established contact with David Magee and he agreed to a personal donation trip back to Nanking. In December 2001, I visited David at his home in Rye, New York. He

showed this family treasure saying that he would not exchange it for a million dollars. I was excited to hold this significant and important historical item. After returning, I contacted the City Government of Nanjing, China for arrangement.

After sixty some years, Reverend Magee’s missionary church had been renamed the 12th High School in Nanjing. I made the recommendation of changing it to “John Magee Memorial High School”. However, I got the answer that changing into a foreign name needs to submit the proposal to Central Education Department and the chance of approval was remote. I made another suggestion of honoring with the school

library. During that period of time, president Sherwin Liou of the St Louis Alliance of Preserving the Truth of Sino-Japanese War (SLAPTSJW) and I helped arrange for editor Ding Bond Ji of Nanjing Daily to visit David Magee. The citizens of Nanjing were excited to learn about Rev. John Magee who had helped the refugees during Rape of Nanking in 1937 and his son David in the US who wished to make his donation at this time.

On October 1, 2002, accompanied by the members



*David B. Magee
(1926-2013)*

of the Alliance in Memory of Victims of Nanjing Massacre, Mr. and Mrs. David and Frances Magee came back to the ancient city of Ginling, the ancient name of Nanking (Nanjing). At 10 AM the following day in the Memorial Hall of the Victims in Nanjing Massacre by Japanese Invaders, Curator Zhu Cheng Shan accepted the donation as it was the only movie camera to capture the horror. The two women survivors in the film came up and held tightly David's hand in tears thanking David's father Rev. Magee for saving their lives. It was a moving moment.

In the morning of 3rd, David returned to his childhood home, Tao Sheng Church where he had spent ten years. At that time, it was his father's church and it would be dedicated as "John Magee Memorial Library".

Hundreds of students and teachers and officials welcomed with thunderous applause to the offspring of the founder across the ocean. The school was founded by Rev. Magee as "Enrich Wisdom Primary School" to educate poor kids in the neighborhood. The library at that time was the main chapel of the church. Now it was restored in a tradition Chinese way. In cutting the red silk ribbon, David spoke in excitement and tears: "My father will take this honor in heaven!" After the ceremony, he visited his father's office, bedroom and his brothers' bedroom. The hallway had been the shelter for women and girls during the Rape of Nanking. The house tour brought back his childhood memory.

Ms Shum Chung Wai, David's next door playmate before 1937, came over for a reunion. David enthusiastically held her hand and introduced her to Frances: "She was my first girl friend, and you are my last girl friend!" This Chinese-American innocent childhood friendship was long and strong. David was satisfied to see that his old home and the Drum Tower Hospital were well preserved and maintained. He was touched by the good tradition of hospitality, goodwill and friendship of Nanjing citizens.

Before heading back to America, he said, after vis-

iting the Memorial Hall of the Victims in Nanjing Massacre by Japanese Invaders, "I feel strongly on the pain, the loss and suffering of Nanking citizens. It makes me love and care for Nanking more. I am proud of the nobleness and courage of my father and am honored to donate our family treasure. I will in this life to return and repay my indebtedness to the citizens of Nanking who nurtured me for ten years!" David brought back fond memories back to America but left his heart and love in Nanking. With the leadership of president Sherwin Liou of St Louis APTSJW, we endeavored between U.S. and Nanjing, China to accomplish this important mission of great historic significance.

The father and son Magees have made an important chapter of history. Rev. John Magee courageously helped save the citizens of Nanking and risked his life in documenting the Rape of Nanking atrocities committed by the invading army of Japan. He went to the Tokyo International Tribunal to testify as witness in order to expose their shameful and horrible atrocities. For many years, David made presentations and commented in New York Times against Japanese denial. For humanity, peace and justice, truth of history, he came to visit and donated his family treasure for the survivors and victims of Rape of Nanking. It was a meaningful commemoration. Chinese people will never forget their dedication, contribution and American friendship. With eye witness account, ironclad proof and blood soaked record, it is irrefutable for Japan to whitewash, distort and deny the Rape of Nanking. This would be a strong fight against Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's statement of "Tokyo Trial is Victor's justice".

This is a commemoration on Rev. John Magee and Mr. David Magee. May they rest in peace; may their spirits live forever.

###

Walter Ko grew up in Hong Kong and came to the U.S. in 1973. He was a graduate of University of Missouri at Rolla and Central Missouri State University. He is a Board member of Chinese American Forum (CAF).



Rev. John Magee (1884-1953)

