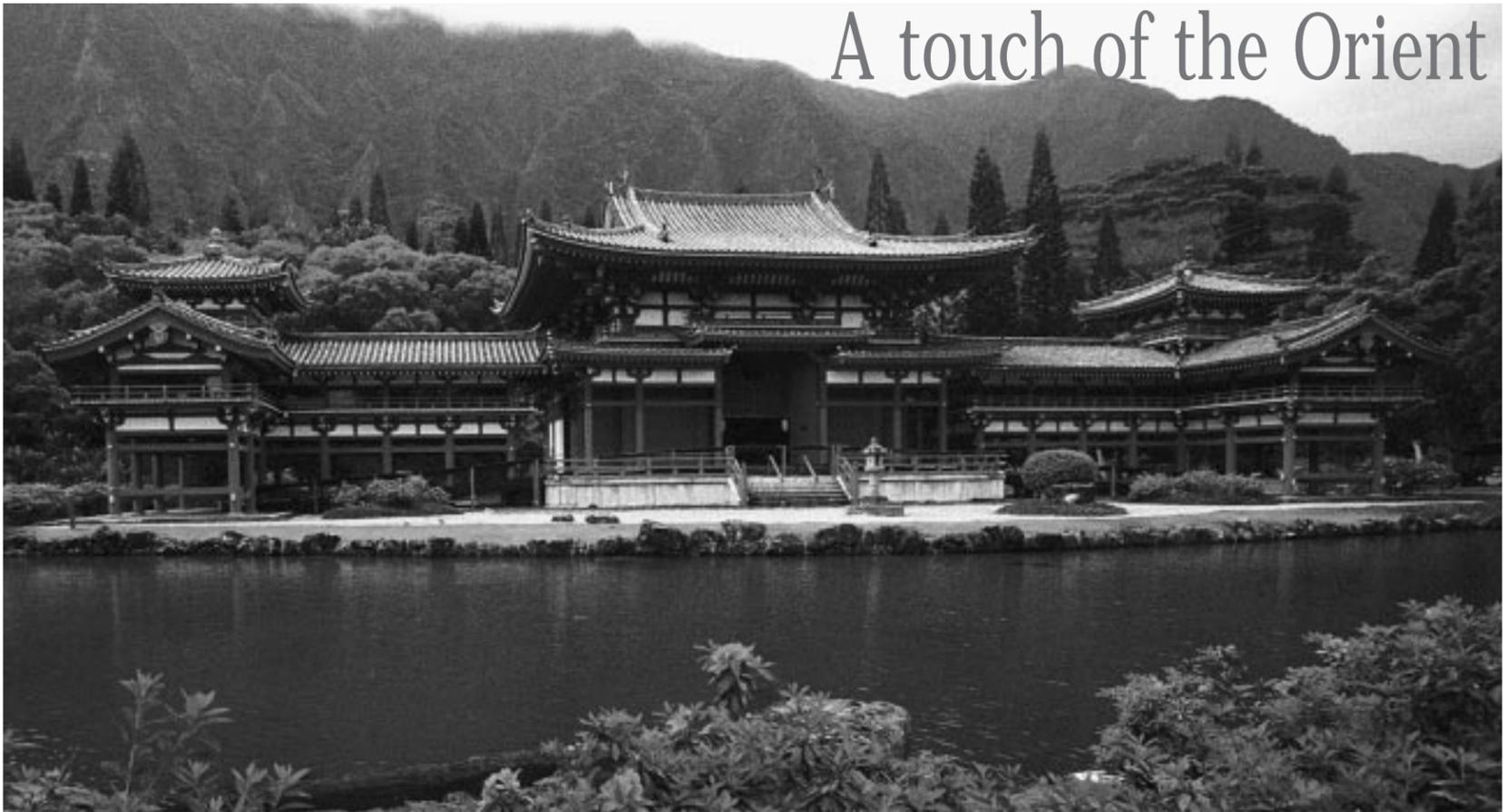


LIBERTY CALL

A touch of the Orient



Scrapbook: Hawaii

Byodo-in Temple...A touch of the Orient

Story and photos by J02 Greg Cleghorne
HNN Staff Writer

One of the advantages of serving in the armed forces is being able to travel to exotic places and see exotic things. On the other hand, sometimes the exotic places and things are brought to you. The Byodo-in Temple is such a place.

Nestled in the Valley of the Temples, on the windward side of Oahu's forest-green Ko'olau mountain range, the temple stands elegantly in front of a picturesque reflecting pool. It's brightly-painted red, yellow and white frame melds in gentle contrast with the lush green mountains rising hundreds of feet in the air behind it.

To the left of the main entrance, and just across a red and black-railed, arched bridge is a replica of the original temple bell. The sculpted, five-foot tall, three-ton bell was cast in Japan and is revered for its distinctive shape.

The tone made by striking the bell can be heard from a great distance and is said to sound a message of peace and spiritual cleansing.

The main structure is called Phoenix Hall and was designed to resemble the mystical bird (Phoenix) - credited with rising from destructive fire and ash - with its wings outstretched. Japanese and other religious leaders believed that the temple reflects the promise of the mystical bird, recreating spiritual hope.

A short walk from the bell and past small waterfalls is the Phoenix Temple. Inside is

a nine-foot, two-inch statue of "Amida, the Buddha of the Western Paradise." It is the largest wooden (and concrete) Buddha carved in more than 900 years and is covered with gold and lacquer.

The large, Japanese temple housing the statue might be considered slightly out of place for Hawaii, but that may just be its allure. It's a popular destination because of Hawaii's western cultural influences and because it's just plain beautiful.

Situated in neat, manicured order in front of the entire length of the temple is a Japanese rock garden. Some say the entire temple grounds are one big garden. The architects boast that Oahu's temple gardens are the largest of their kind outside of Japan.

According to Japanese lore and tradition, the many carp living in the pools surrounding the temple symbolize order and perseverance. In addition to the carp, colorful, wild peacocks are known to wander freely in and around the temple.

Oahu's Byodo-in Temple was opened in 1968 to coincide with the 100th anniversary of the first Japanese immigrants to arrive in Hawaii. The original temple, built more than 900 years ago, stands in the city of Uji-shi southeast of Kyoto and was the villa of a Japanese aristocrat.

The structure was part of a larger compound with many more buildings. Years later, after social and political upheaval, the villa was abandoned, but not forgotten. It was preserved as a masterpiece of 11th century architecture and is revered today as one of Japan's national treasures.

A replica of the original temple bell (below) is located to the left of the main temple entrance and across a red and black-railed, arched bridge. The sculpted, five-foot tall, three-ton bell was cast in Japan and is revered for its distinctive shape.



Nestled in the Valley of the Temples on Oahu's windward side, the Byodo-in Temple (top) offers a touch of the exotic Orient. It opened in 1968 to coincide with the 100th anniversary of the first Japanese immigrants to arrive in Hawaii.

Many carp, symbolizing order and perseverance, live in the pools that surround the temple (above left). A nine-foot, two-inch statue of "Amida, the Buddha of the Western Paradise", is the largest wooden (and concrete) Buddha carved in more than 900 years. The statue is covered with gold and lacquer (above right and below).

