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A 2014 American-German war movie directed by and starring George Clooney (Actor, Screenwriter, Film Director, and Producer; Los Angeles, California and Laglio, Italy) (1961-current) popularized the work of a special United States Army unit devoted to the rescue of art treasures stolen or hidden by the Nazis during World War II. A similar story occurred in Paris to a curious little monument closely linked to the history of Anesthesia. This happened about 70 years ago, in December 1944. *(Anesthesiology 2015; 122:521-3)*

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rather curious association if you do not remember the relevant contributions by both of them to the rise of modern anesthesiology. Wells, as it is known, was the first to use nitrous oxide as an anesthetic in dental extractions in 1844, but his first attempt to give a public demonstration of his discovery in January 1845—in front of Massachusetts Medical College students in a Boston public hall—turned out to be a partial failure due to an improper administration of the gas. Along the hard and controversial battle to give credit of the invention of anesthesia, some French medical societies were among the first, in 1848, to recognize the merits of Wells but this was too late: the unfortunate and upset dentist from Hartford had already committed suicide in January of the same year.

However, Paul Bert, one of the most brilliant pupils of Claude Bernard, became involved in the problems of anesthesia during his important studies on the physiology of respiration in the 1860s. His main contribution to anesthesiology—and his strongest connection with the work of Wells—consisted of developing a method to safely use nitrous oxide not only in dental practice but also in general surgery as an alternative/complement to the more effective but also more risky ether and chloroform. In 1878, he succeeded in doing so by administering nitrous oxide together with oxygen to animals in a positive pressure chamber of his invention.

During the last dramatic months of World War II, anesthesia was used more frequently on the battlefields and in the rear hospitals than studied from a historical point of view. Yet, apparently there was someone in liberated Paris of 1944, who had the presence of mind to celebrate in some way the centennial of (dental) anesthesia. The bust of Wells (fig. 2) was then recovered from its hideout, restored and replaced upon its pedestal where Paul Bert—much less visible, as a matter of fact (fig. 3)—was still waiting for him. Seventy years ago, on December 10, 1944, the monument was re-inaugurated in the presence of a United States Army colonel, a dentist, then stationed in Paris. The ceremony was followed by a 2-day celebration of Wells’ discovery, that took place at the École Dentaire of Paris, where René Bénard (M.D., cardiologist, historian of medicine, Société Française d’Histoire de la Médecine, Paris, France) (1882–1957) gave a lecture on nitrous oxide.

The double monument is still there and, when you are in Paris, I think it deserves a short deviation from the touristic mainstream of the nearby Champs-Élysées. The Wells and Bert monument is not memorable as a piece of art, but it still has more than a story to tell.
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