

# THE BELLS OF BALANGIGA

## Journey Home

### A Tale of Tenacity and Truth

by

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*The three “Bells of Balangiga” on display in front of the church of San Lorenzo de Martir, Balangiga, Eastern Samar, Republic of the Philippines. The two bells on the left are those that became the famous “Bells of Balangiga.” The smaller one on the right, the “Manchu Bell,” discovered to be the real signal bell, joining the others with all now known as, “The Bells of Balangiga.”*

This is a story about three sailors who were able to achieve the return of two Bells to the Church of San Lorenzo de Martir in the coastal town of Balangiga, Province of Easter Samar, Republic of the Philippines, from a museum on a United States Air Force (USAF) missile base in Wyoming, when the administrations of four Philippine and four United States presidents could not.

On December 14, 2018, the “Bells of Balangiga” returned to the Church of San Lorenzo de Martir on the island of Samar in the Philippines. For over 100 years they were on a military base near Cheyenne, Wyoming; first U.S. Army Fort D.A. Russell, a cavalry post and home of three regiments of the famous African-American “Buffalo Soldiers,” then renamed Francis E. Warren U. S. Air Force Base (AFB), home of the ICBM Minuteman III 90<sup>th</sup> Missile Wing and Twentieth Air Force.

In 1904 two 600-pound church bells were brought to Wyoming by the U.S. Army 11<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment as souvenirs from the “Philippine Insurrection,” now officially the “Philippine-American War.” They were originally believed used to signal a September 1901 Saturday morning surprise attack by Philippine revolutionaries against Company C, 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment. The regiment was Regular Army fighting a war where most units were state militia volunteers. The 9<sup>th</sup> had served on Luzon, sent to China and the “Boxer Rebellion,” and were now back in the Philippines positioned in the coastal town of Balangiga on the island of Samar to prevent hemp export that could provide money to the insurgency. Samar had some of the last holdouts from the Philippine Revolution with most of the other islands, especially Luzon, having been pacified. It was in China that the 9<sup>th</sup> gained its nickname, the “Manchus,” and now famous battle cry, “Keep up the Fire,” the last words of their heroic leader, Colonel Emerson H. Liscum.



*Possibly the most important piece of 20th century silver metalwork, the Liscum Bowl, was created in 1902 in honor of Col Liscum and his regiment.*

Following the attack, the church and adjacent belfry were burned in retaliation and three bells, two large campana and a smaller esquila, were sent to a Quartermaster storage or salvage yard on the adjacent island of Leyte, an island made famous in WWII with General Douglas MacArthur's "I will return" landing with American forces, and the Battle of Leyte Gulf, the largest naval engagement of the war. The bells were moved to prevent being melted into weapons by revolutionaries, not unusual during both Spanish and American times. (Filipinos often with humor refer to their colonial history as living 300 years in a convent and 50 years in Hollywood.)

Law on the confiscation of property in war was found in Army General Order 100 and in the Hague Conventions. Known as the Lieber Code or Lincoln Code, "Old 100" stated that "personal property" in war could not be taken unless by "military necessity." This was clearly the case where the bells would likely be used to make weapons, bullet casings, etc. However, the law also said that personal property should be returned at the cessation of hostilities, and that Church property was defined as personal property. Once the war ended on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1902, the bells should have been returned to their church. They were held in storage and the two campanas shipped in 1904 to Fort D. A Russell, that in 1947 became F. E. Warren AFB. The third bell, the real signal bell that became known as the "Manchu Bell," was given to the 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry in June 1902. A subsequent Pentagon legal opinion said that since it was one of the signals of attack, it was an "article of war," and was subject to confiscation and thus became U.S.

property. All that was about to change.

The loss of American life from the attack became known as the "Massacre of Balangiga." *Editor's note: An attack on U.S. Army Company C, 9th Infantry Regiment by Philippine Revolutionary Army forces and Balangiga villagers resulted in 48 KIA, 4 MIA and 22 WIA of the units 78 soldiers with only four escaping unhurt.*

Twice abandoned by the U.S. Army, the Bells were placed in a display stand in 1967 on F. E. Warren AFB and in 1992 accessioned as artifacts of the Museum of the United States Air Force. They became "The Bells of Balangiga" because of a book by that name written by retired USAF Colonel Gerald M. (Jerry) Adams published in Cheyenne in 1998. A friend of Jerry's was



*U.S. soldiers of Company C, 9th Infantry Regiment pose with one of the Balangiga bells seized as war trophy. Photo taken in Calbayog, Samar in April 1902.*

retired USAF Colonel James David (Dave) McCracken, a former base commander, prominent in Cheyenne, and the strongest voice and most influential reason the Bells remained for decades in Wyoming.

In 1996 the President of the Philippines, a former graduate of the United States Military Academy (USMA) at West Point, Fidel Ramos, once again sought return to their church. Earlier as Philippine Secretary of National Defence (SND), he had asked for help from his American counterpart, U. S. Secretary of Defense (SECDEF), Richard B. (Dick) Cheney, a former Congressman from Wyoming. This time President Ramos sent the Philippine Ambassador, the Honorable Raul Chavez H. Rabe, to Wyoming to determine if there was a path by which the Bells could return to the Philippines. Ambassador Rabe suggested that they become "symbols of peace and friendship." He accurately compared them to our "Liberty Bell." Not unlike the bells from the Philippines, the Liberty Bell received its name twenty years after being removed from a Philadelphia scrap yard. It became a national icon a hundred years later not unlike the Bells of Balangiga that became national icons over a century after having been brought to the U.S.

For over a decade Fidel Ramos, before and after becoming president, sought to gain return of the Bells. A West Point classmate and fellow distinguished graduate, retired U.S. Army Major General Neal Creighton, Sr., as President of the Robert R. McCormick Tribune Foundation in Chicago, offered



\$250,000 to make duplicates for Wyoming. I began to think of them as the Ramos-Rabe Bells. The Bells of Balangiga were important to a people whose nation had much of its historical patrimony destroyed in WWII with Manila's devastation being second only to Warsaw's.

Ambassador Rabe visited Wyoming three times. His goal was to have the bells home in 1998 for the Philippines centennial celebration of its declaration of independence. In spite of his sincerity, local resistance was overwhelming. Articles began to appear in local and national press. Former Governor Stan Hathaway, a WWII Army Air Corps combat veteran who also had served as Secretary of Interior, appealed to Senator Craig L. Thomas to help let the bells go home. Since it was believed that the two bells played a role in an attack on American soldiers and were artifacts of the "Massacre of Balangiga," he wrote, "The Germans have forgiven us for killing 300,000 people in the Dresden Bomb raid of 1945. I was on that mission." He could not understand how forgiveness was not possible from a revolutionary loss in battle 100 years ago. Keeping in Wyoming bells from a village church was not an honorable way to treat an ally and its people.

The appeal failed. In an 8 December 1997 phone call from President Ramos to the White House, a Malacañang Palace transcript of which was provided by Neal Creighton, President Clinton said to President Ramos, "We ought to be able to work something on that. I'll see what I can do." Nothing happened.

In April, Wyoming Senator Craig L. Thomas introduced Senate Bill No. 1903, "The Veterans Memorial Physical Integrity Act of 1998" which subsequently became part of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) 2000. That began a two-decade period of rancor and misunderstanding as a small group of Wyoming veterans who believed that the Bells were part of a war memorial fought for their retention in Wyoming. Four times the NDAA was used by the Wyoming Congressional delegation to enact a legislative moratorium on their return.

This made no sense to three former U.S. Navy officers. In 2013, retired Navy Captains Dennis L. Wright and Brian V. Buzzell and myself (Rear Admiral Daniel W. McKinnon Jr.), sought to find out why the Bells were in the U.S. and why that caused acrimony between friends. We understood the historic ties that bound the United States and its longtime ally, the Republic of the Philippines. I had command of the Navy's largest overseas logistics complex, Naval Subic Depot Subic Bay, from 1980 to 1982. Brian had been the Navy's Political Military Advisor during the 1991 military base negotiations and later led the closure of the former Naval Base. Dennis has a residence and business interests in the country and is a champion of Philippine economic development. Our understanding and the absence of a rational basis for the Bells location began a journey of discovery.

We discovered that the Bells had been brought to the U.S. in violation of law; they were not part of a war memorial; they were not one of the signals of a surprise attack against American soldiers; they were not "war booty;" they were not as one lawyer said, "instruments of war;" they were not part of Army, Air Force, or Wyoming history and heritage; they were the property of the Roman Catholic Church; they should never be part of an American war memorial; their presence in our country stood in embarrassing contrast to church bells returned by Americans to former adversaries Russia, Japan, and Germany; and that a legislative fiction called "Veterans Memorial Objects (VMOs)" had been created in law specifically to prevent their leaving the United States.



***The bombing of Dresden was a British-US aerial bombing attack on the German city during WWII. In four raids between 13-15 February 1945, 722 heavy bombers of the British RAF & 527 of the USAAF dropped more than 3,900 tons of high-explosive bombs & incendiary devices on the city. The bombing & the resulting firestorm destroyed more than 1,600 acres of the city center. An estimated 22,700 to 25,000 people were killed.***

To get the Bells home would take tenacity. It would take truth.

In early 2003, Brian Buzzell was approached by Philippine Ambassador to the U.S. and later Philippine Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Albert F. del Rosario, and former ambassador to the U.S., Raul Chavez H. Rabe, to see if he could help gain the return of two church bells on a USAF missile base in Wyoming. Brian was a highly respected Naval Aviator Vietnam Veteran with over 700 combat missions and 14 air medals. Perhaps return could be a veteran's initiative. Raul Rabe would become friend to all of us.

Title 10 USC 2572 provided that VMOs could not be returned to their country of origin.

*"Section 2572 of title 10, United States Code .....*

*.....notwithstanding this section or any other provision of law, during the moratorium period specified in subsection C the President may not transfer a veterans memorial object to a foreign country or an entity controlled by a foreign government, or otherwise transfer or convey such an object to any person or entity for purposes of the ultimate transfer or conveyance of the object to a foreign country or entity controlled by a foreign government, unless such transfer is specifically authorized by law.*

*.....The term 'entity' controlled by a foreign government has the meaning given that term in section 2536(c) (1) of this title.*

*.....The term 'veteran's memorial object' means any object, including a physical structure or portion thereof, that*

*"(i) is located at a cemetery of the National Cemetery System, war memorial, or military installation in the United States;"*

*"(ii) is dedicated to, or otherwise memorializes, the deaths in combat or combat-related duties of members of the armed forces; and*

*"(iii) was brought to the United States from abroad as a memorial of combat abroad.*

*.....The moratorium period for the purpose of this section is the period beginning on the enactment of this Act and ending September 30, 2001.*

The law was crafted with language which the Wyoming Congressional delegation felt would make it difficult, if not impossible, to remove the Bells. It was believed by many that the two bells were part of a memorial and that veterans do not participate in, and will oppose, any effort to "deconstruct" a war memorial. In the Philippines, however, they were seen as "loot" or "war booty" that should be back in their country and church.

The first moratorium had expired at the end of September, 2001, and there was hope in the Philippines for their return. Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo raised the issue with Secretary of State Colin Powell in November. Ms. E. Jean Wall, whose father, Sergeant Adolf Gamlin, was a heroic survivor of the massacre/surprise attack, wrote her Arizona Senator John McCain, asking for return. She had also spoken to the Wyoming Veterans Commission explaining the history of Balangiga. The Commission voted to return the Bells to their church, a recommendation rejected by the governor.



*the church of San Lorenzo de Martir, Balangiga, Eastern Samar, Republic of the Philippines.*

For decades Jean Wall played an important role in the history of Balangiga, having in her home a massive library of letters and documents whose access is made available to scholars. In 2014, as an amateur history writer, I was her guest for two days rummaging through remarkable and often original documents. Each time we talked about her father; she would get misty eyed. It became essential that whatever was achieved with the Bells, a way must also be found to recognize Ms. Wall's father and his many comrades who had fought so valiantly.

In June 2003, a new Philippine Caucus had been formed in Congress and House Resolution 268 passed calling for return. The Army requested the Air Force transfer the Bells from its museum system to theirs. The USAF Museum agreed but the USAF Space Command Headquarters did not. Hapless Wing Commanders at F.E Warren AFB had lost an opportunity to pass a local political problem to the "senior service." Each time the Bells issue had come up, it was U. S Army Center of Military History (CMH) Director of Army Museums, Dr. Charles H. (Charlie) Cureton, who provided the history. Dr. Cureton was a U.S. Marine Corps veteran who believed the Bells should be in their church. In the Pentagon, the two-decade authority had been an attorney, Mr. Philip Sheuerman, Esq. in the DoD Office of General Counsel. Mr. Sheuerman is a former USAF Judge Advocate Officer who when the issue resurfaced in Congress, reviewed



***Francis E. Warren Air Force Base is located 3 miles west of Cheyenne, WY. It is one of three USAF strategic-missile bases in the U.S.***

the matter with a new team of national defense policy makers. He served as counsel on the Bells to both the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy staff and the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Energy, Installations, and Environment (ASD/EI&E), responsible for military bases, museums, and historic properties. Mr. Sheuerman expressed the view that, at least from the viewpoint of the Pentagon, the Congress should make up its mind; keep the Bells permanently or send them home.

Reaction was swift in Wyoming. Again, claiming that removing the Bells was tantamount to destroying a war memorial, a successful amendment was placed in the NDAA 2006 and this time the moratorium was extended to the end of September, 2010.

The stars were not yet aligned.

In 2010 a new Philippines president, Benigno (Ninoy) Aquino III, son of martyred Senator Benigno (Nino) Aquino Jr., was to visit the United States. There was hope in both administrations that the importance of the two Bells to the Philippines could be made clear to those opposing return. Dr. Kurt M. Campbell had become Assistant Secretary of State, East Asia and Pacific Affairs. Dr. Campbell, an Asian scholar and later author of the "The Pivot, The Future of American Statecraft in Asia," believed the Bells should be returned as an important acknowledgment to the value of an ally. He had participated in previous efforts when serving in government from academia, the earliest with the National Security Council (NSC) staff. He sent a Pentagon delegation of highly decorated Brigadier General Richard L. Simcock II, U.S.M.C. and Asian authority and scholar who had lived in the region, Mr. Brian Harding, to visit Wyoming and speak to veteran, state and political leaders. They explained the significance of the Bells to the relationship of the two countries; nations that had been allies in war like few others. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton wrote SECDEF Leon E. Panetta asking for support for "repatriation of the Bells of Balangiga ..." In February 2011, Congressman Robert E. Filner of California introduced Concurrent Resolution 18 asking for their return. It was referred to the Committee of Foreign Affairs where it died. The first resolution introduced had been House Resolution 312 of November 7, 1997 by Congresswoman Robert A. Underwood of Guam to authorize the President to return one bell "as a measure of friendship, good will and cooperation." It also had gone nowhere.



During this time a third bell from Balangiga was “discovered” in Korea by the Balangiga Research Group (BRG). The BRG was formed in 1998 at a University of the Philippines “National Symposium on the Balangiga Attack of 1901” at Tacloban, Leyte, Republic of the Philippines. It consisted of Ms. E. Jean Wall; Mr. Bob Couttie, a British screenwriter, author and television director; and Dr. Rolando (Rolly) Borrinaga, a University of the Philippines Professor in the School of Health Sciences and the foremost authority on Balangiga. Rolly Borrinaga and Bob Couttie have authored books, articles, and documentaries on the events at Balangiga.

The bell in Korea was different than the two in Wyoming. It had the same origin but was unique in its history. Called the “Manchu Bell,” it was smaller and displayed in the Second Infantry Division (2ID) Museum at Camp Red Cloud, just below the demilitarized zone (DMZ) with North Korea. The museum had been built by the government of South Korea; think “tripwire.” For those who know that ugly war, with the Chosin Reservoir and the “Frozen Few,” it is a tough and emotional area. When visiting the Panmunjom Joint Security Area (JSA) on the DMZ in uniform in 1990, I was mistaken for the new American armistice negotiator and subjected to uncomfortable scrutiny by photographers and North Korean soldiers.



*On the DMZ! A Korean War Vet talks with MajGen Michael Bills, Assistant Chief of Staff J-3 Operations for US Forces Korea.*

The Manchu Bell had been with the 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment since given to them by the 11<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment in 1902 just before the 9<sup>th</sup> left the Philippines for their home post at Madison Barracks, Sackets Harbor, New York. The myth that the bell was a “gift” by the people of Balangiga to Company C was just that, a myth. Unlike the two larger bells in Wyoming, the Manchu Bell was a signal bell cast for that purpose, but just one of several signals used to help summon natives during the Balangiga surprise attack. It had become important to Manchu history and heritage and rang on special occasions including run of the “Manchu Mile.”

Efforts to dislodge any of the three bells failed. Even before the Pentagon delegation talked to Wyoming leaders on the 29<sup>th</sup> of May 2012, an amendment to NDAA 13 extending the moratorium had been introduced in the House on the 11<sup>th</sup>. The U.S. Army CMH reminded our embassy in Seoul, South Korea that the Manchu Bell was in an Army museum, its property, and an important historical artifact of the Manchus. The State Department had suggested that the U.S. Forces Command in Korea could arrange to return the bell to the Philippines. The Army said no one in Korea could give it away.

NDAA 13 passed and the moratorium extended until the end of September 2017. When Dr. Campbell asked why the initiative had failed, I replied, “You did not fail. You had no ‘intel.’ You had to accept what was told.” A former Navy Intelligence Officer, he understood. Again, the emotional argument prevailed. Veterans will have no part in the destruction of one of our war memorials. The appeal in behalf of an ally was not selling. No one bothered to ask if the two bells in Wyoming were actually part of a war memorial. No one bothered to ask why legislation on what was purportedly a war memorial was being placed in the annual NDAA and not under consideration by the Veteran’s Committees in Congress, committees that normally would handle memorials and matters honoring veterans. No one had dug into their jaded past to determine if these church bells or their history made them morally appropriate candidates for inclusion in a war memorial.

Once again, the stars were not aligned.

In 2013, Dennis Wright and I visited Cheyenne. It was a fishing trip and a chance for Dennis, who lived in the Philippines and was president of a development corporation, to see family. Dennis's vision was to make the former Clark Air Force base, destroyed by the Mount Pinatubo volcanic eruption in 1991 and slowly coming back as an industrial center north of Manila, into what he envisioned as a "Philippine Crystal City," like the thriving commercial hub alongside Reagan National Airport in Washington, D.C. His motto, which rings today, was "Clark Is It!" We had just completed a successful effort with Congress to place an abandoned American military cemetery with over 8,000 veterans and families at the former U.S. Clark Air Force base under the care of the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC).

We came to Cheyenne to visit the infamous "Bells of Balangiga." We found them on a Minuteman missile base not open to the public, in a protected brick enclosure near historic officers' quarters, and not looking anything like a war memorial. They were artifacts of the Museum of the USAF. Inscriptions on the bells and enclosure were inaccurate. There was no mention in museum records of their description being more than bells. Certainly not components of a memorial. There was no mention of their open brick enclosure being a memorial on USAF plant property records. There was no official USAF record approving a memorial. There was no mention in any state, national or veterans' organization's references of the site as a memorial to valiant Americans. Very little made sense.

That began two years of study. We traveled to Balangiga to learn their ancestry and walk the battle site with Professor Borrinaga. We visited the 21D museum in Korea to study the third bell. I visited the U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle, Pennsylvania; the Naval Academy to study the return of the "Perry Bell" to Okinawa, Japan; the National Archives; and excursions into the Wyoming Veterans Commission files and Jean Wall's library in Arizona. There was study of 19<sup>th</sup> century "Spanish Times" foundries and bell casting in the Philippines from the work of University of the Philippines Professor, Regalado Trota Jose. The correct Balangiga signal bell was identified from his definitive research. Consultations were held with the U.S. Army CMH, the American Society of International Law (ASIL), Pentagon legal and policy officials, and cultural property authorities at the Smithsonian Institution. Historians and cultural arts professionals in Wyoming were consulted and the essay offered several ways for the state to honor New Englanders who died at Balangiga by means other than bells that were church property of parishioners in another country. There were official reports, the dull exchange of cables between military authorities in the Philippines and the old War Department in Washington, as well as news articles and other recorded history to study.



**The former bell-stand on F.E. Warren Air Force Base, thought by some to be a war memorial. Adjacent to historic brick quarters on a base with access restricted due to force protection, its infrequent visitors were officers returning home and antelopes lounging nearby.**

It was felt that the Roman Catholic Church should again take what was clearly a moral imperative and let its voice be heard in government. Calling on the Vatican Embassy in Washington D.C. to discuss the position of the Church with the Papal Nuncio to the United States and the Nunciature attorney, Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò reiterated Vatican support for Church ownership but would only reaffirm a 2003 Nunciature Memorandum. Dennis and Raul Rabe met with the Archbishop of Manila, Louis Antonio (Chito) Tagle, the recognized Church leader in the Philippines, seeking Church support, and I met with him in the U.S. asking for intercession by the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines with U.S. Catholic Church authorities.

In 1999 the Bishop of Cheyenne had taken an aggressive interest in repatriating the Bells and arranged for return of a Philippine church artifact, a carved wooden Madonna. When asked about helping, the Diocese of Cheyenne advised that the Archbishop of the Military Services, USA, had responsibility since the Bells were on a military installation. The Archbishop would not meet and wrote the village priest that the issue was the responsibility of others.

Over fifty people were consulted, inside and outside government, and brought into a dialog of understanding. The result was a

“living essay;” “living” because it was continually updated with new discoveries, circulated in Wyoming before going public, provided to congressional staffs, and placed on VFW web sites. A copy was sent to SECDEF James Mattis and Philippine President Duterte. The essay concentrated on the history of the Bells avoiding entanglement in the complex history of the



“Massacre of Balangiga.”

Philippine and American historians called the essay “definitive.” Having become a source document in government agencies in both the Philippines and the U.S., it was later called, “A Desk Guide to Truth.” Based on its research, op-eds were placed in the Wyoming Tribune Eagle, the state capital newspaper, to dispel “myths and misunderstanding.” Transparency was paramount. It was clear that building a case for return was not enough. It had to be shown why the Bells should not be in Wyoming and not appropriate elements of a war memorial. A way needed to be found to create a genuine memorial to men whose heroism had been cast into the dust-bin of history.

The target was obvious; September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2017. We had to prevent another five-year moratorium, and if that failed, seek legislation. A third alternative could be an Executive Order (EO) if a White House (WH) could be convinced. In the summer of 2016, in the waning days of the Obama administration, Dr. Campbell asked for a point paper to take to the WH. (Appendix A) Law on presidential authority was clear and the law on VMOs shaky. With no fealty from a Democratic administration to a Wyoming congressional delegation that rarely supported its agenda, an opportunity was felt possible. However, earlier the Philippines inaugurated a new president, Rodrigo Roa (Rody) Duterte, who began his administration with statements provoking the U.S. There was no appetite in the WH for an act that might be perceived as acknowledging a government whose leader had just insulted the American ambassador. Had former president “Ninoy” Aquino still been in office, the outcome might have been different. We had built a compelling legal and moral case and the Bells would go to a church and not



a state. It is opined that if Hillary Clinton had won the election, the intensity and understanding of Kurt Campbell would have seen the Bells go home the next year. He had tenacity. Now he had truth. A senior Philippine official expressed the opposite view. It was felt that if Clinton had been elected, the perception of human rights abuse in the country would have prevented release.

Things began to pick up. The Museum curator at F. E. Warren, Ms. Paula Taylor, asked why I was trying to take their two bells from the Philippine-American War when there were three with the U.S. Military Academy (USMA) at West Point, NY?

A “campagna colgante” like the two in Wyoming and known as the “Barry Bell,” was in front of the Chapel of the Most Holy Trinity. Chapel history read, *“The San Pedro Bell (Barry) Bell. In 1883 Fr. Mariano Garcia Assistant Priest of Baung in the Philippines was given the bell by province Lt Governor Balancio and LtDD Hilario Calica. Bell – alloy of gold, silver and copper was baptized San Pedro. Almost destroyed in the Philippine Insurrection but the advance of American forces prevented it and other bells from being melted down and made into guns. Thomas Barry (Class of 1877) served in the Philippines during the Insurrection and became the 27<sup>th</sup> superintendent – instrumental in sending the bell to West Point in 1915. Bell sat in the belfry 44 years unhung and unring! Discovered during the 1959 expansion. Symbol of peace that even the ravages of war could not destroy.”*



Four years later these beautiful words proved to be prophetic with the Bells of Balangiga.

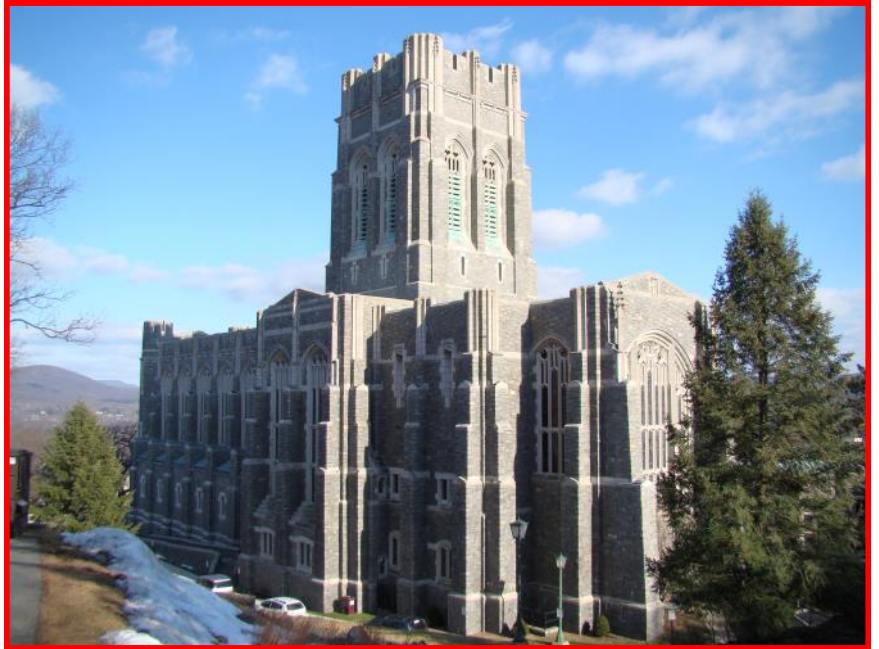
Two smaller bells were in museum storage. The CMH curator suggested contacting the West Point Museum staff where Marlana Cook provided photographs of the three bells. The early history with the Philippines and the burning and looting of churches was discussed with Father Joel Panzer, the chapel priest. He said that, absent major significance to the chapel, and given the history, the Barry Bell could be returned to the Philippines. The USMA Senior Chaplain, Colonel Matthew Pawlikowski, a Catholic, agreed.

The U.S. Naval Academy (USNA) was visited to study how a bell brought to the United States during the 1860's “Opening of Japan” by Commodore Mathew C. Perry was sent back like others brought to America. Called the “Perry Bell,” it was rung by midshipmen after athletic victories. There were alumni objections with return finally requiring approval of the Secretary of the Navy, a Marine veteran and Annapolis graduate. We were looking for a precedent at West Point, not a problem.



During the third week of August 2015, Dennis drove to Bauang and met with Mayor E. C. Martin De Guzman and Father R. R. Chan, Pastor of the Church of St. Peter and Paul. From town and parish archives he was able to confirm the bell's home church. There was no local memory of its history. Father Chan, with Dennis's assistance, wrote the USMA Superintendent and asked for its return. Lieutenant General Robert L. Caslin agreed. Soon, however, shipping preparations bogged down. Weeks and months went by. Help was sought from the Pentagon. The Deputy Chief of Staff, Logistics (J4), Joint Chiefs of Staff, a Navy Vice Admiral, assigned an Army Colonel to solve the transportation logistics problem. Needed was a "required delivery date" (RDD.) Memorial Day 2016 was provided expecting former President Ramos would attend a ceremony to watch a bell come home from a chapel at a school he once attended.

On 29 April 2016, there was a "San Pedro Bell Valediction Ceremony" and Mass at the West Point Chapel attended by cadets and hundreds of the Philippine-American community. The US-Philippine Society (USPHS) was represented by USMA graduate and former Foreign Service Officer, Sonny Busa, who has taught at both West Point and the Philippine Military Academy (PMA). There is a long history of Philippine student officers studying at USMA. "Bayan Ko" (My Country) was sung as the San Pedro Bell was made ready to depart. There are over four million Philippine-American citizens and "Tagalog" (Filipino) is the third most popular language spoken in the U.S.



A century ago, the Army had brought the bell to West Point by a U.S. Army Transport (USAT) ship across the Pacific, and a freight rail car behind a steam locomotive across America. They sent it direct to Manila by FedEx International Air Express. In Bauang, Dennis helped organize a day of celebration of the San Pedro Bell's return. With him were the prospective Secretary of National Defence (SND) Delfin (Del) N. Lorenzana, Ambassador Raul Rabe, and a U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel, an Army Attaché from the American Embassy who would later play an essential role in finally paving a path of return. Del Lorenzana, after retiring in 2004 as a Major General in the Philippine Army, assumed a position in the Philippine Embassy, Washington D.C. In 2016 he returned to the Philippines to take up critical responsibilities in the Duterte administration. Highly respected in the U.S., Del has become the face of Philippine national security, a nation facing territorial infringement from China and its own internal battle with terrorism. He is a friend to many Americans and once told me that as a senior active-duty officer he had asked his government to be allowed to form a military unit to join U.S. forces in the war on terror in Afghanistan.

The journey of the San Pedro (Barry) Bell became an important precedent for the journey of the Bells of Balangiga helping tell and sell their story in the Pentagon "E-Ring." A Pentagon attorney opined that moving the West Point Bell lacked legal authority. We saw moral and religious authority.

Twice it was suggested that the Philippine Embassy request repatriation of the two smaller bells in museum storage at West Point. They had been brought to the U.S. at the same time and under circumstance similar to the other bells and could not be identified to their home church. The idea is simple. Donate them back to the U.S. to become symbols of friendship and reconciliation amplifying lessons of comradeship from the story of the Bells of Balangiga.

We were moving. In August with assistance of retired State Department friend Matthew (Matt) Daley, former Deputy Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs, and former Ambassador to the Philippines Frank G. Wisner II, the international law firm of Squire Patton Boggs, (US) LLP (SPB) was retained for legal support and assistance. The USPHS agreed to serve as pro-bono sponsor and client. Other possible clients were the American Defenders of Bataan and Corregidor Memorial Society (ADBC-MS) or the Project Handclasp Foundation (PHF). There was concern that USPHS was a not-for-profit association advocating in behalf of a government and not a charity. Discovering that Ambassador Wisner was a USPHS board member and the Society a charity, made the decision obvious. Executive Director, Edwin M. (Hank) Hendrickson, a Navy veteran and retired Foreign Service Officer, joined us and asked if Society board member, Dr. Henry B. Howard, could attend a strategy session. I said, "more the merrier." Dr. Howard was known in the Philippines for his philanthropic work providing "poorest the poor" scholarships to the Xavier University - Ateneo De Cagayan in the City of Cagayan de Oro on Mindanao. He engaged two lobbying firms to provide tactical support with Congress. I had only asked SPB for legal assistance to validate a two decades old Patton Boggs legal paper provided by the Wyoming Veterans Commission supporting what was thought to be correctly applicable law. More was received than expected. SPB is famous for helping clients work with a complex government. They assigned a preeminent counsel, Ms. Ludmilla (Milla) Kasulke. A star was added.

That summer the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) Policy staff received a new country officer, Lieutenant Colonel Theodore T. (Leo) Liebreich, who reported from the U.S. Embassy in the Philippines. With a background in Special Forces (SF) he was well equipped to take on the unexpected. LTC Liebreich had seen firsthand the jubilation among Filipinos when the San Pedro Bell came home. Leo was there with Dennis, Raul and Del. He became the Pentagon Bells Action Officer. That Fall, Donald J. Trump was elected President and retired Marine Corps General James N. (Jim) Mattis became SECDEF. Jim Mattis was the Davies Family Distinguished Fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University.

A private conversation was begun with the senior Manchu, General Vincent K. (Vince) Brooks, the US/UN and Combined Forces Commander in the Republic of Korea. GEN Brooks would help with our message to the Manchus and the Pentagon. Joining the Manchu Association made it possible to open discussions with Manchu veterans about someday finding a way to properly honor those that died at Balangiga.

The stars were coming into alignment.

We had three objectives. First, was to see the Bells returned to their church. The second was to remove rancor in our relations with friend and ally and build on an historic alliance. The third was to find a means to honor the men who fought at Balangiga without using religious articles, the church bells. After the Balangiga "Massacre" came weeks of rampage with the burning and looting of churches and convents, killing of civilians, and many subsequent courts-martial. *Editor's Note: In reprisal, General Jacob H. Smith ordered that Samar be turned into a "howling wilderness" and that they shoot any Filipino male above ten years of age who was capable of bearing arms. The American soldiers seized three church bells from the town church and moved them back to the United States as war trophies. The 9th Infantry Regiment maintained that the single bell in their possession was presented to the regiment by villagers when the unit left Balangiga on 9 April 1902. The bell had been actually given to them by the 11th Infantry Regiment, which had taken all three bells when they left Balangiga for Tacloban on 18 October 1901. Smith and his primary subordinate, Major Littleton Waller of the United States Marine Corps, were both court-martialed for illegal vengeance against the civilian population of Samar. Waller was acquitted of the charges. Smith was found guilty, admonished and retired from service, but charges were dropped shortly after. He was later hailed as a war hero.* An Army historian referred to the Bells as, "fruit of the poisoned tree." This is not the well of the valiant from which memorials to the heroic are drawn.

A discussion with the Philippine Embassy on the possibility of intercession by "diplomatic note" or a formal request met with reason. Ambassador Jose L. (Joey) Cuisia told me that since it seemed



it was American veterans in Wyoming preventing return to their church, then perhaps it could be other veterans that achieved their release. He had made the same statement during an office call by Philippine-American USAF veteran, R. Sonny Sampayan-Sampayan, who for two decades has been arguably the most passionate advocate for return. We agreed.

In March, a law school classmate of the Wyoming governor, Fred Fisch, wrote him “to look into this important matter” and the possible repatriation of one bell. The governor’s office replied that such an act “would destroy the current structure .... a moral violation of the memory of those American massacred at Balangiga.” Two months later the Wyoming Veterans Commission voted to support the governor’s position. I made a written presentation to the Commission but to no avail. In a state whose population is the smallest in the U.S., the Commission has a strong and effective voice in behalf of veterans that make up a large percentage of its population.

It was clear that the law would not just simply expire at the end of September. The gloves were now off. In July, a second op-ed was placed in the state capital newspaper; “The Fourth of July ... Is That the Day to Return the Bells?” It was shown that there was no memorial at F.E. Warren AFB, that the Bells were there in violation of law, and their presence were an embarrassment. The op-ed included a Wyoming Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) web site where the true story could be found.

The “considered judgments” reflected in the widely publicized living essay were based on fact and law and felt sufficient for any authority with political and moral authority or suasion to take action. The case was clear. The need was clear. Had they not been held captive by a moratorium in law and the myths and misunderstanding that was its legislative foundation, the Bells would have been treated like many items taken in war and returned in peace. We found the most striking examples were church bells sent back to former adversaries and personal items taken from Imperial Japanese Army soldiers during WWII and returned to their families. When opportunities presented themselves for WH initiative on the Bells of Balangiga, the Wyoming Congressional Delegation was successful in thwarting any attempts. It was political deference. There was little effort expended to peel back the veil.

In July, a Mattis colleague joined him from the Hoover Institution. Dr Joseph H. (Joe) Felter, a retired Army Colonel and West Point graduate, an authority and author on counterinsurgency with a doctorate from Stanford University, came to the OSD Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy becoming Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (DASD), South and Southeast Asia. Like Leo, his skill set was in Special Forces. Think tactical agility and imagination. The three were a dream team. They were veterans like U.S. Marine Corps hero Colonel John Ripley described in the living essay as the embodiment of reconciliation and honor when leading efforts to return bells taken by U.S. forces in WWII back to Japan.

The new OSD Policy team had an additional optic. Their lens was one of national security. They saw the acrimony between allies caused by the Bells conundrum as an impediment to, and opportunity for, stretching and securing an alliance now more critical than ever to regional peace and security. They saw our alliance with a 7,000-island archipelago on the rim of Asia as part of an economic, military, and political security bulwark to the regional rise of the influence of China, the encroachment of ISIS in southern Philippines, and an essential component to regional stability.



***Col John Ripley memorial at  
NMMC, Quantico, VA***

The stars had finally come into alignment.

It was to be a two-pronged approach. If the law could be made to lapse at the end of September, then Secretary Mattis could take the Bells or announce their return that October when he would be in Manila for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Defense Ministers meeting. If that was not possible, then the Pentagon would ask that language be added to the House NDAA 18 amendment to grant authority for the SECDEF to return the Bells to their church if it was found to be in our “security interest.” A possible planned discussion between President Trump and President Duterte at the ASEAN (heads of state) Summit in Manila in November 2017 did not take place. In October President Duterte had brought it up during an office call with Secretary Mattis.

The Philippine President addressed return of the Bells in his July State of the Nation (SONA) address at the suggestion of a retired Philippine Army officer. U.S. Ambassador Sung Y. Kim responded, “We will continue to work with our Filipino partners to find a resolution.” Later, a letter from the Wyoming Congressional Delegation said that our ambassador had “pledged to dismantle a Wyoming War Memorial.” The Philippine Ambassador to the United Nations, Teodoro L. (Teddy Boy) Locsin, Jr. asked U.S. Ambassador Nikki Halley to “work on it.” With the Pentagon now handling the matter, it would become more practical and less political.

Throughout our campaign we had stressed that the Bells should go home to their church, not to a museum, and certainly not under circumstances where they could become symbols of anti-American rhetoric. It must be a return by the peoples of one nation to the peoples of another. They must return to parishioners that paid for their casting so that once again, they could call the faithful to Mass and children to fiesta. In July, the village priest with Dennis’ urging and assistance, wrote a letter to the Wing Commander at F.E. Warren AFB asking for return of the Bells. A supporting letter was sent to the USAF Chief of Staff and a letter to President Trump offering five suggestions on ways felt we could “renew our common bond” using the legacy of the Bells

Milla and I had visited Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) staff in early June presenting the reasons for return and leaving copies of the living essay. Milla kept in continuous contact with committee staff. They were convinced. The SASC Chairman, John S. McCain III, was a Navy veteran that I had introduced to a twelve-year-old boy lobbying for American government care of an abandoned U.S. military cemetery in the Philippines. Brian and I had previously visited Wyoming senior Senator Michael B. Enzi. Senator Enzi said he understood, but had to support state veterans and their resolutions. We left copies of the essay for his staff and the staff of junior Senator John A. Barrasso III. Again, transparency was essential.

Senator Barrasso had been appointed in 2007 to succeed the popular former Senator, Craig L. Thomas, a U.S. Army Air Corps veteran, who had died in office.

Senator Barrasso easily won reelection twice and was an important Republican leader and later Chair of the Senate Republican Conference. His influence was a matter of concern in the Bells end-game. Mr. Charles (Chaz) Zigler joined the senator as his Military Legislative Assistant with a portfolio that included two bells on a USAF base in Wyoming. Zigler has been the long-time strategist in designing tactics to keep the Bells in Wyoming and is arguably the most influential Wyoming Congressional



***Trúc Bạch Lake is the Hanoi lake where U.S. Naval Aviator & future Arizona U.S. Senator John McCain landed during the Vietnam War after being shot down.***

Delegation staff member responsible for the repeated moratoriums that have been inserted in law. He believed they were part of a war memorial.

In July, Milla and I along with Hank and Henry called on the office of freshman Congresswoman Elizabeth Lynne Cheney, daughter of Vice President Dick Cheney, who had held the same at-large Wyoming seat in Congress for a decade. Congresswoman Cheney is an attorney and had served with USAID and with the State Department in the George W. Bush Administration. She had only recently been in office and we met with a member of her staff. He was polite and discussed the need to be responsive to Wyoming veterans. What we did not know was that a House amendment to NDAA 18 had already been introduced to simply extend the law for another five years. This was the same preemptive legislative strike that had taken place with her predecessor, Congresswoman Cynthia Lummis, in 2012 with NDAA 13. Henry Howard returned later with a lobbyist and also called on the staff of Senator Barrasso. Ambassador Wisner was acquainted with Ms. Chaney and wrote a "Dear Liz" letter reaching out for understanding and support.

Later to our astonishment, the House amendment was modified to add language that VMOs were those brought to the U.S before 1907. The addition was probably intended to give the law flexibility in light of our discovery of the large number of bells returned to adversaries, especially to Japan and those to Germany by the WWII "Monuments Men," whose exploits in returning artifacts taken by the Nazi's became a popular movie.

The change was clear that the only VMOs in question were turn-of-century bells from the Philippines. We wondered if there was any understanding that the language highlighted a time in U.S. and Philippine military history known as "Bloody Samar." This addition could be perceived racist in the Philippines. It was that period in our joint history when American soldiers often referred to their Filipino native adversaries as "injuns," "gugus," or the N-word.



*Military Historical Tour Group in Manila, PI American Cemetery*

But the House originated amendment to NDAA 18 was passed by Congress and subsequently became law and the moratorium extended another five years. Pentagon efforts to forestall it were not successful and lobbying efforts to prevent it failed. Nevertheless, there was now broad understanding about the Bells and their checkered history.

The HASC chair had deferred to the new congresswoman from Wyoming. A Senate amendment was forestalled through the effort of SPB, but preventing it from going to conference had not. Had a Wyoming Senator wanted an amendment to NDAA 18, it would have to bypass the Armed Services Committee and be introduced on the Senate floor. The Wyoming Republican Senators deferred to their Republican SASC Chair, Senator McCain, a war hero whose first steps of freedom having left captivity in North Vietnam were on Philippine soil.

The final language had to be negotiated that October in a House and Senate Armed Forces joint committee conference. The Department of Defense "heartburn" appeal was clear and simple; it asked for authority to return if the Secretary determined it to be in "the security interest" of our country. Legislative exceptions on the basis of "national security" were not uncommon. Ultimately the words that appeared in 10 USC 2572 were, "the national security interests of the United States."



More was received than was asked for. Added were conditions that the Wyoming Congressional Delegation staff hoped would delay or deny success. "Poison pills" in legislation were also not unknown. The Pentagon had suggested conditions to show sincerity. The requested authorization of a determination that return was being made on the basis of "national security interests" came with a requirement that the letter include "certification." How could SECDEF "certify" that something innocuous as a pair of bells on a windswept prairie military base reasonably impact national security? The Pentagon was also instructed to confer with veterans' groups, especially in Wyoming, where three times before there had been successful pushback that helped deny return. Conversations with veterans' groups would have taken place anyway. Included was a 90-day "cooling off" period before any congressional notification, no doubt intended to allow time for organized opposition.



*Two bells exhibited at Fort D.A. Russell circa 1910 was a post and base of operations for the U.S. Army, and later the USAF, located in Cheyenne, WY. The fort had been established in 1867 to protect workers on the Union Pacific Railroad. It was named in honor of Civil War BrigGen Russell, a killed at the Battle of Opequon. In 1930, the fort's name was changed to Francis E. Warren (Republican U.S. Senator from Wyoming & being the state's first Governor. A MOH recipient in the Union Army during the Civil War, he was the last Civil war veteran to serve in the U.S. Senate.) In 1949, it became F.E. Warren Air Force Base.*

Except for the national security legislative exception requested by the OSD that became essential and determinant, we now had old law with new language intended to delay or deny success and lacking in empathy for a friend and ally. Wyoming veteran organizations had previously succeeded in obtaining resolutions opposing return from both the VFW and the American Legion, the most recent a 2016 American Legion national convention resolution. Resolutions now coming from the VFW and American Legion Departments in the Philippines supporting return could be seen as work of Expatriates (expats) and hold little respect from veterans in the U.S. The cooling off period was intended to freeze.

It did not turn out that way.

NDAA 18 was signed on December 12, 2017 and once again there was a moratorium on VMO transfers in 10 USC 2572, this time to September 30, 2022. A check with curators of the three military service's museums determined that they did not have any in their collections, only two lonely bells in Wyoming. If they were moved outside the U.S. the law would become an empty sack. It is. What began as a legislative fiction became a legislative vacuum. When the Navy curator was asked about VMOs, he quickly said, "Do not take Yamamoto's coat!" It was a family garment of the Japanese admiral who led the raid on Pearl Harbor.

Enabling law granting Secretarial authority was now in place with the next step a notification/certification to Congress. The pathway home that Ambassador Raul Rabe had sought two decades before was now in place.

Certification would not happen until eight months later. It was one thing to successfully achieve enabling legislation, but now it must be sold. Dr. Felter asked for a one-page point paper. A 148-page 58,000-word essay was bulky. Adapted from previous talking points provided the WH and Congress, its bulleted facts provided ammunition. With a thick staff folder in hand, the Pentagon Action Officer began his race. The "poison pills" had created hurdles for Leo to leap.

Staffs of the State, OSD and the National Security Council (NSC) were understanding and supportive. Issues were raised, however, that required addressing. The U.S. Army CMH agreed, although there had been past concern about a precedent on de-acquisitioning military museum artifacts, a matter of interest with its collection from Nazi Germany in light of their new museum. The Chief of Staff of the

major defense Army was concerned that the matter might be distractive to major defense issues in the NDAA. OSD legislative affairs staff worried about expenditure of political capital on a perceived mundane matter. There was the issue of possible human rights abuse in the Philippines and if return of the Bells could be seen as acknowledgement to a President who was prodding the U.S. in his outreach to China. Why return the Bells now when we did not when West Point graduate and Philippine President Fidel Ramos asked for their return? And there was always the specter that the influence of the Wyoming delegation with a mercurial WH could stop everything in its tracks. Then came the fundamental staff work necessary to show, as the Pentagon saw it, that national security matters were at stake.

All issues were successfully resolved; with tenacity and with truth.

On August 9<sup>th</sup>, the notification and certification were transmitted to Congress in classified correspondence. That was August 10<sup>th</sup> in the Philippines, the Feast Day of Saint Lawrence, the Martir, the Patron Saint of Balangiga. No doubt divine providence. But it was not over. The veteran's community and many in government and politics had to be sold.



***Military Historical Tour Group at Clark AFB & the former Fort Stotsenburg Manila, PI American Cemetery***

Dennis had always said we should rally other veterans. In 2016, a draft resolution had been provided to my VFW 2485 post in Angeles City near the former Clark AFB in the Philippines, joined years earlier when leading veterans back to trek the Bataan Death March. The wording had also been placed as a template in the living essay for use by any Veteran's Service Organization (VSO). A resolution submitted to the national convention by VFW Department Pacific Areas urging return was deferred. A Wyoming resolution urging retention was passed at the American Legion annual convention.

Two years later the tables were turned.

Dennis obtained approved resolutions of return from both VFW and American Legion Departments in the Philippines for their 2018 annual conventions. Brian successfully led and obtained support of a resolution from the American Legion Department of Wisconsin. California piled on. In January, Dennis had traveled back to Wyoming to speak at the mid-year VFW convention in Cody, WY, educating and gaining converts. A straw poll favored return. VFW leadership understood and placed the living essay on their Department of Wyoming web site so members could also understand. It was about church bells, not war memorials. I had placed op-eds in the state capital newspaper in 2016 and 2017 debunking myths and asking for better understanding of American and Philippine history. By this time there was greater understanding among other veterans. The OSD Staff had been talking to veteran's organizations leaders. Joe, Leo, Brian and I had a conference call with the VFW legislative staff.

The OSD Policy team was meeting with members of Congress, their staffs and calling and writing VFW and American Legion leadership. They visited Wyoming, holding discussions with state officials and veterans' groups. Dr. Felter and LTC Liebreich met with Congresswoman Cheney. She understood the national security implications, thought it might "give Duterte a win," but felt she had to support WY VSOs. Letters of veteran support began to arrive at the Pentagon. Senator McCain received a passionate letter from a fellow Vietnam POW. Former Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, ADM Michael G. (Mike) Mullen and Brian joined Ambassador Frank Wisner presenting facts to the staff of Speaker of the



House of Representatives, Paul D. Ryan. Mike Mullen had already met with GEN Vince Brooks in Korea. Brooks was concerned about Manchu legacy and what their bell had come to mean to regimental esprit de corps. That concern would be overcome later.

That summer resolutions of support for return of the Bells were passed by both the VFW and American Legion at their national conventions. The 2016 American Legion resolution was rescinded. (Appendix C)

It was clear that the end-game was to be a veteran's game. We all had one thing in common; an oath that ended, "if necessary, with my life, so help me God."

Opposition, however, was again pursued by the Wyoming Congressional Delegation Staff. In addition to the previous legislative "poison pills," conference report language called on the Pentagon to receive "re-programming" authority if appropriated funds were used in effecting transfer. Clever, not crafted correctly, and ultimately ineffective. Opposition appeared in State Department official's confirmation hearings where questions were asked about harming monuments and not about returning bells. A letter was sent to the SECDEF by the Lantos Commission in the House of Representatives calling for bell retention before improvements in human rights could be seen in the Philippines. The letter was sent Friday and a letter of rebuttal was in Commission hands on Monday (Appendix B.) A member of Congress, an Iraq War veteran who cherished his "war booty" (a Saddam Hussain uniform), drafted legislation to make the VSO moratorium permanent. Dr. Felter, also an Iraq War veteran, paid a visit and the matter "closed." Even the Wyoming State Historical Preservation Office began last minute questioning about removal of Bells from a federal installation without state consultation.

All during this time the OSD team had been treading cautiously. Concerns had to be addressed as well as staffing protocols followed. They could not get out ahead of decisions to be made or law that must be followed. Official determinations must follow consultations and deliberations. It had become a question of how and when, not whether.

It was entirely possible that the summer 2018 American Legion and VFW resolutions were not necessary for SECDEF to make a national security judgment when many felt he had already made a moral judgment. However, the two resolutions served to affirm that this was indeed a matter where veterans were being heard. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Joseph F. Dunford, Jr. USMC agreed. WH Chief of Staff and former USMC General, John F. Kelly, came on board. Three Marines helping three Sailors go ashore is role reversal.

American veterans had spoken. The Bells of Balangiga go home.



*The "Manchu Bell" at an 2nd Infantry Division Museum in South Korea. It would join the two Bells of Balangiga from Wyoming. All three are now home. All three are now, "The Bells of Balangiga." Copies were made to honor Company C, 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, one for today's Manchus at Fort Carson, Colorado, and one for their home post, Madison Barracks, Sackets Harbor, New York.*



A last barrier was legal and political. OSD Counsel advised OSD Policy that although the Secretary could “certify” a national security-based determination for return, Presidential “transfer” authority was needed. That was law. Weeks went by as further deliberation took place. Matters stalled. There was WH transactional thinking; a “what’s in it for me” attitude. The delay gave concern that a political obligation to an influential Wyoming party leader might thwart return.

A Wyoming Senator was Chair of the Senate Republican Conference and the state’s only Representative later became Chair of the House Republican Conference. Had the Pentagon been politically precluded from exercising its national security exemption, we would seek separate legislation to place the issue before the correct committees of jurisdiction for memorials, Veterans Affairs of the Senate and House.

This would not happen. Gen Jim Mattis had decided that it was the correct thing to do. On 23 July, NSC staff advised OSD staff by email of a POTUS approval for SECDEF to affect “transfer.” It was “good to go.”

As we think back on General Mattis, his career in uniform and in civilian coat and tie, words once spoken years ago at the USAF Academy, describe him with perfection.

*“It is my conviction that the major service of the military institution to the community of men it serves may well be neither within the political sphere nor the functional. It could easily be within the moral.”*  
General Sir John Winthrop Hackett, 1970.

On November 14<sup>th</sup> at a Veterans Day Remembrance celebration at F.E. Warren AFB at Cheyenne, Wyoming, General Mattis, with Governor Matthew H. (Matt) Mead at his side and rows of veterans in attendance, announced that the Bells of Balangiga were going home. A SECDEF decision had already been made that the 2ID Manchu Bell would join them from Korea. The law was originally crafted specifically for the Wyoming bells but the new language reference to Balangiga bells was felt sufficiently broad to encompass the third bell. It also had come from Balangiga. The CMH counsel, Mrs. Chanah M. Norman, Esq., advised that since it was on foreign soil, the moratorium language did not apply. During an office call in 2017 on the General Counsel of the DoD, Robert S. Taylor opined to Brian and me that the Bells matter was likely a “policy matter.” There was no formal de-accessioning paperwork of the Manchu Bell. The bells in Wyoming were de-accessioned by the National Museum of the USAF just three days before the SECDEF’s announcement. Their brick enclosure was dismantled the next morning and the bells shipped by FedEx to a Pennsylvania foundry for refurbishment. An opinion that the Bells must be released through government excess personal property law did not prevail. A two-decade old opinion that the Bells were “instruments of war” was long forgotten.

Twice it was suggested to SND Lorenzana that the Manchu Bell take the path of the Boston/Sendai bell. This bell was taken from Japan in WWII by the USN cruiser USS Boston and given by the ship to its namesake city, and offered by the city to be returned to Japan. The city of Sendai said it should remain in Boston, MA, as a symbol of friendship.



**USMC General James “Jim” Mattis—Callsign “Chaos”**



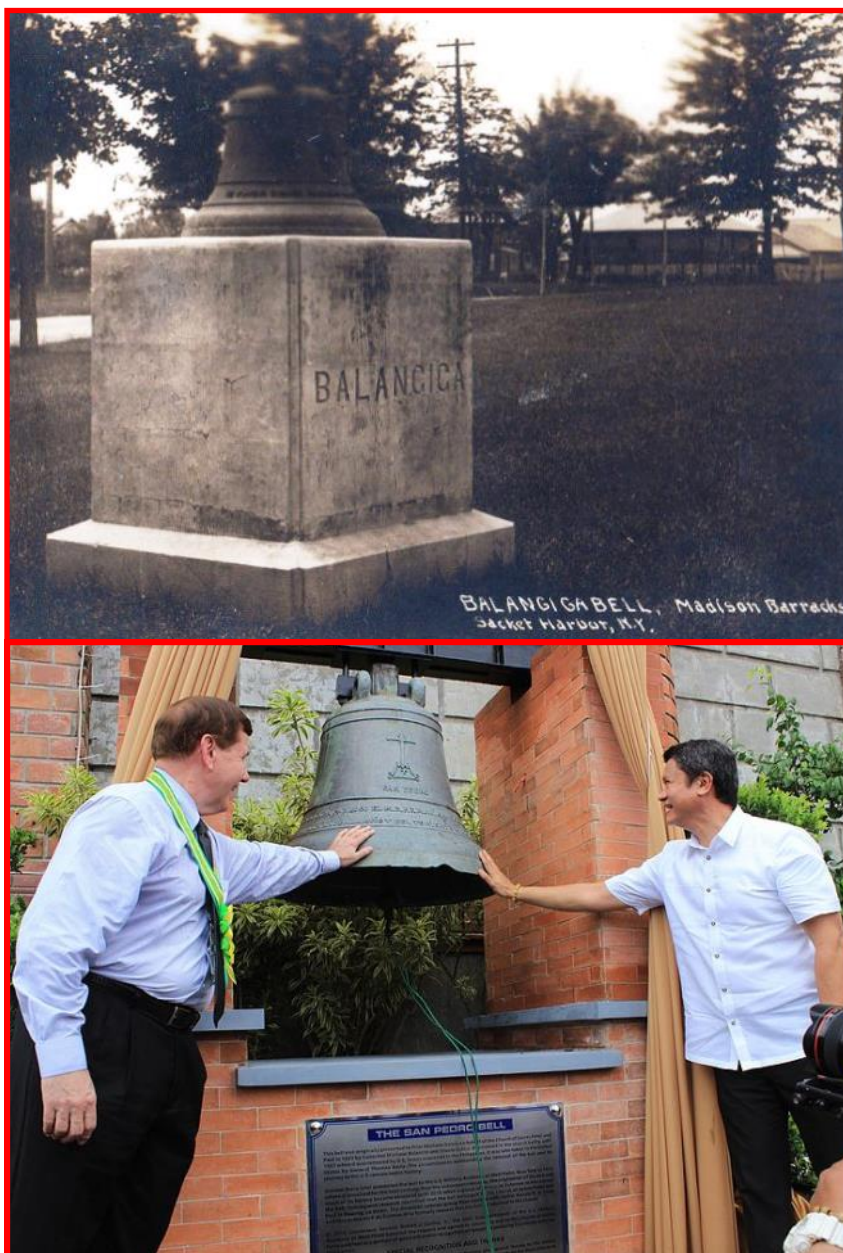
**SECDEF Mattis in front of the F.E. Warren AFB so-called “War Memorial” before the Bells return.**

Now, the Manchus have a bell, a duplicate, to ring on special regimental occasions, not unlike when USNA Midshipmen ring a duplicate of the Perry Bell that had been returned to Japan. Henry Howard had engaged a foundry to cast a pair of identical copies, one for present day Manchus to use at their home post at Fort Carson, CO, and one for Madison Barracks in NY to honor and memorialize the heroic men of Company C, 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment. He had previously paid to ship the Wyoming bells to Laran Bronze, Fine Art Studio and Foundry, in Chester, PA, for refurbishment. The work was performed by artist/sculptor Lawrence Welker IV, whose first trip to Asia was to the “demilitarized zone” (DMZ) below North Korea to take scans and dimensions of the Manchu Bell. He cast all three duplicates. Henry also donated a bronze plaque to the Wyoming Veterans Commission in respect for a view held in the state that the Bells were part of a war memorial. (Appendix F)

Our third objective had been to find a right way to honor the men of Company C. OSD staff was asked to seek opening a “case of denied valor.” They found that it was not legally possible. Early efforts to obtain a Congressional Bronze Medal or Medals of Honor went nowhere. They received the Purple Heart. Now, however, there are plans for a memorial to Company C, 9th Infantry Regiment, at Madison Barracks where before there was only a Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) plaque holding the names of those from the area who died in the Spanish American War. It did not contain all of those who had perished at Balangiga. Missing are the doctor, Major Richard S. Griswold, and his medic, Private Harry S. Wright, the latter whose remains some believe are still at Balangiga.

Congressman Don Bacon of Nebraska was provided information on the heroism of Jean Wall’s father, Adolf Gamlin. This son of Nebraska was recognized in April 2019 for his courage with a citation in the Congressional Record. (Appendix D) Sergeant Gamlin had settled in Nebraska and is interred in an historic cemetery. A copy of the citation that accords acclaim for his heroism hangs in the Manchu Regimental Room at Fort Carson with the “Sentry Adolf Gamlin Manchu Library,” books accumulated over four years of study and donated in his memory.

If three retired U. S. Navy officers had not decided in 2013 that the Bells return to the Philippines, was important, they would still be in Korea and on a AFB. If General Mattis and Colonel Felter had not made a decision built on a foundation of military professionalism and understanding of history,



***Top: The “Manchu” signal bell displayed at the Madison Barracks at Sackets Harbor, NY station of the 9th US Infantry Regiment at the turn of the 20th century. This bell was later moved to Camp Red Cloud in Korea. Bottom: Retired US Navy Captain Dennis Wright (left) & Bauang, La Union town Mayor Martin de Guzman (right) touch the San Pedro bell during repatriation ceremonies at the Saints Peter & Paul Parish Church, Philippines on 23 May 2016.***



coupled to kinship and personal trust crafted among the cloisters of Stanford University, the Bells would not have returned to their church. With LtCol Liebreich, we were able to provide facts and help set the agenda. With Secretary Mattis and Deputy Assistant Secretary Felter, there was honor, there was closure.

A year later in October 2019, a Wyoming Senator brought up the matter in a Committee of Foreign Affairs confirmation hearing on a future appointment of the outgoing American ambassador to the Philippines. The ambassador was inaccurately portrayed as playing a role in “dismantling” a “memorial” (Appendix E.)

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of December 2018, “The Bells of Balangiga” were presented by the Armed Forces of the United States to the Armed Forces of the Philippines at Villamor Air Base in Manila. The “Manchu Bell,” an “esquila” or the signal bell, had joined its two larger “campana colgante.” All three had finally become, “The Bells of Balangiga.”

Three days later the Armed Forces of the Philippine returned the Bells of Balangiga to the Church of San Lorenzo de Martir to national jubilation, a celebratory Mass, and words of comradeship by President Duterte speaking for Filipinos. He ran his hands down a memorial wall inscribed with the names of the fallen, both American and Filipino. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Felter spoke for Americans and its veterans. Having lived and served in the Philippines, Dr. Felter made new friends by speaking in Filipino.



**Home at last. Parishioner jubilation.**

A week later, General Mattis resigned as SECDEF advising the President it would be better if he had a Secretary “whose views are better aligned with yours.” A civilian Secretary might have been more politically intimidated. Jim Mattis’ moral compass was always true north.

A senior Pentagon official whispered, “We may have dodged a bullet.”

*Editor’s Note: It has to be noted that the success was under President Donald J. Trump after 20 years of failure under the Presidencies of William J. Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack H. Obama.*

### **Fini**



*Arrival ceremony at Philippine Air Force Base, Villamor near Manila. The United States was represented by U.S. Ambassador Sung Kim, Admiral Philip Davidson, the INDOPACOM Commander, and Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, Dr. Joseph Felter. The Philippines were represented by Secretary of National Defense, Delfin Lorenzana, and Senator Richard Gordon. In the background is the USAF aircraft, nicknamed “Spirit of MacArthur” (additional divine providence?) that brought the three bells from Japan.*



**Subject:** The Bells of San Lorenzo de Martir (Bells of Balangiga)

**Background:** The “Bells” are two large 600-pound Catholic Church bells, property of the Church of San Lorenzo de Martir of Balangiga, Samar, Republic of the Philippines, held in a brick protective enclosure on federal property at F.E. Warren AFB in Cheyenne, Wyoming. For almost three decades they have been the subject of rancor and misunderstanding between two friends and allies. Brought to Wyoming in 1904 in violation of Army orders and kept from the public by military force protection, they have been prevented from returning to their church out of deference to the Wyoming congressional delegation who believe they are following veteran intentions. [A former American Legion leader who fought return now believes they should go home saying, “I don’t think there’s 100 (veterans who) know enough about the bells to carry on a conversation.”]

The Bells were believed to have signaled a bolo knife attack against American soldiers in 1901; they did not. There was concern that returning the Bells would mean “deconstructing” a “war memorial”; it would not. Their protection is neither memorial nor monument. Public financed memorials and monuments on federal property require congressional authorization and appropriation. There were none.

A Veterans Day 2016 history essay of the Bells states:

- ...the Bells are not part of US Army history and heritage.
- ...the Bells are not part of US Air Force history and heritage.
- ...the Bells are not part of Wyoming history and heritage.
- ...the Bells were twice abandoned by the US Army.
- ...the Bells treatment should have been in accord with the Lieber Code, (G.O. 100).
- ...the Bells should have been returned to their owner in 1902 upon cession of war.
- ...the Bells were taken from Samar following burning of their belfry by angry soldiers.
- ...the Bells’ belfry was a wood platform burned not in battle but in retaliation.
- ...the Bells are not NDAA “veteran’s memorial objects”.
- ...the Bells are not 10 USC 2579 “battlefield souvenirs”, or slang “war booty.”
- ...the Bells are not “instruments of war”.
- ...the Bells are not property of the American people.

...the Bells current location and resistance to return to their church stand in moral and embarrassing contrast to how men and women in uniform protect cultural property of nations and personal property of individuals. Americans have ensured that religious bells taken from former vicious enemies such as Germany, Japan, and Russia go home to their places of worship. American soldiers will not even stoop to pick up a souvenir pebble on the grounds of a mosque when facing Islamic extremism. Contrary treatment of Christian religious artifacts of an American ally in World War Two, Korea, Vietnam, and the War on Terror lacks honor.

**Law and Regulation:** The Bells are subject to several U.S. laws. U.S. Army General Order 100 (the Lieber or Lincoln’s Code) applicable in the Philippines makes clear Church property is personal property and not subject to military confiscation. Property confiscated for “military necessity” must be returned to its owner upon cession of war.

Three times the National Defense Authorization Act had a provision intended to keep the Bells in place by calling them a “veteran’s memorial object” ... they are not... and prevent return “to a foreign country or an entity controlled by a foreign government” ... they would return to their church.

The Philippines Property Act of 1946 passed upon Philippine independence states, “the President of the United States is authorized, in his discretion and under such terms and conditions as he may deem appropriate, to transfer to the Republic of the Philippines any or all of the right, title, and interest of the Government of the United States or its agencies or instrumentalities to any or all real and personal property vested in such agencies or instrumentalities”. This was a law intended to clear all faults. A 1998 Patton Boggs legal analysis on these and other laws provided Wyoming stated, “Tae e king the bells was wrongful in 1901...taking the bells would be wrongful today...that the President has authority he needs to return the bells to the Philippine government.”

**A Balanced Conclusion:** Last April the 800-pound Bell of Saint Peter, almost identical in history, was sent home by the U.S. Military Academy to its church in the Philippines to national jubilation as the “right and honorable thing to do.” At any time, the new Duterte administration, or the Church, may request return of the Bells of Saint Lawrence.

The Administration should act now.

Concerning the Bells, it is recommended that: (1) the initiative to return them come from the U.S.; (2) The USAF be directed to return the Bells to their church.

Concerning the historical interest of Wyoming veterans about honoring those Americans that died, it is recommended that: (1) the U.S. Army opens an inquiry of potential denied valor ... there is evidence of support; (2) a proposal that the Balangiga village plaza be a memorial becomes a U.S. and Philippine Armed Forces project of a future joint training exercise.

August 10<sup>th</sup> is the feast day of St. Lawrence Martyr, the most celebratory day of the year in Balangiga, perfect for the Bells return or a White House announcement. St. Lawrence is also the Patron Saint of the Poor, a natural juxtaposition for any Administration. The Church of San Lorenzo de Martir is waiting for the return of its Bells to call the faithful to prayer and children to fiesta. This is the third church built on the site. The belfry of 1901 was a raised platform of wood with a nipa palm roof several yards to the right from this view.

## APPENDIX B

January 8, 2018

Congressman Randy Hultgren  
Congressman James P. McGovern  
Co-Chair, Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission  
House Committee on Foreign Affairs  
4150 O'Neill Federal Building  
200 C Street SE  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairmen Hultgren and McGovern:

I write as the author of "The Bells of San Lorenzo de Martir, A Desk Guide to Truth," a living essay on the "Bells of Balangiga". You recently wrote the Secretary of Defense about a decision he must make on returning the Bells to the Philippines and current concerns over human rights violations in that country.

There should be no pre-condition on returning the "Bells of Balangiga" to their Church. It is simply a matter of returning personal property to its owner.

The Bell's future is not about policies of a nation's leader; it is about its people. It is not about returning Bells to a country; it is about returning Bells to a Church. It is not about a disregard for human rights abuse; it is about restoring honor.

This is not a political matter. It is finally responding to the repeated petitions of the Church of San Lorenzo de Martir, its Priest and Bishop, the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, and the Vatican.

It is about how the people of our nation can respect the people and religious patrimony of a country "created in our image" the same way we respect religious and cultural property of other nations and former adversaries. I see in that a reflection of human rights and the mission of your commission.

It is a very simple matter made complex by curious law.

The Bells are held in the mistaken belief that their presence in the United States is somehow a war memorial when in fact they were brought here following a period of military history that saw the burning and looting of convents and churches. As poisoned property of that period they have no place in a monument to the valiant. Their place should be with the parishioners who paid to have them cast and with a simple act of restoration we may achieve final release from a toxic history.

Those of us laboring to overcome the myths and misinformation associated with their complex history had looked to the expiration of the moratorium for returning the Bells under U.S. law as the time in their journey where the "Bells of Balangiga" could once again ring as the Bells of San Lorenzo de Martir. It would tighten the bond between two peoples with a unique intertwined history, result in a better way to honor American heroes by means other than stolen church property, and make their return a religious and not a political moment in history.

The moratorium was again extended but with an opportunity given to the Secretary of Defense to decide the future of the Bells of San Lorenzo de Martir.

In my view the certification and outreach responsibility given to the Secretary offers opportunity and hope. Whether for reasons of national security or reasons associated with restoration of Catholic Church Bells to their parishioners so they can return to their original purpose ... to signal the presence of Christ for those who come to worship. I am confident that by the Feast Day of Saint Lawrence the Martyr the Bells will once again ring to summon the faithful to prayer and children to fiesta.

I believe this act of faith and restoration of religious property is in keeping with your charter to "promote, defend and advocate international recognized human rights".

Saint Lawrence is the Patron Saint of the Poor.

I would be glad to discuss the real story of the Bells of Balangiga with you or appropriate members of your staff.

Most respectfully,

Daniel W. McKinnon, Jr.  
Rear Admiral, United States Navy, Retired

Copy to:  
The Honorable James N. Mattis, Secretary of Defense

## **APPENDIX C**

### **RESOLUTION**

#### **National Headquarters, The American Legion One-Hundredth Annual National Convention, Minneapolis, Minnesota August 28, 29, 30, 2018**

##### **RESOLUTION NO. 2**

**SUBJECT: RETURN OF THE CHURCH BELLS FROM F.E. WARRAN AFB TO THE PHILIPPINES  
REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY**

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WHEREAS, the year 2017 marked the 75th Anniversary of the Defense of the Bataan Peninsula and the shared sacrifice of 77,000 Americans and Filipinos who fought side by side delaying the advance of the Japanese Imperial Army resulting with over 1,000 Americans and 9,000 Filipinos perishing in the infamous Bataan Death March; and

WHEREAS, for over 100 years the Philippines has been America's strongest friend in Asia and a staunch ally in World War II, The Korean War, The Vietnam War and The War on Terror; and

WHEREAS, over the past several decades, there are many precedences of religious bells and artifacts removed from Japan, Germany and Russia, during periods of conflict, being returned to the churches and temples from which they were taken, including bells long held by the United States Naval Academy, Virginia Military Institute, Harvard University and many American cities, because it was the right and honorable thing to do; and

WHEREAS, in 2016 the United States Military Academy at West Point returned an 800 pound church bell taken from the Philippines in 1901 that had been held on display for over 100 years to the church of Saints Peter and Paul in Bauang, La Union, because it was the right and honorable thing to do; and

WHEREAS, General Order 100, also known as the Lieber Code and Lincoln's Code, was placed in effect by General Arthur MacArthur during the Philippine American War (1899-1902) specifically

prohibiting the taking of personal and religious property; and

WHEREAS, the Iwo Jima Association of America encourages the return to Japanese families of personal property and artifacts brought to the U.S. during World War II as a gesture of reconciliation and friendship; and

WHEREAS, the monuments men of the monuments, fine arts and archives section of thirteen allied nations persevered to protect and preserve looted private property taken by German forces during World War II, because it was the right and honorable thing to do; and

WHEREAS, in 1904 the U.S. Army 11th Infantry Regiment brought to Fort D.A. Russell (Today Francis E. Warren Air Force Base) in Cheyenne, Wyoming from a quarter master salvage yard on the Philippine Island of Leyte, two 600-pound bells which had originally hung in the belfry of the church of San Lorenzo de Martir in the small town of Balangiga on the island of Samar; and

WHEREAS, the 11th Infantry abandoned the bells in place in 1913 and later the U.S. Army again abandoned the bells in 1947 when the base was turned over to the U.S. Air Force because they held no special significance to either the legacy or history of the 11th Infantry or the U.S. Army; and

WHEREAS, an existing monument and memorial to those soldiers of company C who died as a result of the encounter exists at Sackets Harbor, New York, home of the 9th U.S. Infantry at that time; and

WHEREAS, for several years it was incorrectly believed that the bells of San Lorenzo de Martir, taken from the church in the town of Balangiga, had been rung during the Philippine American War as a signal of surprise attack on American soldiers of Company C, 9th U.S. Infantry that was garrisoned in that town; and

WHEREAS, these two 600 - pound bells ultimately became known through pejorative writing and distorted history as the "Bells of Balangiga" and a source of misunderstanding and rancor between friends and allies; and

WHEREAS, the Philippines is predominately a Catholic nation where church bells play a very important role in the lives of Filipinos as well as reflective of their National Patrimony representing the very fabric of their cultural heritage and history and because the bells were bought and paid for the parishioners of San Lorenzo de Martir to return the bells would be the honorable and right thing to do and result in national jubilation; now therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Minneapolis, Minnesota, August 28, 29, 30, 2018, That in recognition of the 75th anniversary of the Bataan Death March and the historic military ties and camaraderie between Americans and Filipinos and given that new and accurate information on the history of the two bells now exists, that the Secretary of Defense in collaboration with Veteran organizations, take action to return the two Catholic church bells now on display at F.E. Warren Air Force Base (formerly Fort D.A. Russell) in of Eastern Samar, republic of the Philippines; and

RESOLVED, That Resolution No. 56 of the 2016 National Convention of The American Legion held in Cincinnati, Ohio titled, Protection, Preservation and Retention of Federal and Military Monuments in the United States, is hereby rescinded.





United States  
of America

# Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 116<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

WASHINGTON D.C., THURSDAY, APRIL 4, 2019

## House of Representatives

### Floor Speech Honoring Sergeant Adolph Gamlin

#### HONORABLE DON BACON OF NEBRASKA IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

**Mr. BACON of Nebraska.** Madam Speaker. Late last year, an historic event took place in the relations between our country and the Republic of the Philippines. In December of 2018, the United States returned the historic "Bells of Balangiga" to the Church of San Lorenzo de Martir on the Island of Samar. The three Bells had been brought to the U.S. following the Philippine-American War over a century ago. The return of the Bells by the Department of Defense became a moment of national jubilation for the Philippines.

The history of the Bells began on a Saturday morning in September 1901 when a company of American soldiers were caught in a surprise attack by Philippine revolutionaries and the U.S. Army unit was nearly decimated. Some reports indicate that one of the bells was thought to be used as a signal in the attack. U.S. forces launched a counter-attack in response, killed many of the people of the town, destroyed the church with the bells and took all three as war trophies. The three bells were then shipped to America by the U.S. Army, despite orders that Church property was not subject to retention after the end of hostilities. For over a century they remained unlocated until twenty years ago when Philippine President Fidel Ramos, a West Point graduate and American compatriot in the Korean and Vietnam wars, asked for the return of two bells from a U.S. Air Force base in Wyoming, a base that a century ago was an Army cavalry post. Since then, every Philippine president has asked for repatriation and over the years, the "Bells of Balangiga" have become national historic icons; sacred artifacts of a nation whose historical patrimony was largely destroyed in World War II.

Despite disagreement in the U.S. about the return of the Bells, three retired U.S. Navy officers, later referred to as the "three sailors" believed that it was the right thing to do and set out to advocate for their return. They knew well the bond of friendship forged between the United States and the Republic of the Philippines in World War II and strengthened ever since. Thus, the three Naval officers began a journey of discovery and learning spanning Wyoming, Army and Air Force record centers, a private library in Arizona, and the battle site in Balangiga to fully realize the story of the historic bells.

The "three sailors" discovered that the two bells in Wyoming were not used as signals for the attack and were the property of the Catholic Church and sacred icons of the Philippines. They also discovered that our possession of them stood in stark contrast to other church bells previously returned by the U.S. to Russia, Japan, and Germany. Most importantly, they concluded that returning captured bells to their rightful nations and church parishioners have only strengthened the bonds between those nations and reflect the highest standards of military honor.

For twenty years legislation existed that prevented removal of the Balangiga Bells from the United States. Last year I was honored to advance and advocate legislation that amended the law to permit the Secretary of Defense to approve return of the Bells and on the 14th of November in 2018, former Secretary of Defense James Mattis announced that the Bells were going home. On the 15th of December, the President of the Philippines, with leaders of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the United States in attendance, expressed gratitude to the American people as the Bells rang once again in the coastal town of Balangiga. As we commit to the work of this new Pacific Century, let us reaffirm our long partnership with the Republic of the Philippines, now made stronger by the return of the Bells of Balangiga, a noble act that will ensure that a century long Philippine-American friendship will endure and echo in eternity.

I am also pleased to share another story of the Bells less known, that includes a heroic young man from Nebraska, Private Adolph Gamlin. Adolph was the principal sentry on duty the tragic morning of battle that became known as the "Massacre of Balangiga". The record reflects that Gamlin fought bravely that day and acquitted himself with honor. His courage and skill in battle helped survivors to escape the onslaught and prevented the complete decimation of his unit.

Adolph Gamlin was a 20-year-old farm boy when he enlisted in 1898 with the 51st Iowa Volunteer Infantry and was sent off to the Philippines. He later joined other Spanish American War volunteers by re-enlisting in the Regular Army's 9th Infantry in 1900. Back to the Philippines in November, he caught up with Company C in January of 1901 when they were still in China and returned to Manila with his unit in June. He mustered out of the Army in 1903 at Fort Niagara in New York as Sergeant Gamlin and returned to Nebraska, married, had three children before his wife's untimely death. Adolph remarried and today his daughter, E. Jean Wall from that marriage, carries on his memory. Over the years she has accumulated the single most complete library on Balangiga and its military history. Included are many letters left to her by her father. He was her hero, and now he is mine too.

Adolph Gamlin died in 1969 at age 92. Today he is at rest at the historic Wyuka Cemetery in Nebraska City. The diligent research of the "three sailors" found there were many heroes of the battle, valiant men never fully recognized. Gamlin was one of them. Today I am honored to capture this story in the Congressional Record to ensure it is never forgotten and available in our nation's archives so others may know their story for generations to come.

I yield back the remainder of my time.

## APPENDIX E

11 November 2019

Veterans Day

The Honorable James E. Risch  
Chair, United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations  
423 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Risch:

On October 16, the following statement was made during the confirmation hearing of Ambassador Song Y. Kim's nomination as Ambassador to the Republic of Indonesia.

"Mr. Chairman, I want to take this opportunity to raise my concerns with a nomination of Sung Kim to be the U.S. ambassador to Indonesia. In 2017, we learned through press reports that the U.S. ambassador to the Philippines, Ambassador Kim, pledged to the Philippines government to move the Bells of Balangiga from Wyoming's F.E. Warren Air Force Base to the Philippines. I joined Wyoming veterans in strongly opposing the efforts of Ambassador Kim.

Despite the opposition of our veterans and legislation passed to protect the veterans' memorials, Ambassador Kim believed it was quote, "the right thing to do to return the bells soon." Well, the bells of Balangiga were not just some bells indiscriminately taken during the Philippine insurrection. These bells were part of a veteran memorial located in Wyoming that paid tribute to the massacre of C Company 9th infantry.

The Bells of Balangiga were used by the Filipino insurgents to signal the attack on American soldiers while they were asleep. In all, 48 of the 75 U.S. soldiers were killed during the attack. To honor the soldiers of C Company, these bells were legally brought to Cheyenne, Wyoming to be placed at Fort D.A. Russell, which is now F.E. Warren Air Force Base. A veteran memorial was erected, displaying these bells as a way to recognize the troops who bravely fought for our nation and never came home.

Mr. Kim's support for moving the bells to the Philippines resulted in tearing down a veteran memorial. In Wyoming, we have a strong tradition of never forgetting the sacrifices of our brave men and women. Dismantling this veteran memorial was completely unacceptable. It also sets a dangerous precedent for future veteran and war memorials. Mr. Kim's support and involvement helped establish a bad precedent for the future.

There is nothing more important for a nation and to honor and remember those who died in service to their country. Mr. Kim's support for dismantling the Bells of Balangiga memorial is contrary to that commitment and he failed to meet the standard experienced--expected of him."

Mr. Chairman, this matter involved the return by the United States of two Roman Catholic Church bells to the Church of San Lorenzo de Martyr on the island of Samar in the Philippines from the Museum of the United States Air Force. The events described took place in 2018 and Ambassador Kim had little to do with any decision related to their return. The statement quoted was in the context of the Ambassador's work on a position taken by the United States Government. A personal attack was unwarranted. The decision to send the bells back to their church and the parishioners that had paid to have them cast came about through the application of law by the Secretary of Defense, and the urging of veterans who could not envision how these two bells had any place in an American war memorial.

The bells presence in the United States had been a long-standing irritant in the relations of two nations, one a former colony and arguably our longest and closest ally in Asia. The Republic of the Philippines and its people have stood with us in war like few others. The bells retention in the United States stood in embarrassing contrast to church bells brought to America from former adversaries Japan, Germany, and the USSR, and returned to their places of worship.

It is acknowledged that a few veterans genuinely believed the bells were part of a war memorial. That perception has been dispelled with veterans having concluded their return a moral imperative. The American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States petitioned our government to affect return through national resolutions.

It was not an initiative of the Philippine government nor our State Department. It was American veterans.

It should also be pointed out:

...that the bells were an unfortunate historical scapegoat to a tragedy of the Philippine Insurrection/Philippine-American War. In 1901, a company of courageous U.S. Army soldiers was decimated in a native surprise attack during breakfast. The town had been occupied for only a few weeks and the attackers hid in the nearby brush and the village church whose attached convent had been appropriated for company headquarters and billeting. The church and belfry were burned in retaliation and the bells removed to an adjacent island to prevent being melted into weapons.

...that a period of history followed that became known as “Bloody Samar” where villages were destroyed and hundreds of civilians killed, also in retaliation, resulting in multiple courts-martial. It is anathema to believe that church property taken following such circumstances could ever be appropriate for use in a memorial to courageous American soldiers. ***“This is not the well of the valiant from which memorials to the heroic are drawn.”***

...that the bells were brought to a U.S. Army Cavalry post in Wyoming in 1904 in violation of Army regulation;

...that the bells were not one of the signals of attack nor were the soldiers asleep;

...that the bells were not part of a war memorial but museum artifacts on a U.S. Air Force minuteman missile base denied public access due to force protection;

...that the bells were not part of Wyoming military history and heritage, a heritage beautifully honored by the Spanish-American War Memorial, “Taking the Oath”, on the grounds of the state capital.

There was sufficient awareness of this history, a study having been posted on the VFW Department of Wyoming website.

A final and beneficial consequence of the long-time opposition to their return is that there are now plans for an authentic memorial to the heroic men of Company C, Ninth Infantry Regiment, with their home post at Madison Barracks, Sackets Harbor, New York.

The complexity of the national security situation in Southeast Asia is fully understood by the Committee. I trust the Committee also understands that Ambassador Kim was not, and never would be, party to the “dismantling” of a memorial to American valiant.

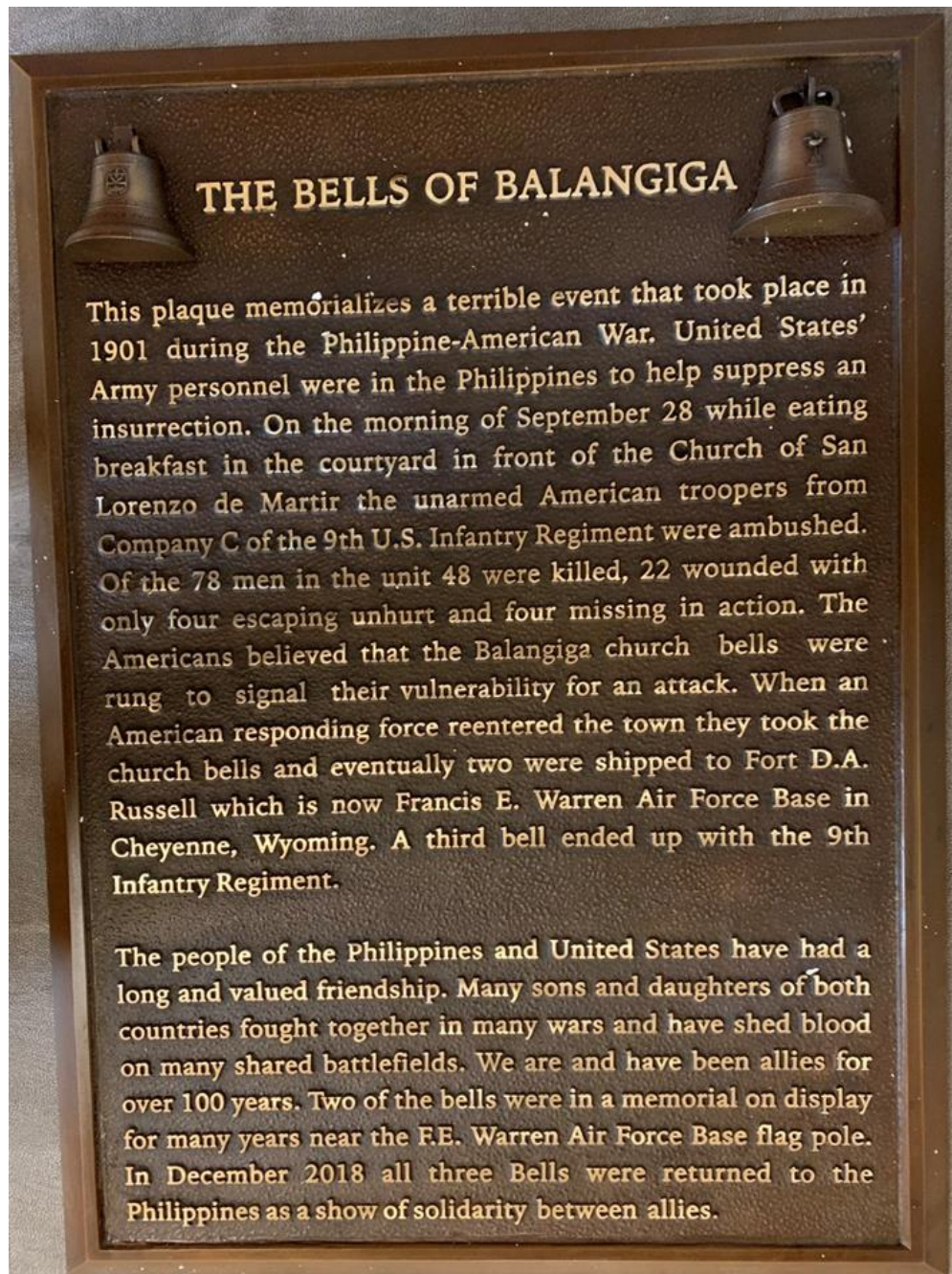
The ambassador’s wife and young daughters were with him at his hearing. As a 35-year Navy veteran, I understand well the sacrifice of the Kim family to support his devotion and service to his country. In order for the record to accurately reflect that devotion, and remove any intimation that he would ever hold in disrespect the sacrifice of veterans, I earnestly request that this letter be added to the record of the confirmation hearing.

Most respectfully,

Daniel W. McKinnon, Jr.  
Rear Admiral, United States Navy, Retired

Cc: The Honorable Michael R. Pompeo, Secretary of State





*Bronze plaque donated by Bells benefactor Henry B. Howard to the Wyoming Veterans Commission to commemorate the heroism of Company C, Ninth Infantry Regiment, respecting a view held in the state that the two bells on F.E. Warren Air Force Base were part of a war memorial.*