



The San Pedro Bell on its stand at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point where it was on display prior to its return to the Church of Saint Peters and Paul in Bauang, La Union.

"FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS" THE STORY OF THE HISTORIC AND SIGNIFICANT RETURN OF A PHILIPPINE CHURCH BELL BY THE U.S. ARMY

by Dennis Wright

For centuries on centuries, church bells have long been a part of worship for Christians around the world. Church bells are used to call the faithful to start services or to announce births, weddings, funerals or other community celebrations and events. This is especially true in the Philippines, a country that is composed of 80 percent Roman Catholic. Church bells have played, and continue to play, a very important role in the very fabric of Filipino society and culture which were literally derived from the Catholic church, its teachings and the tolling of church bells that called the faithful to worship.

During the Philippine American War, church bells were sought after by Filipino troops fighting for independence because the bells could be melted down into

weapons. Sometimes the bells were taken with the blessing of the priests, but sometimes against their wishes. Similarly, American troops would confiscate church bells to prevent them from being melted down and turned into weapons that could be used against them. In some instances, after the conflict ended, U.S. forces retained possession of church bells as trophies of war that eventually found their way to the U.S. It is unknown exactly how many bells were either destroyed by Filipino forces or taken by U.S. forces during this period, however several have been identified and cataloged by Dr. Regalado "Ricky" Trota Jose of the University of Santo Tomas, the Philippines leading expert and authority on church bells.

The taking of church bells or other items was not unique to the Philippines. Over the course of centuries, trophies of war, including art, artifacts, relics, historical objects, weapons and church bells were often taken as souvenirs marking the

victor's conquests. The history of trophies of war taken during periods of conflict is a complex issue facing many parties and nations today. Many will remember the recent movies *The Monuments Men* and *Woman in Gold* both dealing with the protection and return of private property taken during World War II. Historians will also well recall many other treasures and artifacts that have been taken from Egypt, the Orient and other parts of the world over the course of time.

1930	Babylonian Ishtar Gate in the Pergamon Museum of Berlin taken from Iraq
1800	Rosetta Stone in a British Museum taken from Egypt and then France
1802-1812	Elgin Marbles in a British Museum taken from Greece
1850	Koh-i-Noor Diamond on display in the Tower of London taken from India
1913	Nefertiti Bust in a German Museum taken from Egypt
Late 19th Century	Imperial treasures in British Museums taken from China

So what is the right thing to do? Keep the artifacts or return them to their original owners? For many, it is a matter of conscience, for others it is a matter of honor, and still for others, they just don't know or resist.

While all of the objects identified above remain in the possession of the victors today, many others have in fact been returned to their original owners, including the famous Austrian painter Gustav Klimt's *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer* which after lengthy legal efforts was returned to the owner in 2006 and subject of the movie *Woman in Gold*.

Over the course of time, many bells have been taken from various places of worship around the world, and especially Japan after World War II by U.S. Forces and then relocated to the U.S. Many of these bells have subsequently been returned to their rightful owners. For example:

RETURNED BELLS TO THEIR RIGHTFUL OWNERS

- 1954** In 1954 Duluth, Minnesota returned a bell that had been taken from Isumi, Japan;
- 1961** In 1961, the Rotary Club in Atlanta, Georgia facilitated the return of a Japanese bell. The city of Atlanta had held to Yokosuka, Japan, as a joint Rotary project with their counterpart in Yokosuka;
- 1987** The U.S. Naval Academy returned a bell Commodore Perry had taken in 1854 and long held on display at the school; it was returned to the Shuri Historical Museum in Okinawa, Japan in 1987;
- 1989** In 1989 Topeka, Kansas returned their WWII trophy bell to the temple it had been taken from in Shimizu City, Japan;
- 1991** In 1991 the Virginia Military Institute returned its bell to Okinawa's Shuri Castle;
- 2007 to 2008** Harvard University returned 18 bells it had acquired after the Russian purge of churches in the 1920s to the Danilovsky Monastery in 2007-2008; and
- 2010** In 2010 three bells taken in 1863 from a Santiago, Chile church were returned by the All Saints Church in Oystermouth, Wales.

Today, there is much more awareness and enlightenment concerning the preservation and protection of private property, artifacts and historical sites during times of conflict than ever before. There also is more of a social conscience



On May 23, 2016 Bishop Rodolfo Fontiveros Beltran, Diocese of San Fernando de La Union rings the San Pedro Bell for the first time since its return to the Philippines since 1901 as witnessed by Dennis Wright and the Honorable Eulogio Clarence Martin P. de Guzman III, Municipal Mayor of Bauang, at the Dedication and Unveiling Ceremony at the Church of Saints Peter and Paul.

and sense of goodwill to return church bells and other private property that were wrongly taken.

In 1863, during the U.S. Civil War, President Lincoln signed a new regulation known as the Lieber Code that set forth standards of behavior for U.S. military forces during times of conflict – including restrictions on the taking of private property. This has been further codified and continues today as General Order 100 and The Hague Conventions. Section II of the Lieber Code specifically addressed ". . . Protection of persons, and especially of women, of religion, the arts and sciences. . .". It did allow

for the temporary confiscation and safeguarding of private property due to military necessity, including church bells, but then mandated that they be returned to the original owners upon cessation of hostilities.

So it comes as no surprise then, that some bells might have been removed from churches in the Philippines during the Philippine American War and migrated to the U.S. The most talked about of these are three bells taken from the church



The Clergy from Northern Luzon along with thousands of parishioners and citizens flocked to Bauang, La Union to attend and witness the Dedication High Mass held at the Church of Saints Peter and Paul and subsequent Unveiling Ceremony and the first ringing of the San Pedro Bell since 1901.

of San Lorenzo de Martir in Balangiga, Samar in 1901. However, there were others that we know about, including another bell that had similarly been taken in 1901 and that had been on display at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York for the past century. This bell, known as the San Pedro Bell, had long been lost to history until it was recently rediscovered and identified by a small group of American veterans working to secure the return of the Bells of San Lorenzo, Balangiga.

I am proud to be a part of this group of American veterans, along with my principal counterpart in the U.S., Dan McKinnon. Over the years we have worked together on various U.S. – Philippine historical projects, including the return of the Clark Veterans Cemetery to the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC) that culminated in its transfer to ABMC in 2014. Then again earlier this year we were successful in identifying and ushering the return of the San Pedro Bell from West Point to the Church of Saints Peter and Paul in Bauang, La Union.

Last year, we began working with the Superintendent of the U.S. Military Academy, the Pastor of the Church of Saints Peter and Paul in Bauang and the town Mayor to substantiate and prove that the San Pedro Bell that was on display at West Point had in fact been taken from the church in 1901 based on names embossed on the bell itself and the church and town records. On January 26, 2016 Lieutenant General Robert L. Caslen, Jr., the Superintendent of the academy, approved the transfer of the San Pedro Bell back to the Church of Saints Peter and Paul.

So after 115 years in the U.S., the San Pedro Bell was finally returned to its rightful owner on May 23rd of this year. I was most fortunate to have been part of this initiative and to have personally attended and witnessed the heartwarming re-dedication and reinstallation ceremony officiated by Bishop Rodolfo Fontiveros Beltran, Diocese of San Fernando de La Union. If anyone ever doubted what is the right thing to do with respect to returning artifacts or church bells to their rightful owners, they merely needed to have attended and witnessed the joy and



The Author, Dennis Wright and U.S. counterpart, Dan McKinnon, who led the effort to return the San Pedro Bell, visit Warren AFB in Cheyenne, Wyoming where two of the Bells of San Lorenzo de Martir are displayed as they continue their work to secure the return of the bells to Balangiga, Samar.

excitement the community displayed a sit welcomed home their bell and listened to it ring loud and clear for the first time since 1901. We are hopeful that one day we will be as successful nurturing the return of the Bells of San Lorenzo to Balangiga and hear the beautiful sound of the tolling of their bells.

The Bells of San Lorenzo have been the subject of much dialog and animosity over the past few decades. Two of the bells are located on a display stand on a USAF Missile Base in Cheyenne, Wyoming, and the third with the U.S. Army in Korea. We are urging our comrades in Wyoming and U.S. Army forces in Korea to follow the gestures of the U.S. Military Academy, the U.S. Naval Academy, the Virginia Military Institute and all the other cities and institutions, to return the bells of San Lorenzo de Martir to the Catholic Church in Balangiga, Samar. We can think of no finer or bolder example of honor than returning these three bells to their rightful owners, our friends and allies in the Philippines. Each tolling of those bells then would symbolize the friendship of our two peoples and the kinship of humanity.

In closing, I am reminded of a work taken from Meditation 17, written by John Donne, an English poet and cleric in 1624. Ernest Hemmingway also borrowed lines from this poem as the title of his book and movie "For Whom the Bell Tolls". Donne's poem describes the "interconnectedness" of humanity. It is perhaps most appropriate and relevant then that we reflect on what it means. It was especially meaningful to me as I witnessed the jubilation and pride of the people of Bauang when they first heard the tolling of the San Pedro Bell on May 23rd after 115 years of silence. We hope and

pray that one day we will similarly hear the ringing of the Bells of San Lorenzo in Balangiga and would understand for whom the bells really toll, as they would be tolling for all of us, the givers and the receivers, consider:

No man is an island, entire of itself;
Every man is a piece of the continent, a
part of the main.

If a clod be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less.
As well as if a promontory were.
As well as if a manor of thy friend's, or of
thine own were.

Any man's death diminishes me, because
I am involved in mankind;
And therefore never send to know for
whom the bell tolls,
For it tolls for thee. ■

About the Author:

Dennis Wright is the Founder of Peregrine Development International, President of the Central Luzon Chapter of the American Chamber of Commerce and a Founding Board Director of the U.S. – Philippine Society. He is retired U.S. Navy Captain. Dennis was instrumental in the return of the San Pedro Bell and on January 5, 2016, the Mayor of the City of Bauang, La Union presented him The Tawid Award conferred to non-resident individuals who have generously contributed to the progress of the Municipality.