

VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS
DEPARTMENT OF PACIFIC AREAS RESOLUTION
June 13, 2017

BELLS OF BALANGIGA

Whereas the year 2017 is the 75th anniversary of the notorious Bataan Death March where American and Philippine men-at-arms who fought and bled together saw over 500 Americans and over 5,000 Filipinos comrades die together;

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

Whereas over the past few decades, the United States Naval Academy, the Virginia Military Institute, Harvard University, many American cities, among others, have returned religious bells which were removed during periods of conflict and brought to the United States to churches and temples in Japan, Russia, and Germany from which they came;

Whereas in 2016 the United States Military Academy at West Point returned to the Church of Saints Peter and Paul in Bauang, La Union an 800-pound Bell taken in 1901 from the Philippines which it held on display for over 100 years because it was the "right and honorable thing to do";

Whereas it was not unusual during the Philippine-American War (1899 – 1902) for soldiers to bring home souvenirs and artifacts from Catholic Churches in the Philippines such as bells, and other reliques in violation of the U.S. Army's General Order 100 which implemented the Lieber or Lincoln's Code protecting private property;

Whereas General Order 100 placed in effect by General Arthur McArthur during the Philippine American War prohibited the taking of personal property and defined the property of churches as personal property;

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

Whereas in 1904 the U.S. Army 11th Infantry Regiment brought to Fort D. A. Russell (today Warren Air Force Base) in Cheyenne, Wyoming from a Quartermaster 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;

Whereas for several years it was incorrectly believed that these Bells of San Lorenzo de Martir, taken from the church in the town of Balangiga, Samar had been used during the Philippine American War as a signal of a surprise attack on American soldiers garrisoned in that town;

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;

Whereas the Philippines is predominately a Catholic nation where church bells are a very important element in the lives of Filipinos as well as reflective of their national patrimony representing the very fabric of its cultural heritage and history - - the return of the bells would be “the right thing to do” and result in national jubilation;

Whereas our history and common bond was also forged in the Philippines and on August first, 1914, the “Army of the Philippines, Cuba and Puerto Rico” became the “Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States”;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Veterans of Foreign Wars Department of Pacific Areas, 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 accurate information on the history of the two bells now exists, that the President of the United States in collaboration with the Congress of the United States, take action to return the two Catholic Church Bells now on display on F. E. Warren Air Force Base (formerly Fort D. A. Russell) in Cheyenne, Wyoming to the Church of San Lorenzo de Martir in the town of Balangiga, Province of Eastern Samar, Republic of the Philippines.