

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

FIFTEENTH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE RESOLUTION No. 236



Introduced by Reps. **TEDDY A. CASIÑO** and **NERI JAVIER COLMENARES**

RESOLUTION

EXPRESSING THE SENSE OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CALLING FOR THE RETURN BY THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT OF THE THREE BELLS OF BALANGIGA AND OTHER ARTIFACTS TAKEN FROM THE PROVINCE OF SAMAR AS WAR BOOTY DURING THE PHILIPPINE-AMERICAN WAR

WHEREAS, the Filipino people have continuously sought to reclaim and recover possession of the Bells of Balangiga which were forcibly taken by the US military forces from the town of Balangiga in Samar island during the occupation of the Philippines by the United States 109 years ago;

WHEREAS, the Filipino people regard the said bells not as tools or spoils of war that should be kept as war trophy but as historic and religious treasures made for the people of Samar that have become a significant part of Philippine heritage – not unlike how Americans regard their own Liberty Bell enshrined in Philadelphia;

WHEREAS, the sad history of the Bells of Balangiga dates back to September 28, 1901 when rising hostilities between the local Filipino populace and American occupation forces led to a surprise attack on the garrison of Company C of the 9th US Infantry Regiment in the small coastal town of Balangiga in Eastern Samar which had been set up to pinpoint the nerve center of guerrilla activities;

WHEREAS, the bells of the Balangiga church were rung by the town's chief of police at 6:30 a.m. to signal the ambush. The night before, rebels disguised as women smuggled weapons, mostly bolos, in small coffins which were carried to the church for an evening service. The attacking force, composed of around 500 men in seven different units, represented virtually all families of Balangiga, whose outlying villages then included the present towns of Lawaan and Giporlos, and of Quinapundan, a town served by the priest in Balangiga;

WHEREAS, the popular uprising was mounted for purposes of self-defense and survival following several weeks of forced labor, imprisonment in overcrowded conditions, the seizure of food and the rape of a young native woman. Only two of the eight main plotters were identified as revolutionary officers under the command of Brig. Gen. Vicente Lukban, the politico-military governor of Samar appointed by President Emilio Aguinaldo. They were Capt. Eugenio Daza, a former teacher who became Lukban's area officer for tax collection and food security in southeastern Samar, and Pedro Duran Sr., a Balangigan sergeant under Daza;

WHEREAS, of the 74 men of Company C, 36 were killed during the swift attack (including all commissioned officers), eight of the wounded died later during the escape by bancas to Basey town, four were missing and presumed dead. Of the 26 survivors, only four were not wounded. The Filipinos suffered 28 deaths and 22 wounded, in what historians would later describe as the “single worst defeat” of American forces during the Philippine-American War of 1899-1902;

WHEREAS, to avenge the attack, Brig. Gen. Jacob Smith gave orders to US forces to “kill and burn,” to take no prisoners and shoot down any male over the age of 10 capable of bearing arms. The resulting orgy of burning, looting, rape, torture and killing turned the island of Samar in six months into a “howling wilderness.” From around 300,000, the island's population dropped to around less than 257,000. In Balangiga alone, about 5,000 people were killed and the village burned to the ground;

WHEREAS, so severe were the methods employed that after the end of the “pacification campaign,” Gen. “Hell-Roaring Jake” Smith was court-martialed for murder and forced to retire from the service. But the American troops kept four artifacts taken from Balangiga as war trophies:

- Two church bells with the Franciscan Order emblems dated 1863 and 1889, respectively, and an English-made Falcon cannon dated 1557 – all three artifacts are on display at the Trophy Park of the F.E. Warren Air Force Base in Cheyenne, Wyoming;
- A smaller church bell with the Franciscan Order emblem dated 1896, which is with the 9th U.S. Infantry Regiment in Camp Red Cloud, Korea;

WHEREAS, according to Bishop Leonardo Medroso of the Diocese of Borongan, to which the Parish of Balangiga belongs, the bells were the property of the Roman Catholic Church in Balangiga when they were taken by the American forces. The bells should hence be returned to the place where they belong and for the purpose for which they were cast and blessed. The use of a religious article, as the Bells of Balangiga were allegedly used to sound an attack, does not by that very act fault the owner and deprive that owner of his property;

WHEREAS, in the hope of inspiring the US to return the stolen bells, on February 18, 1998, Wyoming’s Roman Catholic Bishop Joseph Hart returned a Madonna and Child statue reportedly taken during the Philippine-American War. He presented the 18-inch-high painted statue to Philippine ambassador Raul Rabe in Cheyenne, Wyoming. The statue, on display in Hart's home since 1984, was given by Dazee Bristol, whose husband fought in the war and reportedly took the statue from a burning church in Samar. Bristol gave Hart the statue shortly before she died at age 106;

WHEREAS, the Diocese of Cheyenne and the National Bishops Conference of America have also been joined by other Americans who likewise express support for the return of the bells as a gesture of goodwill and faith, as “religion transcends war and always pleads for peace and reconciliation” and because “in war, there are no war trophies except freedom”;

WHEREAS, various resolutions have been introduced in US state legislatures and the US Congress supporting the return of the bells, including US House Resolution 16, introduced January 27, 2003 in the State of Maryland. This resolution recognizes that the surprise attack on the US garrison at Balangiga must rightfully be viewed in the context of the Filipino struggle for independence from

Spain and the United States, and it should be acknowledged that Americans may have employed no less “surprising” and “unprovoked” means to fight for their own independence from England during the Revolutionary War;

WHEREAS, returning the Bells of Balangiga and other looted artifacts to the Filipino people would be a gesture of respect and goodwill on the part of the United States of America;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the House of Representatives call on the United States government to return the three Bells of Balangiga and other artifacts which were taken from the province of Samar as war booty during the Philippine-American War.

Adopted,

TEDDY A. CASIÑO
Bayan Muna Party-list

NERI JAVIER COLMENARES
Bayan Muna Party-list