

THE BELLS ARE BACK IN TOWN

BALANGIGA 2018

BY JENNIFER HALLOCK



INTRODUCTION

“It ain’t here until it’s here.”¹ President Rodrigo Duterte was skeptical. If all went well, it would be one of the most unexpected and celebrated events of the year: the return of the bells of Balangiga, war trophies taken from the Philippines by American soldiers in 1901. But many, including the president, were skeptical: would these bronze church bells really return to Philippine shores after 117 years in American custody? Who or what had changed the Yanks’ minds? Why would the US give the bells back now, at a time when relations between the two countries may be at their worst point since the Philippines ejected Americans from their Luzon military bases in 1992? Moreover, some Americans, like the Wyoming congressional delegation, still openly oppose their return. Who will prevail?

The proof is in the pudding—or in this case, on the pallets. The bells were boxed up on November 15, 2018, after US Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis and Philippine Ambassador to the United States Jose Manuel “Babe” del Gallego Romualdez attended a formal turnover ceremony for the two larger bells at Francis E. Warren Air Force Base in Cheyenne, Wyoming—on the grounds inelegantly called Trophy Park.² By that time the third bell, in Camp Red Cloud, home of the 9th Infantry in South Korea, had already been crated for shipping. All three bells were loaded aboard a U.S. Air Force plane and flown to Villamor Air Base, Manila, arriving on the morning of Tuesday, December 11, 2018. They were met by National Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, a representative of US Secretary of Defense Mattis, and U.S. Ambassador Sung Kim.³ The bells would stay in Manila for a few days for public viewing⁴ before being flown to Samar on a Philippine Air Force plane in time for the first *Simbang Gabi*, or novena mass, on December 16th.⁵ The empty second belfry of San Lorenzo de Martir church in Balangiga⁶ had been faithfully restored after the devastation of Typhoon Yolanda but would only be truly complete when it could use its bell to call parishioners to this early morning service. As Eastern Samar Representative Ben Evardone said, “The return [of the bells] will hopefully finally erase the remaining irritant or vestiges of the Philippine-American War.”⁷

THE WAR

If Americans read this story at all, most were thinking: What war? Which bells? They probably do not know that the United States had—and still has—an overseas empire in Asia, nor that a war was fought to colonize the Philippines from 1899 to 1913. The three bells in question were seized in 1901, amidst some of the worst fighting.

Why should the average American care? This war launched the American Century and shaped the country until today. It was the US's first overseas counterinsurgency and the first time America tried to exert its authority and values abroad. Not everyone bought into this enterprise, and a significant anti-imperialist movement was led by personalities like Andrew Carnegie and Mark Twain. But the truth was that most agreed with Theodore Roosevelt when he said: "Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure, than to take rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much, because they live in the gray twilight that knows not victory nor defeat."⁸

Unfortunately for both Americans and Filipinos, this war was just as murky as Roosevelt's gray twilight. The Yanks' overall strategy was a combination of what they called attraction and chastisement. The first part is better known today as civic action: the idea that making people's lives better with education, medical care, and political reform can convince them to put down their weapons. Some of these programs were implemented by the military before a civilian government could even be formed. The military's main objective, though, was to *secure* these benefits of American rule by protecting people in their homes and occupations. The chastisement needed to do this was supposed to be directed at the enemy: the Philippine revolutionaries who had shifted from conventional to guerrilla tactics and whose offensives in the provinces of Batangas and Samar were giving the Americans a lot of trouble. Chastisement was *not* meant to be directed at civilians—but at Balangiga, it was.

THE BELLS ARE BACK IN TOWN

Photo shows American soldiers of the 20th Kansas in trenches in the Philippines during the insurrection. (Library of Congress)

20TH KANSAS



BALANGIGA

THE BELLS ARE BACK IN TOWN

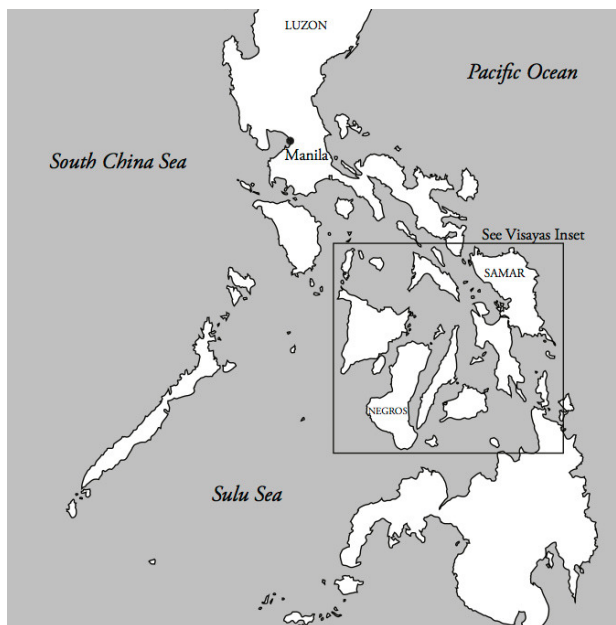
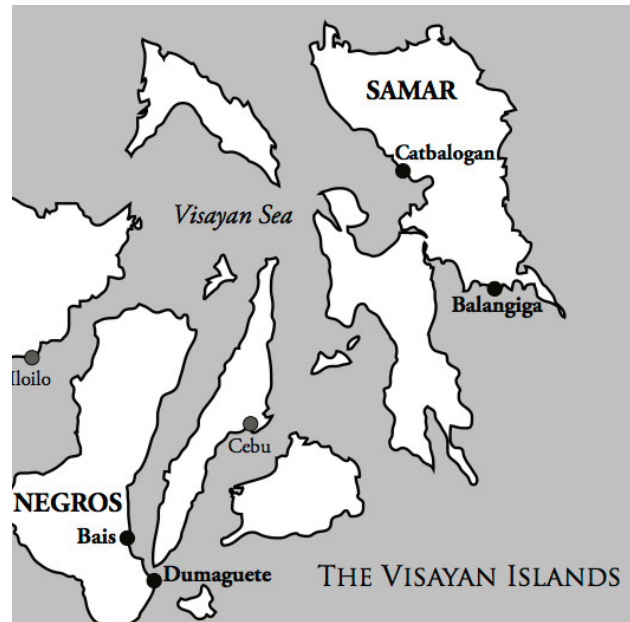
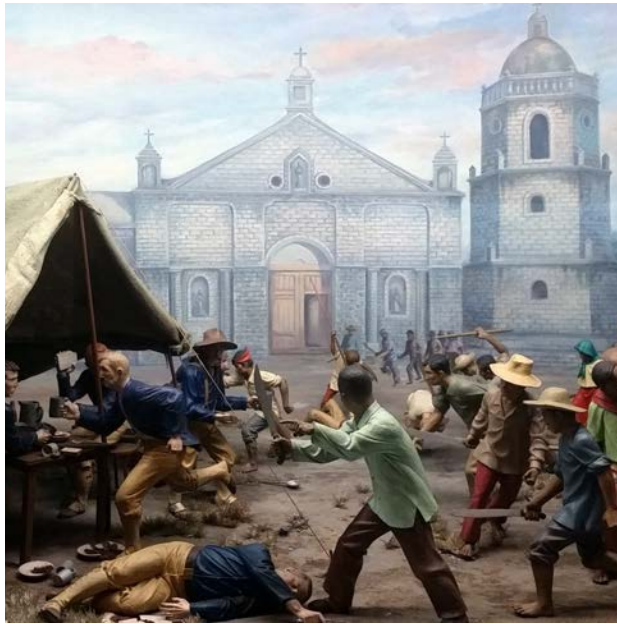
Company C of the Ninth US Infantry was sent to close the small port town on the southern coast of Samar to prevent the Philippine revolutionaries led by General Lukban from being resupplied. After the officer in charge, Captain Thomas Connell, was reprimanded by his commanding officer for his laxity, he overcompensated: he imprisoned 143 able-bodied men and boys in two conical tents designed to fit a total of only 32 people. They were only freed during the day to cut down vegetation that blocked the company's view of the surrounding jungle. It was this forced labor, and maybe some unwanted attention to a few young women in the village, that inspired the town to hatch a plan.⁹

On the morning September 28, 1901, the day after the town fiesta when many American troops were still hung over, they launched their attack. The police chief attacked the American sentry, Private Adolph Gamlin, and shouted, "*Atake, mga Balangiganon!*" ("Attack, men of Balangiga!"). Armed men rushed out of the tree line next to the mess hall and set upon the Americans eating breakfast.

A bell rang.

Within a few hours, the Americans had suffered their worst defeat since the Battle of Little Big Horn. 36 were Americans killed in the massacre, 8 died of their wounds, and 4 went missing and were presumed dead.¹⁰ That is a total of 48 dead, more than two-thirds of the company. "This was the biggest victory of Filipinos against the Americans during the Philippine-American war," said Professor Rolando O. Borrinaga, secretary of the Committee on Historical Research of National Commission for Culture.¹¹

Once the survivors of the attack made it to Basey the next morning by outrigger boat, news of the attack spread. Company G of the 9th Infantry, as well as members of the 11th Infantry, were dispatched to burn the town of Balangiga to the ground.¹² While they were there, they took the church's three bells.



DIORAMA 49: SURPRISE ATTACK AT BALANGIGA (TOP LEFT)
 DIORAMA 50: AMERICAN REPRISALS IN SAMAR (BOTTOM RIGHT)
 FROM THE AYALA MUSEUM DIORAMA EXPERIENCE. MAPS FROM
 THE SUGAR SUN SERIES.

WARRING SYMBOLS

THE BELLS ARE BACK IN TOWN

History professor W. Fitzhugh Brundage of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill said: “One of the fascinating and vexing characteristics of symbols like these monuments is that people want them to have a single meaning. The problem is the more important the symbol, the more likely there will be competing interpretations of that symbol.”¹³ Are these bells religious property or instruments of war? And how will that affect the fight to repatriate them to Balangiga?

The Catholic Bishop of Wyoming, interviewed in a 2002 documentary on the bells, said: “I think a bell is an inappropriate trophy of war. It’s like using a chalice or a menorah for a trophy.”¹⁴ (Never mind that this is exactly what the Roman general, and eventual emperor, Titus did after destroying Jerusalem—carried off the Jewish Temple’s menorah as a trophy. He even bragged about it on his arch in Rome. But maybe humankind should have advanced in 2000 years?) “Church bells belong in churches calling the faithful to worship, not as trophies of war,” said retired Navy captain Dennis L. Wright.¹⁵

Others believe that since “the bells were used to signal the attack in 1901... those bells became instruments of war.”¹⁶ There are some problems with this logic. First, only one bell was rung of the three—the smallest bell, often used to signal “public meetings or civic and non-religious activities, such as communal street cleaning, or to alert [townspeople] in cases of emergency, like fire or flood.”¹⁷ Second, the attack had already begun by the time the bell did ring. It added to the general alarm but did not solely initiate it.¹⁸

But these clarifications were not going to change the minds of those opposed to giving the bells back. They still saw the repatriation of the bells as a reward for the attack. “Men fought and died in the Filipino campaigns,” said Dennis Smith of Upper Sandusky, Ohio. Smith is a 9th Infantry veteran—though, obviously, a veteran from long after Balangiga. “They give us those lives back, then maybe we would consider it,” he said, “but until then the bells can stay where they are.”¹⁹ Steven Kravinsky, executive director of the Wyoming Veterans Commission, said in an interview with Wyoming Public Radio: “Sending them back would dishonor the soldiers that were killed in the Philippines.”²⁰ Wyoming Representative Liz Cheney, daughter of the former vice president, called keeping the bells in Wyoming one of her top priorities after being sworn into office in 2017.²¹

The largest opposition to the return of the bells came from this state of Wyoming, which is interesting because Wyoming is not even the home of the 9th Infantry. Wyoming ended up with the two larger bells, the ones that had remained silent throughout the attack. The smaller bell, the one actually rung in the battle, was given to the survivors of Company C, and they were photographed with it before leaving the Philippines. They took the bell with them to Madison Barracks at Sackets Harbor, New York, where it was placed on a solo pedestal as a memorial. Eventually, only the pedestal would remain since the bell would move with the Ninth to South Korea. The two bells in Wyoming—in *Trophy Park*, not *Memorial Park*, which is worth reiterating—were seized by a unit not under attack, but taken during retaliation for that attack.

And the retaliation was massive. Maybe not in terms of numbers of immediate dead: dozens of Filipinos died in the attack itself and maybe hundreds in the immediate days that followed, when the Americans landed on shore and burned all they saw. As Professor Borrinaga points out, “if you burn the houses, destroy the rice, burn the boats and destroy the carabao, they are as good as dead.”²² Anywhere from 2500 to 15,000 died in the next few months in southern Samar.²³

Worse, the American general in charge, General Jacob H. Smith, exhibited a carelessness that characterized the entire campaign. While asking for Samar to be turned into a “howling wilderness,” he told at least one subordinate that “I want no prisoners. I wish you to kill and burn, the more you kill and burn the better it will please me.”²⁴ This meant he wanted “all persons killed who are capable of bearing arms in actual hostilities against the United States.” When asked an age limit, Smith said ten years old.²⁵

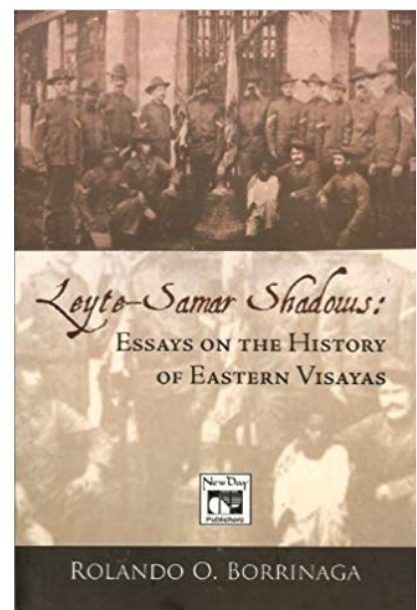
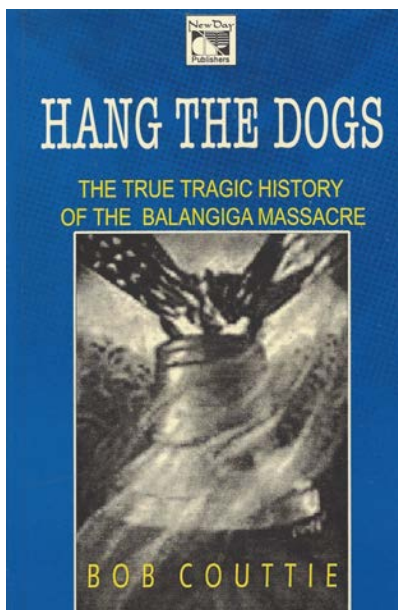
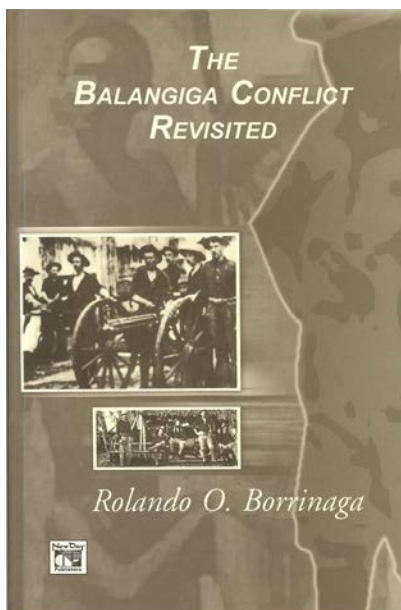


Smith was court-martialed, found guilty of “conduct to the prejudice of good order and military discipline,” and ordered to be “admonished by the reviewing authority.”²⁶ In addition to his reprimand, he was forcibly retired by President Roosevelt. If this punishment seems insufficient now, know that at the time America’s newspaper of record, the *New York Times*, thought it too harsh: “Gen. Smith, it will be remembered, was sent to punish the massacre of Balangiga. That massacre was so flagrant that the soldiers in the Philippines felt that the offenders must be made an example of.”²⁷ This persistent one-sided view of the attack is a big reason why veterans groups in the US resisted returning the bells for so long. Because the attack at Balangiga was assumed to be an unprovoked attack against faultless soldiers, it seemed to justify any harsh response, not the least of which is stealing a few bells. This attitude would change, but not for a while.

In 1902 the *New York Times* continued Smith’s defense by saying that his “epigrams and fantastic oaths”—like “kill everyone over ten years old”—were meant to be seen as jokes and not to be taken seriously.²⁸ In fact, Secretary of War Elihu Root wrote, “Gen. Smith’s written and printed orders, and the actual conduct of military operations in Samar, were justified by the history and condition of the warfare, with the cruel and treacherous savages who inhabited the island and their entire disregard of the laws of war; were wholly within the limitations of General Order No. 100 of 1863, and were sustained by precedents of the highest authority.”²⁹ (Unfortunately for Root’s reasoning, General Order No. 100 specifically prohibits cruelty and revenge-taking in Article 16.³⁰) All this shows is how inflammatory the whole issue was. The *New York Times* and Secretary of War justified a massacre in the name of a massacre. Benevolent assimilation, indeed.

No wonder the Americans who believed this skewed version of events would not countenance returning the bells; no wonder Filipinos wanted them back. As Representative Evardone said, the bells “rightfully belong to us as a symbol of freedom and justice.”³¹ Some even consider them a Philippine version of the Liberty Bell.³² “Balangiga, today a town of about 14,000, has never gotten over the loss of the bells,” writes a *New York Times* reporter. “Its modern identity revolves around the massacre and the reprisals that followed. The town plaza, where the killing occurred, is dominated by a large monument depicting the breakfast scene and the villagers approaching the soldiers with their bolos. September 28, the anniversary of the massacre, is celebrated as a holiday, now politely known as Balangiga Encounter Day.”³³

Instead of blame, the two sides should see that they share the burden of mourning the dead. Maybe the return of the bells will help them do that. “Today is a time of solemn remembrance as we pay tribute to all those who gave up their lives during the Filipino-American War,” the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs said. To cement that alliance, they added: “We also honor the shared sacrifice of Filipinos and Americans who fought shoulder to shoulder during the Second World War.” Retired Consul General and Philippine Military Academy Professor Sonny Busa said the effort to return the bells “worked now because the approach was not one of blame, but just one of shared interest, a commonality.”³⁴ But it took everyone a long time to get there.



THE BELLS IN WYOMING (US AIR FORCE PHOTO)
 KEY BOOKS BY FOUNDING MEMBERS OF THE BALANGIGA
 RESEARCH GROUP: ROLANDO O. BORRINAGA AND BOB COUTTIE

GETTING THE BELLS

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According to Secretary Lorenzana, the first request for the return of the bells was made in 1935 by one of the men who had helped plan the attack, Eugene Daza, a revolutionary leader in Samar.³⁵ He failed. In 1989 the municipal government of Balangiga passed a resolution formally requesting the bells. They failed. Five year later, President Bill Clinton offered the bells back—only to have veterans cry foul.³⁶ (In that same year Clinton—known to his military critics as a Vietnam draft dodger—moved to normalize relations with Vietnam, so he did not have the political strength to battle veterans’ groups on a second issue.) Philippine President Fidel Ramos sought the bells back for the centennial celebration of independence on June 12, 1998. He was opposed by Senator Craig Thomas (R) of Wyoming, who filed a bill to stall the motion. Thomas eventually offered the smaller, third bell, if Ramos would stop asking for the two in Wyoming.³⁷ (At this time, it was not yet clear which bell had rung during the attack, so Ramos refused.) Thomas then introduced a bill that prohibited the return of veterans’ memorial objects without specific authorization. This law gummed up the works for a while. There were more public attempts. Celebrities were enlisted. Susan Sarandon did the voice-over for *Two Bells/Two Worlds*, and later Danny Glover did the same for another documentary, though the message of these films were sometimes as garbled as the celebrities’ pronunciation of Balangiga. (Sarandon called it “Ba-lan-JEE-ya” and Glover said “Ba-lan-Gl-ga” with very hard consonants. The central sound of “ng” should rest at the back of the tongue, giving a softer sound.)

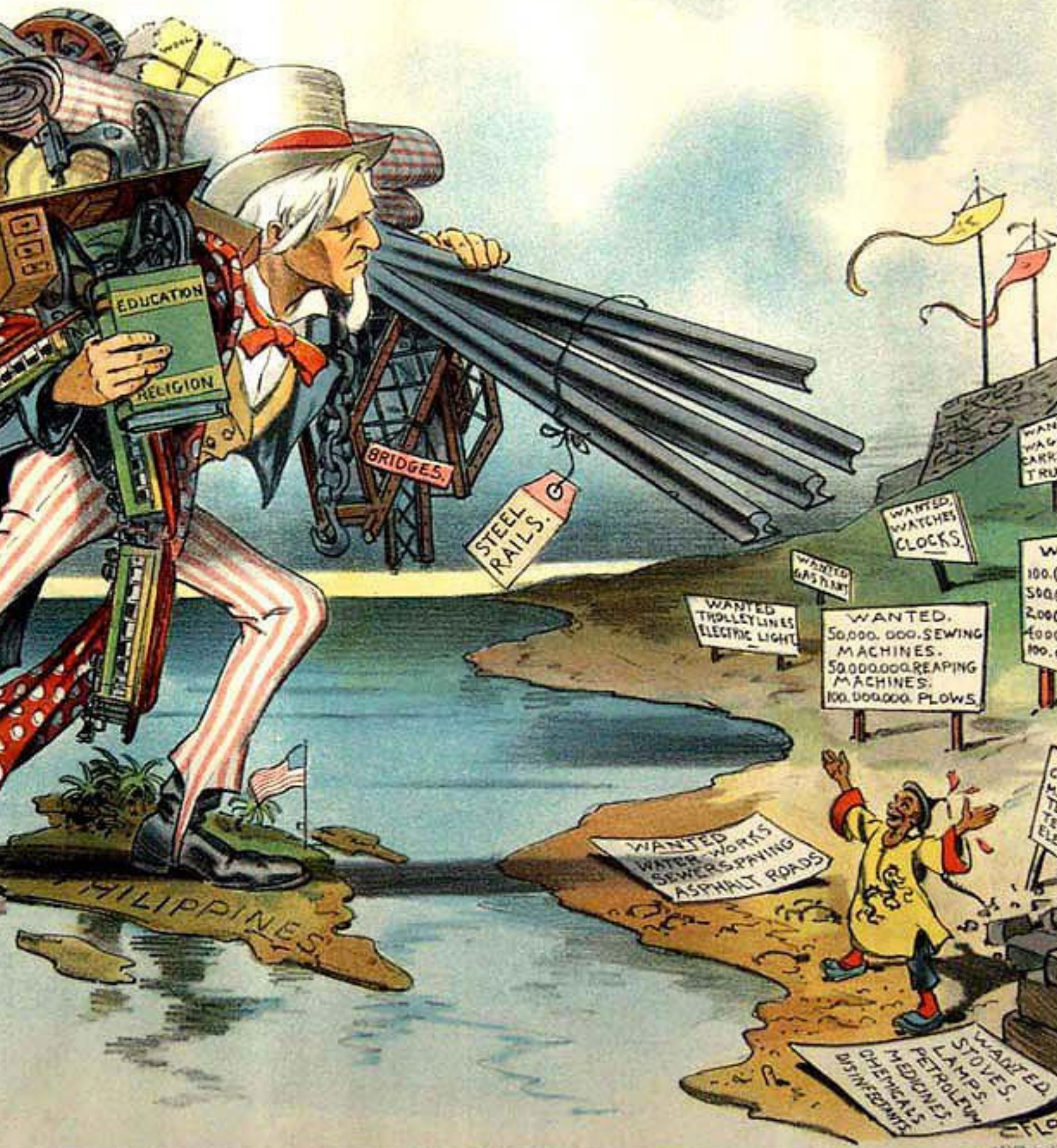
The real breakthrough came when veterans changed their minds, and they changed their minds partly because the public’s understanding of the original incident changed. Professor Borrinaga and British author Bob Couttie formed the Balangiga Research Group with Jean Wall, the daughter of Private Adolph Gamlin, the first soldier attacked and one of the few to survive. As Borrinaga uncovered more of the inciting conditions in the town, the so-called “massacre” began to look more like the “revolt” the Filipinos said it was—or, at least, a little of both. That, plus the unsavory nature of the “howling wilderness” campaign, began to taint the trophy bells.

Two key veterans groups made pivotal changes to their policies in this past year. "The latest successful campaign for the return of the Bells of Balangiga was largely a veterans-to-veterans effort," Borrinaga said. "So many in the U.S. veterans community have let their voices be known and lent their support—including national resolutions of support from both the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) and the American Legion [in July and August of 2018]."³⁸ Professor Busa added: "Once we got the VFW on our side, it was clear sailing because no politician wants to go against the VFW."³⁹ The men and women of the VFW changed their minds, it seems, because it was the "right thing to do,"⁴⁰ or even, in the words of veteran Cheryl Shannon of the VFW, "We're tired of it always being an issue."

Moreover, by 2018 even the military academies had started sending back their ill-gotten gains. "The US Naval Academy and the Virginia Military Institute have both repatriated bells to Japan, and the military academy at West Point last year returned another bell taken from the Philippines," reported the *New York Review of Books*.⁴¹

Others went along more reluctantly. Veteran Hank Miller of the VFW said, "I was advised to 'stop fighting a losing battle' and 'stop beating a dead horse' as the bells were going back."⁴² To men like Miller, though, Secretary of Defense Mattis had some meaningful words. Himself a lifelong soldier who donned a civilian suit only to take his current job, he said: "To those who fear we lose something by returning these bells, please hear me when I say: Bells mark time, but courage is timeless. It does not fade in history's dimly lit corridors."

If it were only a moral question, though, the bells would either have been returned sooner—or maybe not at all. Inconvenient moral questions do not often garner top billing. The whole issue might have been ignored altogether. Ultimately, though, the issue was tied to the Pentagon's purse strings. The US National Defense Authorization Act of 2018—a \$700 billion fiscal 2018 military authorization bill that veterans and military circles wanted passed—gave the Secretary of Defense the authority to decide on the return of the Balangiga bells.⁴³ As long as Mattis certified that the Pentagon had consulted with veterans' organizations, and if he felt the objects' return was in the country's national security interest, he could initiate the transfer within 90 days.⁴⁴ He could, and he did.



THE PHILIPPINES ARE ONLY THE STEPPING-STONE TO CHINA.

FORWARD POSITION

THE BELLS ARE BACK IN TOWN

Why would the return of the bells be in US national interests, and why now? Much like the original choice to colonize the Philippines, it is really all about China. In the Gilded Age, businessmen and missionaries alike wanted to sell stuff to the Chinese—both goods and Bibles. But China is no longer an untapped market to exploit; it is a competitor, a superpower, and a potential threat. In this new world order, the Philippines has a front-row seat.

When historians look back for the date that began the US-China Cold War, they will mark it as October 4, 2018, the date of Vice President Mike Pence's speech to the Hudson Institute, a conservative think tank in Washington, D.C. His rather dry remarks had none of the verbal flair of Churchill's 1946 "Iron Curtain" speech at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, but all the needed elements were there: the existential threat, the culture clash, and the call to action.

Pointing out the vast growth of China's military and espionage apparatus, Pence not only claimed China wants to push the US out of the Western Pacific, but he also said they were "meddling in America's democracy," particularly the midterm elections.⁴⁵ In one breath, he said that American investment in China has rebuilt the country, and in the other he said China was gutting the US through a huge trade deficit. In the political sphere, he cited cases of political oppression, like the "Great Firewall of China" and the social credit system. He also detailed religious oppression of Christians, Muslims, and Buddhists. He warned that China has been using "debt diplomacy" to pray on smaller countries around the world by lending them money for ports and infrastructure, then repossessing those potential bases when the countries cannot pay. Then Pence lauded the largest military spending bill in American history as a necessary deterrent.⁴⁶

Pence is not the only one who sees the US and China on a collision course. Harvard professor Graham Allison's book, *Destined for War*, claims that the countries are on an unavoidable path to war. When a rising superpower challenges the existing one, he claims, their brinksmanship will push them into an inevitable war. He called this the "Thucydides Trap."⁴⁷ Others say that it will be the actions of a third party, like Taiwan, who will ignite the spark of war.⁴⁸

Admittedly, relations are not going well. While the trade war went on a 90-day hiatus, both the US and China were taking hostages. US authorities requested Canada to arrest telecom giant Huawei's chief financial officer, Meng Wanzhou.⁴⁹ Huawei is one of the companies that Pence described as stealing American technology and turning it into "cutting-edge military blueprints" for the People's Liberation Army.⁵⁰ "And using that stolen technology, the Chinese Communist Party is turning plowshares into swords on a massive scale," Pence said.⁵¹ Meng's father, the founder of Huawei, was in fact an officer in the PLA, though that in itself is not proof of the claim.⁵²

The ten-year program entitled Made in China 2024 is supposed "to develop self-sufficiency and global leadership in robotics, artificial intelligence, aviation and new energy vehicles," but Pence called it a plan to "[steal] trade secrets, [violate] patents, [hack] industrial targets and [force] US companies investing in China to hand over their technology to Chinese partners."⁵³ Why arrest Meng now? Could it be retaliation for the fact that China has taken their own hostages? An American family—siblings Cynthia and Victor Liu as well as their US citizen mother—are being held in China as bait to catch their fugitive father, accused of a \$1.6 billion fraud from his time in control of a Chinese state-owned bank. The two children are being denied exit visas while their mother is detained.⁵⁴ If it sounds personal, it is. The normally staid BBC reported on Meng's arrest: "So what does this mean? The gloves are off. You should be under no illusion what this latest move by the US means for the relationship between the world's two largest economies: things have taken a dramatic turn for the worse."⁵⁵

The more dangerous interactions are taking place in and over the South China Sea—or, as the US now officially calls it, the West Philippine Sea. With the use of 3200 acres of reclaimed land, seven underwater atolls of the Spratly Islands have been built into Chinese military bases “complete with radar domes, shelters for surface-to-air missiles and a runway long enough for fighter jets.”⁵⁶ The Chinese now claim the sea around the newly-minted “islands,” as well as the air space above it. “U.S. military aircraft,” a Chinese radio operator warned a US P-8A Poseidon. “You have violated our China sovereignty and infringed on our security and our rights. You need to leave immediately and keep far out. . . . Leave immediately!”⁵⁷

Why do the Chinese want this “Great Wall of Sand”⁵⁸ as Admiral Harry B. Harris Jr., the former head of US Pacific Command, calls it? It may be the 11 billion barrels of oil beneath the sea, or the 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. Or it may be the \$5.3 trillion—or 30 percent—of world trade that passes through every year.⁵⁹

China is not deterred by American freedom of navigation operation patrols (FONOPs). In fact, just before President Pence’s speech, a Chinese warship cut off the USS *Decatur* near the Gaven and Johnson Reefs in the Spratlys. After “increasing aggressive maneuvers” by the Chinese vessel, the two nearly collided.⁶⁰ The Chinese destroyer approached within 45 yards of the *Decatur*, about the same distance as a baseball catcher throwing to second base.⁶¹ It is enough to make one believe a Thucydides trap will not be necessary: the two powers could crash directly into war, no “invisible forces” needed.

Not too surprisingly, given the cooling of relations, the US recently disinited China from participating in the biannual Rim of the Pacific naval exercise, which involves 20 navies including Vietnam.⁶² (The US lifted its lethal weapons ban on Vietnam in 2016, so we are now growing closer to our former enemy than our largest trading partner, China.) Around the same time, China refused a port of call for a US naval vessel in Hong Kong.⁶³



THE USS DECATUR AND A CHINESE DESTROYER (STARS AND STRIPES);
THE OVERLAPPING TERRITORIAL CLAIMS IN SPRATLY ISLANDS (VOICE OF
AMERICA); PHILIPPINE AMBASSADOR JOSE ROMUALDEZ AND DEFENSE
SECRETARY JAMES MATTIS (AIR FORCE).

The Philippines is right in the middle of this mess—literally. The US did support the Philippine case against China at the Permanent Court on Arbitration under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Though the Philippines (and the United States) won, nothing has changed. Professor Alexander Vuving of the Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies in Honolulu says that the US should not have needed the court to begin with. They should have physically protected the Scarborough Shoal for the Philippines to begin with, preventing the need for a court case after the fact. Inouye claims that Duterte had no other option than to seek better relations with China—and to pull away from the US.⁶⁴ Politics intervened, too, as Duterte was upset by President Obama's criticism of his human rights record.

The stakes are high for both the US and the Philippines. Duterte knows that Chinese bases on the Scarborough Shoal would put Manila "within striking distance" of the PLA.⁶⁵ And the Chinese seem to have been pressing harder on Philippine aircraft. "I hope China would temper its behavior," Duterte said. "You cannot create an island and say the air above it is yours."⁶⁶ This kind of opening may be exactly what the US is hoping for.

Therefore, when the Philippines president called for the return of the bells in his 2017 State of the Nation address, the Pentagon was listening. "Those bells are reminders of the gallantry and heroism of our forbearers who resisted the American colonizers and sacrificed their lives in the process," Duterte said. "That is why I say today, give us back those Balangiga bells. They are ours. They belong to the Philippines. They are part of our national heritage."⁶⁷ To put a point on it, Duterte said that he would never visit the US as long as the bells were not returned.⁶⁸

Mattis listened. A year after Duterte's speech—and as soon as was practically possible after the passing of the US defense bill passage—Mattis was in Wyoming at the turnover ceremony. There he said that the return of the bells would "smooth the bonds that were tested but never broken by war. Bear these bells home back to their Catholic Church confident that America's ironclad alliance with the Philippines is stronger than ever."⁶⁹ Mattis also said, "In returning the bells of Balangiga to our ally and our friend, the Philippines, we pick up our generation's responsibility to deepen the respect between our peoples."⁷⁰

The bells are a convenient and powerful tool in this reconciliation. Their Catholic symbolism is particularly useful and relevant. Consider the recent rapprochement between the Catholic Church and the Beijing government. Though Catholics are not even one percent of China's population, the Church there still numbers 12 million people. These millions had fallen outside the eyes of the Church because their bishops had been chosen by the Community Party and were not recognized by the Vatican. But Pope Francis has just concluded a deal with China to bring back into full communion the seven bishops appointed by the "Patriotic Catholic Association."⁷¹ This means that Chinese communists now have a say in elevating candidates for Catholic bishops, a power no other governmental authority has had in hundreds of years.

Rather than risk Filipino Catholics being won over by this new Catholic-Chinese unity, the Americans are going big. They are sending Catholic bells back to a Catholic church in a 81% Catholic country of 85 million Catholics.⁷² Though the popularity of Catholicism in the Philippines is waning a bit,⁷³ it is still "one of the most religious countries in the world."⁷⁴ Moreover, since religiosity rises as income falls,⁷⁵ one of the best ways to influence the widest possible swath of Philippine society could be through their faith. At least, that is the mercenary way to look at it. And it is in US interests to be mercenary right now.

Returning the bells is the right thing to do. Global geopolitics should not matter. The US should act on a moral basis, especially when war booty is both unappealing *and* unprofitable. However, since it took this long for the US to return the bells, it is hard not to see a more selfish motive at play. At least this time self-interest collides with an absolute good: the improvement of US-Philippines relations. If we all can just stay out of war with China, we will not have to worry about any more bells tolling for the dead. — © Jennifer Hallock, 2018

Endnotes

- ¹ ABS-CBN News, "Balangiga Bells back in Philippines 'as quickly as possible,' says US," *ABS-CBN News*, last modified December 8, 2018, accessed December 9, 2018, <https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/12/08/18/balangiga-bells-back-in-philippines-as-quickly-as-possible-says-us>.
- ² ABS-CBN News, "Balangiga Bells to begin journey home to Philippines," *ABS-CBN News*, last modified November 13, 2018, accessed December 8, 2018, <https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/11/12/18/us-to-return-balangiga-bells-to-philippines>; Rolando Borrinaga, "Balangiga history not clear as a bell," *Philippine Inquirer*, August 4, 2001, visayas edition, accessed December 8, 2018, <http://www.oocities.org/rolborr/balnotclear.html>.
- ³ Francis Wakefield, "Balangiga bells head for home," *Manila Bulletin*, December 9, 2018, [Page #], accessed December 9, 2018, <https://news.mb.com.ph/2018/12/09/balangiga-bells-head-for-home/>.
- ⁴ ABS-CBN News, "Balangiga Bells back," *ABS-CBN News*.
- ⁵ Wakefield, "Balangiga bells."
- ⁶ ABS-CBN News, "Church ready for return of Balangiga bells, says Qutorio," *ABS-CBN News*, last modified November 15, 2018, accessed December 8, 2018, <https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/11/15/18/church-ready-for-return-of-balangiga-bells-says-qutorio>.
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