

Ceremony Honouring Filipino Merchant Mariners

A ceremony organized by John Rivas, Philippine Honorary Consul General of the Philippine Consulate General, Darwin, through a collaborative effort with Dr. Tom Lewis, OAM, Director of Darwin Military Museum, Ms Linda Fazldeen, Community Officer of the Office of the NT Chief Minister and Ms Christine Gray, Protocol Office, NT Government and the Philippine Embassy will be held on 18 February 2014 from 9:30 am to 10:30 in Darwin Military Museum, East Point, Darwin, Northern Territory.

SS Don Isidro was used as a United States Army Transport (USAT) which carried supply for the camp of General McArthur who occupied Corregidor Island during WW II when the ship was lost. It sustained a relentless attack by dive bombers north west of Bathurst Island and set on fire during the Japanese air raid on Darwin on the 19th February 1942. Eventually she drifted ashore near Melville Island where she was abandoned. Eleven of her eighty-four survivors died on the beach. The wrecks of SS Florence D and SS Don Isidro are located at the protected military gravesite off the coast of Bathurst Island. All accounts stated that SS Don Isidro and SS Florence lay somewhere to the northwest of Bathurst Island and has been there, undisturbed for 72 years, until now.

Don Isidro was built at F. Krupp in 1939 and owned by de La Rama Steamship Co. was registered at Iloilo, Philippines. Don Isidro (Rafael J. Cisneros) was on voyage from Brisbane to Philippines with a cargo of jam, peas and egg noodles also munitions and stores for US Army. SS Don Isidro had a crew of 95, when she was lost in an air raid off Cape Fourcroy, Bathurst Island. 11 Filipino merchant mariners died during this attack.

SS Florence D (originally named *Lake Farmingdale*) was a steamship built in Superior, Wisconsin, USA and launched 30 April 1919. Her gross tonnage was 2642 tons. In 1925 it was purchased by the Cadwallader-Gibson Lumber Company for \$60,000 and sent for operations in the Philippines. Like SS Don Isidro, SS Florence was also bombed by Japanese aircraft while on a US Army chartered blockade run of ammunition and supplies destined for the Philippines, during the first bombing of Darwin on 19 February 1942.

Fourteen Filipino Merchant Mariners as crew of SS Florence D and SS Don Isidro (USAT) United States Army Transport died when these steam ships were bombed by the Japanese on 19 February 1942. On board SS Don Isidro were Antonio Cordoba, Oiler; Raul Delgado, Machinist; Albert Jamenea, Oiler; Melchor Jarobilla, Third Engineer, Lorato Jayne, Second Engineer; Amado Longo, Waiter; Maximo Manga, Chief Engineer; Acapito Masankay, Pantryman; Frederico Montealegra, Chief Electrician; Antonio Reynes, Extra Engineer and Quirino Sabando, Oiler. On board SS Florence D were crew members: Francisco Beltran, Sailor; Librado Briones, Carpenter and Mariano Reyes, Messboy.

This ceremony will be attended by Her Excellency Belen F. Anota, Ambassador of the Philippines to Australia and Ms Nina Cainglet, Minister, First Secretary and Consul General. At

this ceremony, the commemorative plaque will be jointly unveiled by Her Excellency Philippine Ambassador Belen F. Anota and Hon Peter Styles MLA, Minister of Multicultural Affairs of the Northern Territory. At the end of this event, Her Excellency Philippine Ambassador and Minister for Multicultural Affairs will lay wreaths recognizing the Filipinos wharf workers who died when Darwin Harbour was bombed 55 days after the bombing of Pearl Harbour in Hawaii. The Filipino wharf workers were Ricardo Conanan, Juan Roque Cubillo, Francisco Chavez, Catalino Spain and Dominic Domingo. Fr. Felimon Libot, CMF, will say prayer for the eternal repose of the soul of these innocent victims of war in Australian northern waters.

This is a special event honours the services of Filipinos and their involvement in World War II and recognizes the sacrifices of lives of these men who died in the northern waters of Australia, off the coast of the island of Bathurst, north of Darwin, Northern Territory.