

Captain Carmelo Lopez Manzano was Master of the *SS Florence D*. On the morning of 19<sup>th</sup> February 1942, the *SS Florence D* was busy rescuing the crew of a Catalina flying boat which had been shot down by a Japanese 'Zero' on its way to Darwin.

Captain Manzano responded to an SOS call from the *SS Don Isidro*, but the *SS Florence D* was herself attacked northwest of Bathurst Island by dive-bombers returning to their carrier after attacking Darwin. After a dramatic explosion the *Florence D* sank immediately, taking with her three of the Filipino crew and one American airman from the *Catalina*.

In these two actions north of Darwin on 19<sup>th</sup> February 1942, 14 Filipino merchant mariners lost their lives. A further two later died in Darwin from their wounds. They were all civilians, serving under Articles of Agreement with the Master. But they were on a secret mission to support allied forces in the Philippines, crewing blockade-runners engaged by the American military. There were no war medals for them, and the families of those who died only received a small compensation payment.

The wrecks of *SS Don Isidro* on the west coast of Bathurst Island, and *SS Florence D* northwest of Darwin, are today protected historic shipwrecks under the Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976.

It is significant to note that the *SS Don Isidro* was actually first attacked by Japanese aircraft the day before the raids on Darwin, a preliminary act which had its culmination in the fatal attacks at sea on 19<sup>th</sup> February 1942.

The service and sacrifice of these merchant mariners represents a significant contribution by the Filipino community to the military history of Australia. This should never be forgotten."

**Major (Retired) Paul A Rosenzweig MA JP**

**RECOGNISING AND HONOURING THE INVOLVEMENT  
AND SACRIFICES OF FILIPINO MERCHANT MARINERS  
DURING THE BOMBING OF DARWIN ON  
19<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 1942**



**DARWIN MILITARY MUSEUM, EAST POINT**

**TUESDAY 18<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2014**

**9:30 am – 10:30 am**

A collaborative effort of Mr John Rivas, Philippine Honorary Consul General NT, Dr Tom Lewis OAM, Director of Darwin Military Museum, Mrs Christine Gray, Operations Manager Protocol, Department of the Chief Minister & Ms Linda Fazldeen, Ministerial Adviser, Community Engagement, Office of Chief Minister

**Sponsors: Migration Corporation Australia  
Bridge Toyota  
Elvira Parker  
Major (Retired) Paul Rosenzweig MA JP**

## Program

- 9.30am MC: Dr Tom Lewis OAM,  
Director Darwin Military Museum
- Welcome by Mr John Rivas,  
Philippine Honorary Consul General Northern  
Territory
- Historical background by Dr Tom Lewis OAM
- Address by the Hon Peter Styles MLA,  
Minister for Multicultural Affairs
- Address by Her Excellency Belen F Anota,  
Ambassador of the Philippines to Australia
- Unveiling of Commemorative Plaque by  
Her Excellency Belen F Anota, Ambassador of  
the Philippines to Australia and the  
Hon Peter Styles MLA, Minister for  
Multicultural Affairs
- Laying of wreaths in honour of all Filipinos  
who lost their lives during the bombing of  
Darwin in 1942 both on land and in sea.
- Prayer of Eternal Repose
- Acknowledgements
- Viewing of Plaque and Memorial Wall
- Refreshments
- 10.30am Conclusion of Ceremony



## THE SACRIFICE OF FILIPINO MERCHANT MARINERS ON 19 FEBRUARY 1942

The story of the Bombing of Darwin is well known these days and 19<sup>th</sup> February in each year is now officially a national day of observance.

“The tally of those who died in Darwin on that fateful day has always included 16 merchant sailors from the American transport ships *SS Florence D* and *SS Don Isidro*.

Two things need to be clarified about these men – they died in a location to the north of Darwin, not actually during the raids on Darwin itself and they were all Filipinos, not Americans.

These two vessels were cargo ships contracted by the United States Army to breach the Japanese blockade of the Philippine Islands. Their secret mission was to deliver supplies to the besieged troops on Bataan Peninsula and Corregidor Island.

Captain Rafael J Cisneros was Master of the *SS Don Isidro*. She had already been attacked on 18<sup>th</sup> February north of Wessel Island off eastern Arnhem Land, but suffered no damage. Ironically, Captain Cisneros turned her around to seek shelter in Darwin harbour.

On the morning of 19<sup>th</sup> February, the *SS Don Isidro* was north of Bathurst Island when seven ‘Zero’ fighter planes returning from the strike on Darwin suddenly strafed her.

She was later bombed and set on fire. The crew abandoned ship and *Don Isidro* drifted ashore on the west coast of Bathurst Island, still burning, the next day.

The survivors were rescued by HMAS *Warrnambool*; once aboard, Captain Cisneros identified that 11 Filipino crew had died. Their bodies were never recovered.

In Darwin, two of the Filipino crew later died from their wounds and were buried in a temporary cemetery. Their names were not included in the casualty lists and still remain unknown today.