Captain Carmelo Lopez Manzano was Master of the SS Florence D. On the morning of 19^{th} 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 19th 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.

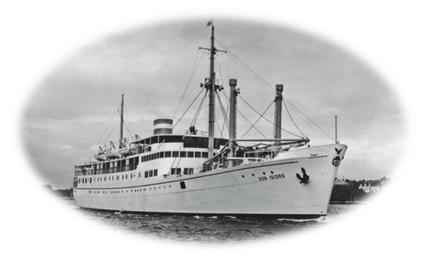
The wrecks of *SS Don Isidro* on the west coast of Bathurst Island, and *SS Florence D* northwest of Darwin, are today protected historic shipwrecks under the Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976.

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 19th 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 19TH FEBRUARY 1942



DARWIN MILITARY MUSEUM, EAST POINT

TUESDAY 18TH 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 19th 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 18th 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 19th 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.