

THE SACRIFICE OF FILIPINO MERCHANT MARINERS ON 19 FEBRUARY 1942

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

But the tally of those killed in Darwin on that fateful day has always included sixteen merchant sailors from the American transport ships *SS Florence D* and *SS Don Isidro*. Two things need to be clarified about these men – they all died well 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 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 February, *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 eleven 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 added to any casualty list, and still remain unknown today.

Captain Carmelo Lopez Manzano was Master of the *SS Florence D*. On the morning of 19 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 February 1942, fourteen 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*.

A small ceremony and unveiling of a plaque has been arranged by the Philippine Honorary Consul General in Darwin, Mr John Rivas. This will take place at the Darwin Military Museum at East Point. The Memorial Wall to the Allied Fallen at the museum is a focal point for all Allied personnel and civilians who died as a result of combat action in Northern Australia in World War 2.

The preparations for the unveiling have been assisted by Dr Tom Lewis OAM (Director of the Darwin Military Museum), Ms Christine Gray (NT Protocol) and Ms Linda Fazldeen (Community Liaison Officer, Office of the Chief Minister). The NT Government and the Philippine Embassy will jointly unveil the plaque, which commemorates and honours the sacrifice of these Filipino merchant mariners during World War 2.

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 February. For this reason it is considered appropriate to commemorate the sacrifice of these Filipino merchant mariners on 18 February 2014.

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.

THOSE KILLED

The eleven Filipinos who died in the attack on the SS *Don Isidro* off Bathurst Island on 19 February 1942 are as follows, listed with the most accurate version of their names:

Antonio CORDOVA	Oiler	<i>Possibly also known as 'Cordoba'</i>
Raul DELGADO	Machinist	
Loreto JAIME	2 nd Engineer	<i>Also recorded as 'Jayne'</i>
Melchor JARUVILLA	3 rd Engineer	<i>Also recorded as 'Jarobilla'</i>
Alberto JIMENEA	Oiler	<i>Also recorded as 'Jamanea' or 'Jimena'</i>
Amado LOGNO	Cook / Waiter	<i>Also recorded as 'Longo'</i>
Maximo MANGAN	Chief Engineer	<i>Also recorded as 'Manga'</i>
Agapito MASANGKAY	Pantryman / Steward	<i>Also recorded as 'Masankay'</i>
Frederico MONTALEGRA	Chief Electrician	
Antonio REYNES	Extra Engineer	
Quirino SABANDO	Oiler	<i>Also recorded as 'Sabajido'</i>

The three Filipinos who died as a result of the sinking of the SS *Florence D* off Bathurst Island on 19 February 1942 are as follows:

Francisco BELTRAN	Sailor	
Librado BRIONES	Carpenter	
Mariano REYES	Messboy	