



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – Defence of Darwin Experience Opening

**Remarks of Ambassador Bleich
Opening of the Defence of Darwin Experience
and Presentation of Relic from the *SS Florence D*
Darwin Harbor**

(As prepared for delivery – February 18, 2012)

Thank you Andrew,

Your Excellencies the Governor-General Quentin Bryce and Mr. Michael Bryce,

Her Honour, the Honourable Sally Thomas, Administrator of the Northern Territory

The Honourable Paul Henderson, Chief Minister of the Northern Territory

It is a great privilege to be here for the opening of the Defence of Darwin Experience. This museum is a testament to those in the Northern Territory who have worked so hard to preserve and honor our past.

Museums help us discover who we are, and appreciate those who came before. They teach us humility – as Isaac Newton said ‘If [we] have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants’.

They also teach us lessons from our past. We come here today, and tens of thousands will come in the days and years that follow, to learn of the defense of Darwin. Gathered here today, surrounded by eyewitness testimonies and artifacts from the Bombing of Darwin, we see the ravages of war, and we renew our commitment – Australians and Americans – to never allow another invasion on this soil.

One reminder will be a three-inch anti-aircraft shell recovered from the wreck of the *SS Florence D*. In early 1942, the merchant ship *SS Florence D* valiantly diverted its course to rescue the stranded crew of a U.S. Navy airship, as well as the USAT Don Isidro. On its return though, near Bathurst Island, the *Florence D* was attacked and sunk by Japanese dive bombers, losing its crew and four of the rescued U.S. sailors. The wreck of the *SS Florence D* has lain off Bathurst Island ever since. Last year, this three-inch anti-aircraft shell was removed from the protected wreck. It seems especially fitting that this artifact – a relic of the heroic rescue and shared sacrifice of these U.S. and Australian sailors –



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now finds a new home here, where the public can learn more about our rich shared history and friendship.

We see these roots of our 70-year alliance, and it reminds us of all we've accomplished together. The bond between our two nations has never been stronger, in part because we continually renew and refresh it. Soon U.S. Marines and Australian troops will be training side by side in Darwin. They come to help both our nations protect and preserve the peace for which so many men and women gave their lives. And they serve as a living reminder of the lessons of our history. As George Santayana said: "Those who cannot remember the past, are condemned to repeat it."

We won't forget our past or each other. We are the best of friends; the strongest of allies. We are so honored to have shared this history with you and we look forward to sharing the future.

On behalf of the President of the United States and the People of the United States, I am proud to present this anti-aircraft shell from the *SS Florence D* to the people of Australia.

Thank you