

# Zamboanga - 1936

In the shores of Sulu lives the sea-faring tribe that is ruled by Datu Tanbuong. His granddaughter, Minda (Rosa del Rosario) is betrothed to be married to Danao (Fernando Poe), who is a handsome young pearl fisher who presents a handful of impressive pearls to the datu. However, a visitor to Danao and Minda's wedding celebration is Hadji Razul, a chief of another tribe who has feelings for Minda. He then solicited the help of a renegade American captain to abduct Minda. Minda was abducted, and a tribal war ensued. In the end, Danao kills Hadji Razul, and the film ends with Minda and Danao sailing into the sunset.

[ubelceCreamCone](#) on Jul 5, 2009

"Zamboanga" was directed by my grandfather, Marvin Gardner in his native Philippines in 1936. His screen name was Eduardo De Castro. Thought lost forever, it was found in 2003? by Philippine filmmaker Nick de Ocampo at the US Library of Congress. (The copy came from Finland, hence the subtitles.) It stars Fernando Poe, Sr., the father of Fernando Poe, Jr., Philippine actor and presidential candidate. It is the oldest Filipino feature film known to exist. It was produced by Americans Tait and Harris and intended for American audiences. I have read that it was the first Filipino film entered in the Oscar Awards, but I'm still researching that. I had never even hoped to see any of my grandfather's work, as we thought it was all destroyed during WWII. The original film is now back in the Philippines. Nick included "Zamboanga" in his book, *SineGabay: A Film Study Guide*. He was kind enough to send some copies of the movie to my family. Here's more info:

## **LOST FILM ON JOLO'S SEA DIVERS FOUND AFTER 60 YEARS**

**MANILA, February 25, 2006** (MALAYA) Six decades ago, two American producers Eddie Tait and George Harris attempted to launch a Philippine-made film for international release.

This movie depicts the life of south sea divers and was shot in the remote island of Jolo. Its two American producers managed to screen it only to audiences in New York and San Diego on December 10, 1937. Both producers, however, ran out of money due to excessive taxes and the film disappeared into obscurity.

Mowelfund Film Institute director Nick Deocampo said the film has for decades been considered a lost film, one of the hundreds made before World War II that is irretrievably lost. Until one day, a copy has been found.

During Nick last research trip as a senior Fulbright research scholar in the Library of Congress in Washington D.C., he was surprised to be informed by a library staff that there was a newly-acquired film about the Philippines and asked if Nick would be interested to take a look at it.

He was hesitant at first because he already came across three films with the name Zamboanga and none of them was the fabled Tait and Harris film. When he was told that the film was newly-struck from an original print that came all the way from Finland, he instantly became interested. "Why would a film about the Philippines turn up in a frigid country in the Scandinavian peninsula? Interesting," he thought.

At last, after 60 years that the film has not been seen by any Filipino, Deocampo had the privilege to be the first one to watch this historic film alone, thrilled with his new-found piece from the past.

In the movie, the young Fernando Poe Sr. played as a pearl diver who marries the village chief's daughter (played by Rosa del Rosario). One of the guests in their wedding is a pirate who abducts the bride, inciting a tribal war. Fil-American Eduardo de Castro directed the cast that spoke in

Tausog and English languages. The film features underwater photography and that the film processing chores boggles the mind with thoughts of the sacrifices behind the nine-month shooting.

"It showed the picturesque sea and the captivating landscape and with warring tribes and a kidnapped maiden to hook the audience's attention," Deocampo reveals.

"Zamboanga" came at a crucial moment in the history of filmmaking in the Philippines. Tait and Harris revolutionized local filmmaking when they established the first film studio, Philippine Films in 1932. Their act ushered in the studio system that made it possible for subsequent native-owned studios like the LVN, Sampaguita, Premiere and Lebran to bring Philippine movies to their "golden era" in the '50s.

Ref.: <http://www.newsflash.org/2004/02/sb/sb003853.htm>