

Project 19 Most Secret—APO 617 in Eritrea

SCOPE and PURPOSE

This five-frame Exhibit tells the story of APO 617 at the top secret Project 19 in Eritrea. Project 19 was initiated in 1941 when the U.S. was a neutral country before Pearl Harbor was bombed. Project 19 involved building a U.S. naval base in Massawa and operating an airfield at the bombed-out Italian airfield at Gura. Air planes were repaired for the RAF for use in the Battle of North Africa and P-40 fighter kits sent from the U.S. were assembled as well. Gura was manned by 2,500 American civilians and military personnel. The base was closed in 1943 but APO 617 continued to serve the American Legations in Asmara and in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia until May 31, 1945.

Exhibit Plan

The Exhibit begins with APO 815, a short-lived APO that preceded APO 617 that opened at Gura on July 20, 1942. It continues by showing the various APO 617 postmarks and censor marks used, followed by post cards, V-mail, registered mail and postage due covers.

The story continues with APO 617 having moved to Asmara on October 1, 1943. It ends with APO 617 closing on May 31, 1945.

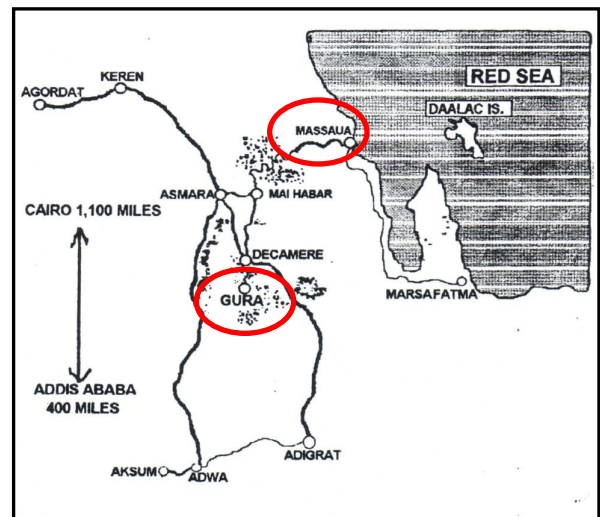
Philatelic Importance

Prior to the Exhibitor assembling this collection and publishing the findings in four articles, the military and postal history of Project 19 and APO 617 at Gura had faded into oblivion.

Since Project 19 was initiated while the U.S. was still neutral it was kept top secret for that reason. The story needs to be told since Project 19 played an important role in the Battle for North Africa, a role now long forgotten.

Rarity

The Price Guide to U.S. A.P.O. Cancels of the Second World War states: "In all, about 1000 different A.P.O.'s were in use in the period between 1941 and the end of 1945... [In a] random sampling of 1000 A.P.O. covers... 500 will be from a group of about 100 A.P.O. numbers which are the most common; 400 will be from a group of 400 A.P.O. numbers which are less



commonly found; and the remaining 100 covers will be from the 500 or so A.P.O. numbers which are scares to rare."

APO 617 falls in the "remaining 100 covers."

APO 815 is rare. The covers shown may be the only ones outside the Edward Ellsberg Archives.

Illustrations

Photos and excerpts from letters and the book "Project 19, A Mission Most Secret" are included in abundance to connect the viewer with the life and activities at APO 617 that cannot be conveyed by the rather uniform appearance of the mail.

Personal Research

Exhibitor has published four articles on APO 617.

Important Items are framed in red.