

This Day in History... July 7, 1899

U.S. Issues Stamps in Guam

On July 7, 1899, the US issued its first overprinted stamps for use in Guam.

In 1521, the Spanish explorer Ferdinand Magellan led the first European expedition to Guam. Spain claimed Guam as its colony shortly thereafter. It was not until 1668, however, that Spain actually took control of Guam.

On April 21, 1898, America declared war on Spain. The media played an instrumental role in this occurrence by printing exaggerated accounts of Spanish oppression. Americans felt that Spain was treating its citizens in the colonies unfairly. The main issue of the Spanish-American war was Cuban independence from Spain. With no strong opposition from Spain, the US was able to win easily.



First stamp issued for use in Guam



4¢ Lincoln overprinted for use in Guam

The Treaty of Paris was signed December 10, 1898. In this treaty resulting from the war, Spain ceded Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines to the United States. The peace treaty was passed by only one vote, due to anti-imperialist attitudes prevalent in America at that time.

Upon its succession to the states, the island of Guam, as well as its postal system, were placed under the supervision of the US Navy Department on July 7, 1899. The Bureau of Engraving and Printing printed the stamps in use in the US at the time. Hence the name of the series of stamps was called the “Bureau Issues.”

The stamps used to transport mail from Guam were the same as the Bureau Issues, except for the overprint.

All of the black overprints were applied to the stamps in the US, while the red overprints were done at the post office in Guam. The overprints were sold for exactly double the face value currently on the US stamps. Collectors in the US who tried to obtain stamps with the Guam overprint were discouraged by the US Navy Department, making these issues scarce.



Special Delivery stamp overprinted for use in Guam



Scarce 1930 Guam Guard Mail stamp

On March 29, 1901, a US postal department agent was dispatched to the island to take control of the post office there. On that date, stamps with the Guam overprint ceased to be used. Regular US postage was used from that point on.

In 1929, Guam’s newly appointed governor, Willis W. Bradley Jr., learned that the US Post Office had ceased mail service on the island. So Bradley ordered his assistant to produce stamps for local use.

The resulting Guam Guard Mail stamps were produced in sheets of 25 in a labor-intensive, two-step process. The amateur technique required 50 separate impressions for every sheet of 25 stamps – the first for the logo and denomination. The stamps were produced in very limited numbers and sold out on the first day they were issued.



Philippines stamp overprinted for use in Guam

Because quantities of these stamps were low, Philippines stamps were later overprinted “Guam Guard Mail.”

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