

THE PHILIPPINES' CEBU GUERRILLA STAMPS OF 1942-1943
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During the early months of the Japanese Occupation of the Philippines in 1942, communication facilities of the local government broke down. In CEBU PROVINCE (the premier province in the Visayan islands), the northern towns immediately fell to the Japanese. The southern towns were spared but only for a few months. The United States Armed Forces in the Far East (USAFFE - the combined forces of the USA and the Philippines under Gen. Douglas MacArthur), organized the Cebu Guerrilla Force under the joint command of Lt. Col. James Cushing for the Northern Cebu Force and Lt. Col. Harry Fenton for the Southern Cebu Force.

Since the southern towns of Cebu were not immediately occupied by the Japanese, the Southern Cebu Forces (SCF) was able to partially restore postal services in the 18 towns under their jurisdiction. These towns include the following; Alcantara, Alcoy, Alegria, Argao, Badian, Barili, Carcar, Dalaguete, Dumanjug, Ginatilan, Malaboyoc, Moalboal, Pinamungajan, Ronda, Oslob, Samboan, Santander and Sibonga.

For the prepayment of services, the SCF decided to issue emergency guerrilla stamps in 4 denominations. These were printed by Maj. Cipriano Barba, in the following denominations; 2 cents and 4 cents for ordinary mail, 16 cents for registration and 20 cents for special delivery.

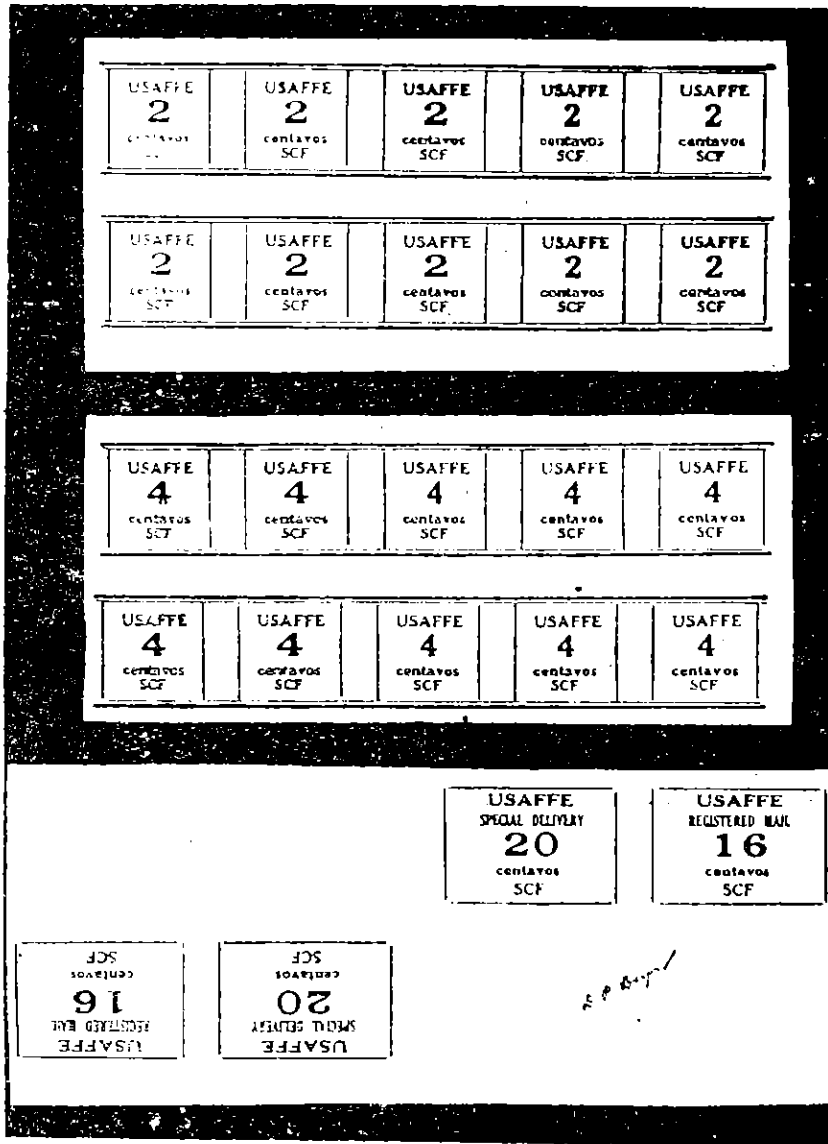
The 2 lower values were printed on pink USA bond paper, substance 16 in small sheetlets of 10. The 16 and 20 cents were printed side by side on white USA bond paper, substance 16 in small sheetlets of 8, but in a totally peculiar fashion. That is to say, seemingly in tete-beche format, 4 stamps on one side of the sheet plus the other 4 stamps on the reverse side of the same sheet, occupying the blank spaces of the front. In the May-June 1955 issue of the PHILIPPINE JOURNAL OF PHILATELY, Pablo Esperidion offers this explanation; the printer probably used this strange format to save time when cutting down the stamps.

While that explanation may be one reason, I can offer a more logical explanation which is as follows;

Since Barba was able to move only his manually operated printing machine to his hometown in Barili when the Japanese invaded Cebu City, he ran short of letratypes for a sheet that would contain 4 x 20 cents stamps and 4 x 16 cents stamps. In fact he can only produce one plate for a 20 cents stamp and one plate for a 16 cents stamp.

Faced with such a dilemma, Barba either experimented by Trial and Error or used his years of experience as a printer to find the easiest way to print the required 8 stamps to a sheet.

CEBU GUERRILLA STAMPS



COMPLETE set of the guerrilla stamps issued by the Southern Cebu Forces, GRILA, is illustrated above. Set consists of 2, 4, 16 and 20c. The 2 and 4c stamps were issued in sheets of 10 stamps per sheet, while the 16 and 20c were issued in sheet of 5 stamps—4 printed on the obverse and 4 on the reverse of the sheet. Sheet of the 16 and 20c as shown above bears the signature of D. P. Dayon, Postmaster of Binamungajan, Cebu.—(Photo courtesy Don Rodrigo O. Velez).

The solution was in fact very simple. That is, at first, print a pair of 20 cents and 16 cents stamp to the upper right corner of the sheet. Next, rotate the paper and do the same. Note that when the paper is rotated, the lower left corner becomes the upper right corner. Now using the reverse side of the same sheet (which is ungummed anyway), repeat the first and second procedure. The resulting what-you-may-call-it is therefore not a tete-beche at all. Whatever it is, credit is due to Barba for providing philatelists with such a unique item.

These stamps were utilized by members of the guerrilla unit SCF and were also sold to civilians living in areas where the guerrilla mail service was available.

In effect, these stamps were in use for only 4 months between November 1942 until March 1943. In April of 1943, the Japanese Imperial Army overran the guerrilla units and took control of southern Cebu. There the Japanese discovered the operations of the Cebu guerrilla mail service. The thousands of unused Cebu guerrilla stamps found lying in the small postal offices were burned to the ground. The Japanese also found Barba's printing press in Barili and this too was burned. For fear of Japanese persecution, residents who are in possession of these stamps and covers also burned their holdings. However, the local philatelist Oscar G. Guido realized the importance of these stamps and covers and decided to hide away his materials. He sought out a large biscuit can, placed his Cebu guerrilla stamps and covers inside and placed his treasures in a hollow wall of the belfry of the town's church. It was in this manner that the materials in his possession were saved. Other stamps and covers were probably hidden in a similar manner and these too were saved.

But what is the significance of these stamps to bicycle stamps collectors?

The Japanese Imperial Forces invaded CEBU PROVINCE on April 10, 1942 and immediately took charge of all banking, commerce, communications as well as fuel supplies. As a result, it became necessary for the SCF to employ foot messengers composed of farmer volunteers to relay letters in the neighboring towns. For letters addressed to the far-flung areas, Maj. Mariano V. Trinidad who was himself partly responsible for the restoration of the Cebu guerrilla postal service, related that the "Mails were relayed from one town to the next by messengers mounted on bicycles. Mail posted at Barili, Cebu at 8 or 9 o'clock in the morning was sure to reach Samboan, Cebu 66 kilometers away at 4 o'clock in the afternoon of the same day."

Cebu guerrilla stamps and covers are rare and expensive. A set of single MINT stamps costs about US\$1,000. In June of 1990, a cover addressed to Oscar G. Guido franked with a 2 cents Cebu guerrilla stamp realized an incredible US\$2,150. in an international auction held in Manila.

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