

South African Gold and the Lend-Lease Agreement.

Launched in 1938, the USS Louisville was a Northampton-class heavy cruiser of the US Pacific fleet. In late 1940 she passed through the Panama Canal to make 'Show the Flag' visits to South American ports. She visited Colon, Panama; Rio de Janeiro, Rio Grande, and Santos, Brazil; Montevideo, Uruguay; and Buenos Aires, Argentina. She then sailed back to Rio de Janeiro and on to Bahia, Brazil, where she received secret orders to re-route to Simonstown.

An ex-sailor recalled that when "the 'Lady Lou' eased up to the dock in Simonstown, our eyes bugged at a stack of gold bars ricked up like cordwood. I don't recall any special security measures around the gold when we arrived, but our ship's Marines quickly took up guard duty. ... All hands started work at 10:30 A.M. on Sunday, January 7, 1940. A man could carry only one of the heavy bars at a time. Each bar had a serial number that an officer at the gangway recorded as the sailor brought it aboard. ... By 11:30 P.M. the \$148 million had been secured in our ammunition magazines."

The Louisville sailed for New York the following day with 220 tons of gold aboard. With U-boats active in the Atlantic, her Captain had two huge US flags displayed on the ship's flat starboard and port sides. A third was stretched between the aft funnel and the aft mast and illuminated by floodlights at night. After 17 days at sea the Louisville docked at the Brooklyn Navy Yard where she was met by a mass of uniformed guards with armored cars, a scene quite different from Simonstown where the crew "found the gold almost unattended. We heard then that this was the largest shipment of gold ever made by sea. ... the hoard was paying for Britain's tools of war." (American Heritage, October 2003).

The Lend-Lease Programme began in March 1941, some five weeks after the South African gold was deposited in New York. The Lend-Lease Act allowed the then neutral US to provide war material to countries fighting Axis forces. Under the Lend-Lease Programme Britain paid a total of \$7.5bn (£3.8bn) to the US and US\$2 bn (£1bn) to Canada. The gold transported by the USS Louisville was presumably a down-payment. The USS Louisville went on to enjoy an illustrious wartime career in the Pacific theatre where she was twice severely damaged by Kamikaze suicide attacks.



1938. US Naval Cover. CAPE TOWN, S.AFRICA '18 NOV 1938' to NJ, USA (undated).

USS Boise Shakedown Cruise Naval Cover with 'CAPE TOWN S. AFRICA' within killer bars.

Pre-addressed stamped cover supplied to US Navy by collector for Ship Postmark Collection.

As this was a diplomatic propaganda vist, not a naval one, the USS Boise docked in Cape Town, not Simonstown.

The USS Boise was a light cruiser of the Brooklyn class launched on 3rd December 1936. In late 1938 she went of a shakedown cruise - a performance testing and crew familiarisation exercise - to Monrovia, Liberia and Cape Town. In February 1939, Boise joined Cruiser Division 9 Battle Force, at San Pedro, California. She escaped destruction in the Battle of the Coral Sea and was badly damaged during the Battle of Cape Esperance in 1942. Like the USS Louisville, the Boise enjoyed an illustrious wartime career in the Pacific theatre, the Mediterranean, and later in the Pacific again.