

Historical

On June 30, 1973, the U.S. Navy assumed control of Kagnew Station, ending a quarter century of tenant status under the U.S. Army. The ascendancy to host command was destined to be short-lived, however, for on October 11, 1973, a brief announcement was released stating that the U.S. military communication installation would cease to exist on June 30, 1974.

From the time of that announcement until the closure of the station, all hands became involved in a challenging operation that often seemed to be composed of equal measures of frustration, confusion and long, demanding hours. With the passage of time, however, each requirement in the complex schedule was met and slowly the outlying tracts were stripped of their equipment and the overall strength of the U.S. Naval Communication Station began to shrink.

The erasure of nearly three decades of U.S. military presence in the northern Ethiopian province of Eritrea was not an easy task. Seven Armymen had arrived in Asmara in April 1943 to conduct a feasibility study for a fixed radio station. The location, 15 degrees north of the Equator and an altitude of 7,800 feet, proved more than suitable and the former Italian Navy radio site - Radio Marina - on Tract A was taken over by the United States.

Nearly five years passed before the first contingent of Navy men arrived in Asmara. The six-man detachment founded the U.S. Naval Communication Unit Three which would, by 1961, expand into the U.S. Naval Communication Station, Asmara.

With the U.S. Army acting as host command, the Navy's receiver operations had moved from site to site in the early years, finally being established at Tract F. The Navy command element was situated at Tract A, site of the original Radio Marina, and subsequently moved to Tract F also. In 1966, Navy transmissions emanated from a newly opened Tract H at Gura, 30 miles south of Asmara.

By March 1972, uncertain rumors began flying at all the tracts. Department of Defense budgetary considerations had already caused the elimination of a portion of the Army's Security Agency from Kagnew Station. During the ensuing months, inter-service discussions in Washington and Ethiopia sought to determine where the final responsibility for the base would come to rest. With the phase-down of operations by the Army Security Agency, it seemed logical that the Army's Strategic Communications Command would inherit Kagnew Station. But STRATCOM demurred and suddenly the Navy Communication Station found itself propelled from the wings onto center stage, awaiting the word to take full control of the installation.