



a publication of the International School of Gemology 11.July.2014

Forward Operating Base: Afghanistan

Editor's Note: We recently received the following email from a US Army Colonel in Afghanistan and realized it is again time to remind everyone of the problems of gem shopping at the local bazaars around the Coalition Forces bases in Afghanistan. The ISG has pledged to maintain the following service free of charge to any APO or FPO address as long as we have our soldiers in harm's way over there. Here is the email along with a reprint of our 2012 article on this effort:

Robert,

Just wanted to say a million thanks again for dvd. I made quite a few copies and passed them around. One Soldier had already bought a large quantity of rubies. Your info helped us determine they were all glass-filled. He took them back to the bazaar. One nurse had already spent over \$8000 in loose gems. I am not sure how much luck she had returning them.

Your dvd should be mandatory as part of the in-processing to Bagram. It would sure save a lot of money for the unsuspecting Soldiers....either that or they close down the gem shops here.

Dave

David D.
COL USA

Last name and location withheld for security reasons



This year marks our 6th year of providing our Gem Shopping at Bagram AB DVD to troops located throughout the Afghanistan operations area. We have provided thousands of these packages that include the 35 minute DVD video, Selvylt polish cloth and 10x jewelers' loupe. Over these years we have assisted hundreds of soldiers with problem purchases of loose gemstones at the local bazaars located around Bagram AB, as well as the forward operating bases located throughout the country.

In 2010 we reported on a young E4 who spent most of his paychecks on gemstones from the local dealers who he was made to believe were giving him great deals. This soldier had a family with young children back home and he honestly thought he was utilizing the opportunity to buy gemstones in Afghanistan as investments for his family. Only later did he find out that he was being sold virtually worthless flame fusion synthetics. One of the actual stones sent to us for evaluation is located at right.



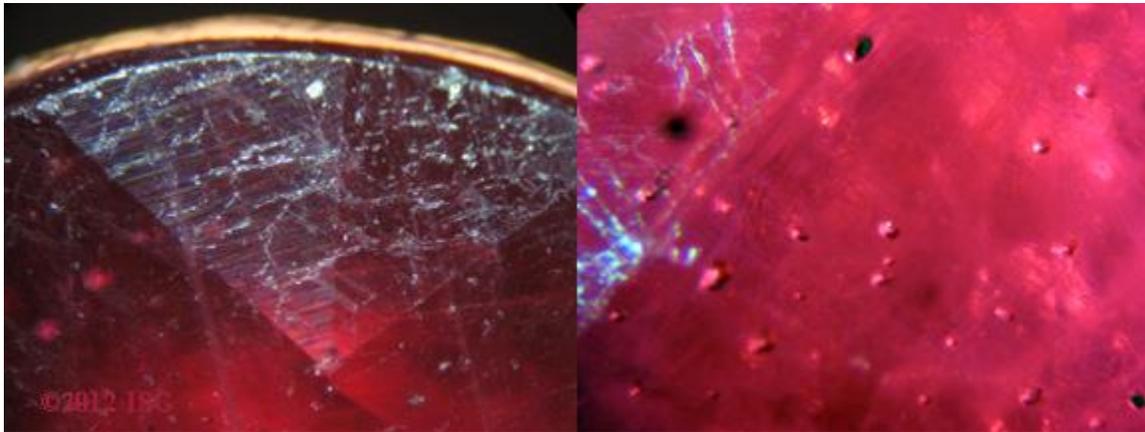
Last month we were contacted by the Deputy Commander of one of the Afghanistan FOB who requested us to send him a DVD package based on problems that his soldiers were experiencing with the local gem dealers. He sent us a parcel of stones as study specimens of the problem. A few of the stones from this parcel are shown in the banner at the top of this report with individual stones shown below. We hope this will serve as a continued warning to other military personnel in Afghanistan regarding buying gemstones from the local Afghan dealers. These are actual stones sold by Afghan dealers to US Military Soldiers.

Glass Filled Ruby

This has almost become a cliché for soldiers returning from Afghanistan with rubies. The overwhelming majority of stones we have seen have been these glass filled, heavily treated stones that are more glass than ruby. These are fracture-filled in the same way (and basically with the same substance) that windshield dings are repaired. We should note that these stones are virtually worthless. They break very easily, cannot be subjected to heat and are made from unsalable material that is treated in this manner to make them appear to be of high quality.



Glass filling is easily visible with 10x loupe. The surface will have a “cracked glass” appearance as seen below left, with large gas bubbles being visible under magnification as seen below right..

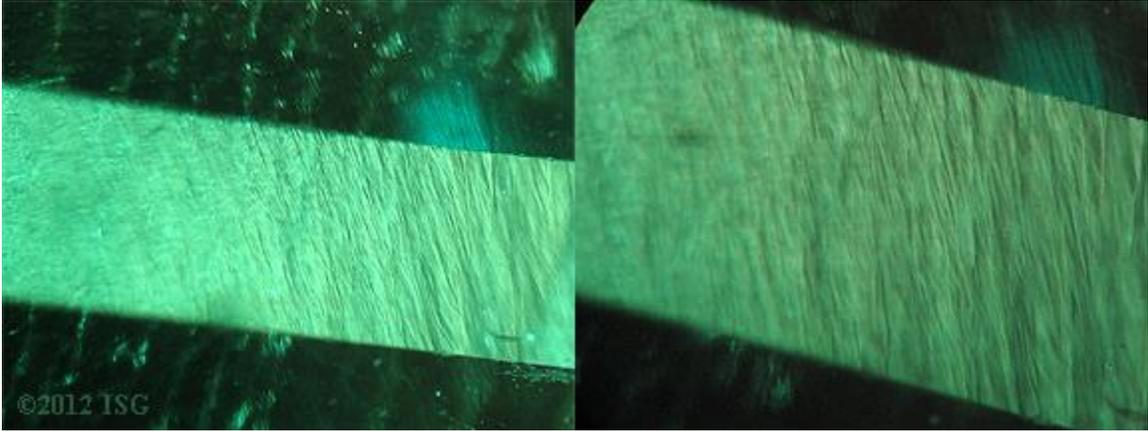


Hydrothermal Synthetic Emerald

Afghanistan is a major producer of some beautiful natural emeralds, but these are rarely, if ever, seen in the local dealer’s booths around the FOBs. We have credible reports that the finest Afghanistan gemstones are going out over the mountains to Pakistani dealers who get much higher prices than the Afghan dealers. Based on this it is no surprise to find that the overwhelming majority of emeralds being sold around the FOBs are either glass imitations or lab created synthetics. Neither of which has value that is close to the natural emerald.



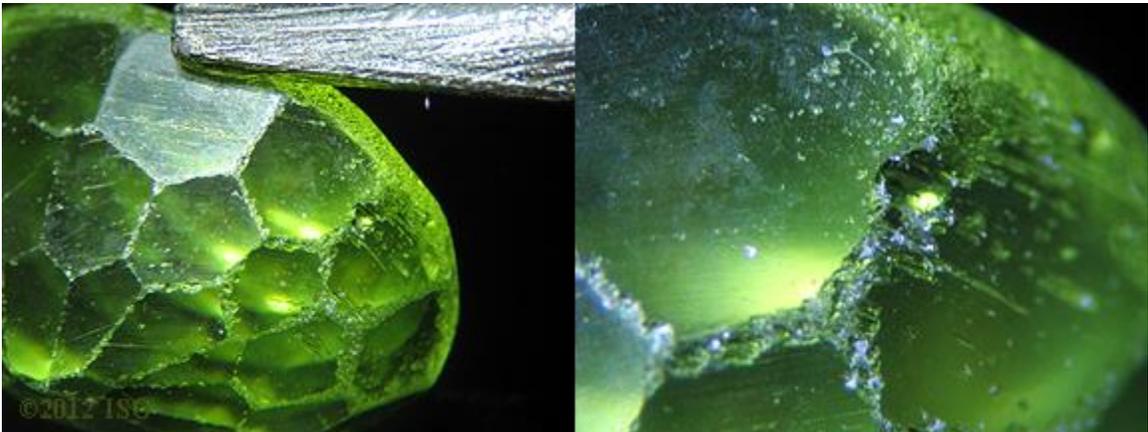
This hydrothermal synthetic emerald is well known to the ISG office based on our ISG Identification of Synthetic Gemstones course and our [GemstoneTreatmentReport](#) website. The true nature is easily identified by the classic growth pattern of the hydrothermal crystal as seen in these 10x and 30x images below.



Wear Damaged Gemstones



This is also a major problem with gemstones we have evaluated from the Afghan dealers. As seen with the peridot at left, this gemstone has massive damage from wear and tear, something not readily visible without a 10x loupe. This stone was obviously worn for years or else was really poorly treated in a parcel with other stones. Regardless of the cause, this peridot is virtually worthless. In fact, as a gemstone it is worthless without an expensive recut that would cost more than the value of the stone itself.



Synthetic Aquamarines



We also received several very light colored aquamarines. While 3 of these were natural, the others were hydrothermal synthetic as was the case with the emerald. Overall, this parcel contains gemstones that are valued from a few dollars per carat to worthless.

What every soldier and soldier's family needs to know:

The problem of these gemstones is greatly enhanced by a scenario that has become well known here in the ISG office:

- A soldier deploys the first time to Afghanistan and buys gemstones.
- They return from the first deployment and sell these stones to friends and family who pay far more than they are worth based on everyone, both soldier and family, believing what the Afghan dealers say about the stones.
- The soldier returns to Afghanistan on a subsequent deployment and this time spends everything they have on gemstones with local dealers believing that they are now investing in gemstones and making profits.
- The soldier returns home and this time goes to the local jeweler who may not be well trained on identifying treated and created gemstones. Knowing the soldier just came home from Afghanistan they give him a glowing report on his gemstone purchases, and offers to buy some to help the soldier out, thereby making the soldier more profits.
- The soldier returns to Afghanistan and this time spends all the money they make and everything their family sends them with to buy gemstones.
- This time, upon return to the states, the soldier goes out to the open gemstone market to sell their investment gemstones. Only now do they find out that the stones they have are actually worthless, or at best worth far less than they have believed, including those previously sold to family.
- By now, the soldier has a major financial loss as up to now no one was really evaluating their purchases. Once they have a significant investment and get a proper evaluation, they find that all of the stones they have purchased have been heavily treated or synthetic. Total loss.

This is not a “**what if**” type of story; it is a true story that we have experienced on many occasions in various stages. Some find out after the first deployment and their losses are mitigated. Others do not find out until the third or fourth deployment and the losses are great.

The above is based on true stories.

At the 2009 Tucson GJX Show we met several of the Afghan gemstone producers and they are fine people. I purchased tourmaline from them and the stones and prices were excellent. However, these folks **are not** the one's selling to the military FOBs around Afghanistan. The dealers around the military bases are just purely ripping off our soldiers. And as rare as it is for us to recommend that anyone not buy gemstones, we strongly warn all soldiers around the FOBs of Afghanistan to be aware that the overwhelming majority of the stones we have seen come out of these dealer's shops have been grossly misrepresented.

We realize that these Afghan dealers sound like they are your best friends, and that they are selling off generations of the "family jewels" because of the hardships of the war. But these are the very dealers who are ripping off soldiers the worst.

Final Note for Parents of Soldiers

Over the past 4 years I have had the honor to work with various levels of the military command staff around the Afghanistan operations. What impresses me most is just how much effort these folks put in to protecting their soldiers from all threats, running from incoming mortar rounds to fake gemstones sold at the bazaars. I do not ever want my son to have to go to war. But if he does, and his commanders are of the quality of those I have worked with over the past few years in Afghanistan, I know he will be getting the best this country has to offer.

For what it's worth, I wanted to end with that thought for you all.

To order a copy of the ISG Gem Shopping at Bagram AB DVD, please send the APO or FPO address to: military@schoolofgemology.com. We will send this at no cost to any APO or FPO address, for as long as we have the resources to send them.



Robert James
President, International School of Gemology

If you have problems viewing the images please use this link: [FOB Afghanistan](#)

If you would like to have this article on PDF to share with others, please use this link. [FOB: Afghanistan on PDF](#)

To learn more about the ISG we invite you to visit our website and learn about our efforts to bring quality gemological training and knowledge, at an affordable price, to the world. Please click the icon below to visit the ISG,

ISG



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
JEWELRY APPRAISERS

©2014 International School of Gemology. **ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.** We encourage sharing as long as all copyrights are left intact.

This message was sent to mikross4@windstream.net from:

ISG | ISG@SchoolofGemology.com | International School of Gemology | PO Box 1727 |
Helotes, TX 78023

Email Marketing by
iContact 
try it free

[Unsubscribe](#)