

# General Sir William Green and the 'Great Siege' of Gibraltar (1779-1783)

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Paul Newman,  
Museum Collections and Operations Manager



Wait, Gibraltar and the American  
Revolutionary War?

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# Gibraltar and the American Revolutionary War

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- Colonial rebellion becomes global war
  - France declares war on Great Britain, February 1778
  - Spain declares war on Great Britain, June 1779
- For both France and Spain, opportunity was knocking
  - Proximity and threat
  - Commerce
  - National prestige
- Divide and conquer...

Spanish flag believed to have been captured during the siege of Gibraltar in 1782 and presented to Lieutenant James Robert Mosse.  
National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London



What and where is Gibraltar?

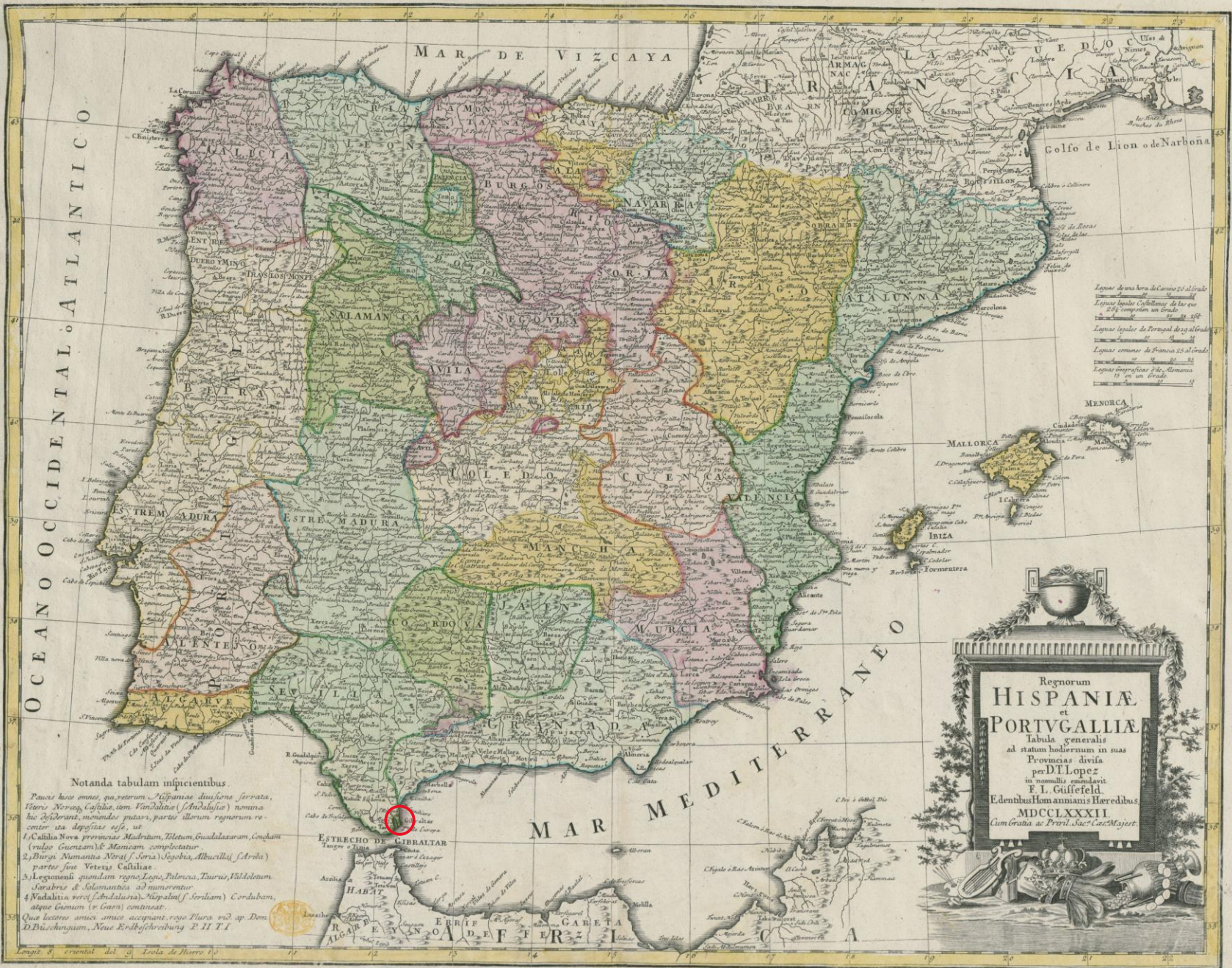
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*The north view of Gibraltar from the isthmus towards Spain.* Published January 2nd, 1775. by J. Boydell, London.  
The Society of the Cincinnati.



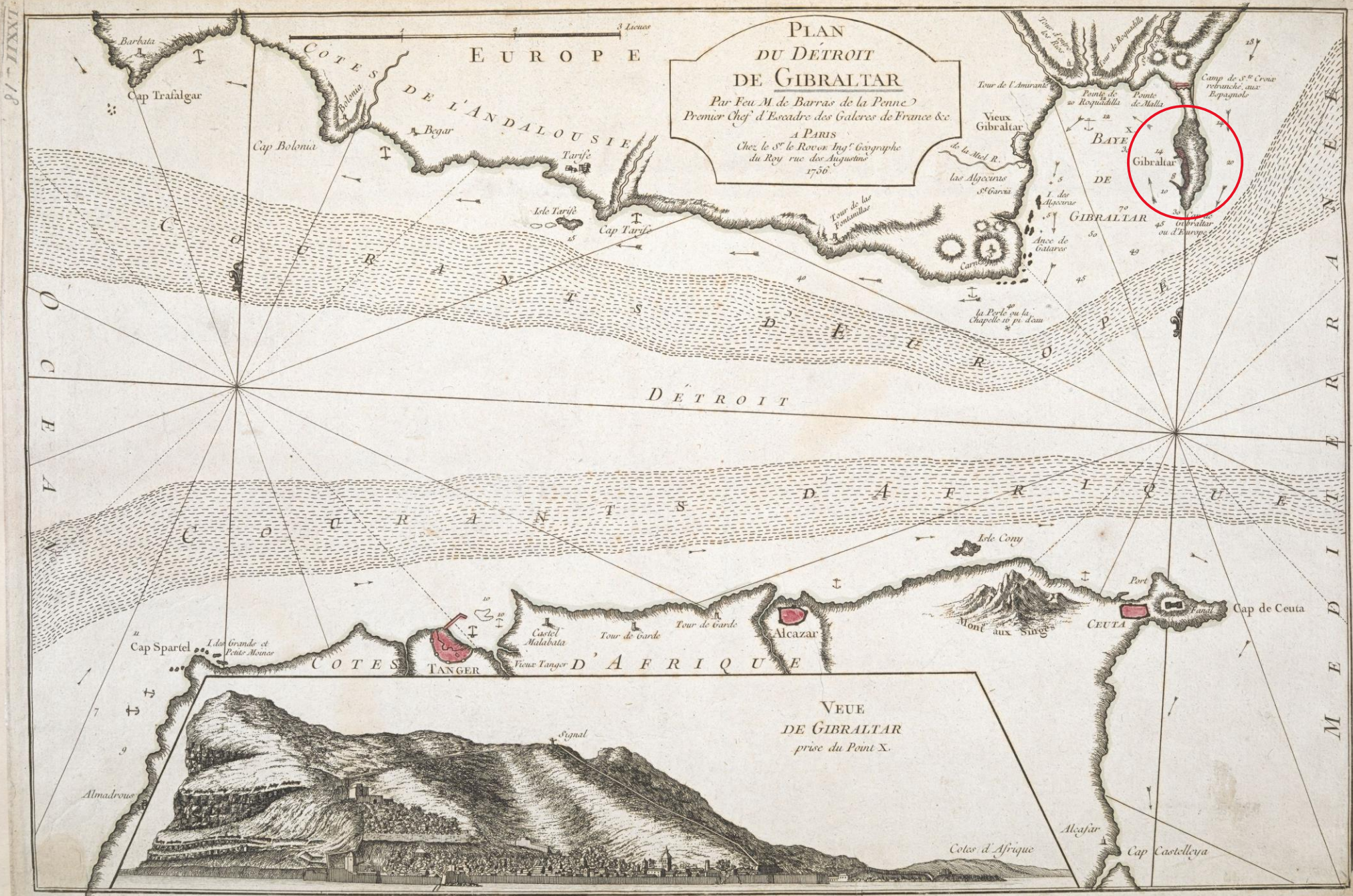
Map of Europe by S. Styles, Utica. MAP L1991.1.534 [mod], The Society of the Cincinnati



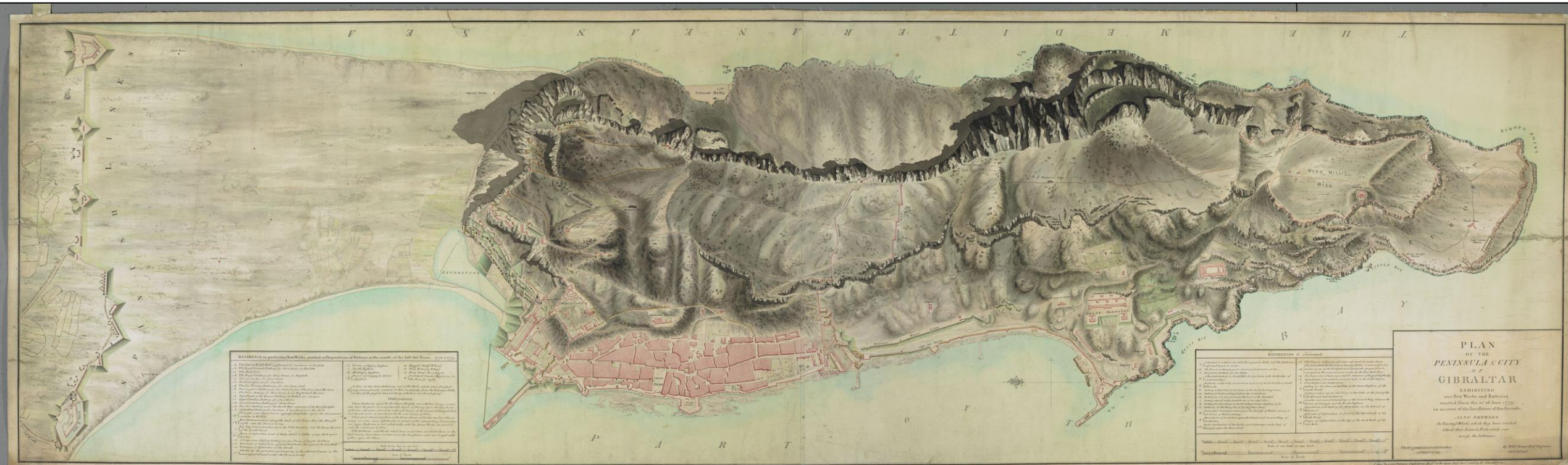
Regnum  
**HISPANIAE**  
 et  
**PORTUGALLIAE**  
 Tabula generalis  
 ad statum hodiernum in suas  
 Provincias divisa  
 per D. I. Lopez  
 in nomina conscripsit  
 P. L. G. Gütelfeld  
 Edentibus Homannianis Haeredibus  
 MDCCCLXXXII  
 Cum Gratia ac Privilegio Sac. Caes. Majest.

Notanda tabulam infipientibus.  
 Pauci hinc annis, quorum Hispaniae divisione serrata,  
 Veteri Novae, Castulae, sive Vandulatae (Andalusiae) nomina  
 hic referant, momentis paucis, partes illorum regnum re-  
 centur, ut designat, esse, ut  
 1. Castula Nova provincia Madritum, Tiletum, Guadalaxaram, Comitam  
 (vulgo Guzman) & Manicom completatur.  
 2. Burgi Numantia Nova (s. Joria) Segobria, Albuicilla (s. Arida)  
 partes fuit Veteris Castulae.  
 3. Legionem quondam regno Logis, Palencia, Tauris, Paldeolam  
 Sarabre & Salamantica ad numeratur.  
 4. Madritum veteri, Madritum, Madritum (s. Serdium) Cordubam,  
 alique Civitatem (s. Caes) continetur.  
 Quae lectore amica amice accipiant, regno Flavia red ap. Dom.  
 D. Burchardum, Neue Erdkloberung P. II. T. I.

Regnum HISPANIAE et PORTUGALLIAE, Tomás Lopez de Vargas Machuca, chez les Heret. de Homann l'an 1782, [Nuremberg], 1782. British Library, Maps K.Top.71.32



PLAN DU DÉTROIT DE GIBRALTAR, Jean Antoine de Barras de la Penne, Chez le Sr. le Rouge ingr. geographe du Roy rue des Augustins, Paris, 1756  
British Library, Maps K.Top.72.18



PLAN OF THE PENINSULA & CITY OF GIBRALTAR, William Green, [Paterson, Green and Chamberlain, London, ca. 1780  
 British Library, Maps K.Top.72.40.1.2 TAB



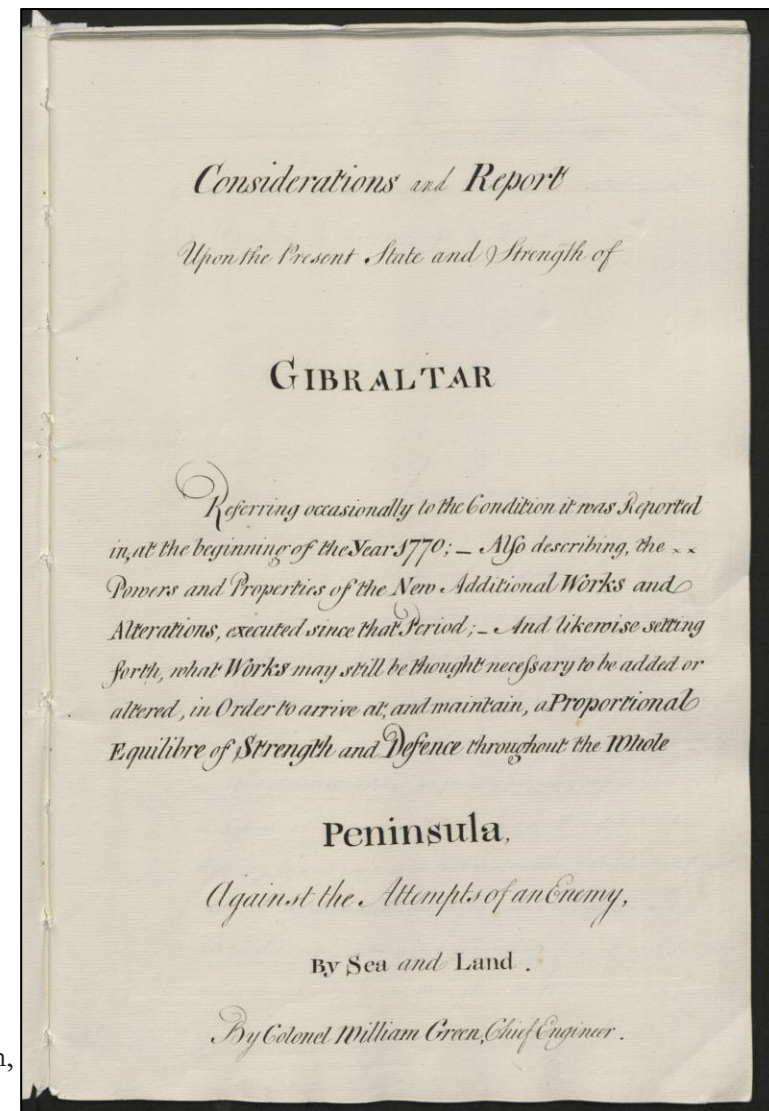


# Who was Sir William Green?

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- 1725 - Born 4 April in London
- 1737 - Enrolled 1 January at the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich Warren as a cadet gunner
- 1745 - Service in Europe and North America during the War of Austrian Succession (1740-1748)
- 1760 - Made senior engineer of Gibraltar
- 1760 – 1779 - Green's report and trip to Britain

*Considerations and report Upon the Present State and Strength of GIBRALTAR, Lt. Col. William Green, 1778. Maps K.Top.72.38.2.a., British Library.*





Marc-René,  
marquis de  
Montalembert  
(1714-1800)

Sébastien le  
Prestre de Vauban  
(1633-1707)



Menno, Baron  
van Coehoorn  
(1641-1704)









# Gibraltar, on the eve of siege: by the numbers

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- 3,000 civilians (British, Genovese, Jewish, Portuguese, Spanish)
- British garrison of 5,400 men, plus 1,400 military wives and children
- British naval force
  - One 60-gun warship, three frigates and a sloop, later augmented by gun boats



Soldier Artificer company, uniform 1786. History of the Royal Sappers and Miners, Volume 1 by T. W. J. CONNOLLY, LONDON: LONGMAN, BROWN, GREEN, LONGMANS, AND ROBERTS. 1857.

# The 'Great Siege' begins...



"Vue perspective du siège de Gibraltar, commencé par les Espagnols en Juillet 1779" (1779). *Prints, Drawings and Watercolors from the Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection*. Brown Digital Repository. Brown University Library. <https://repository.library.brown.edu/studio/item/bdr:239352/>

# Life under siege – ‘total war’

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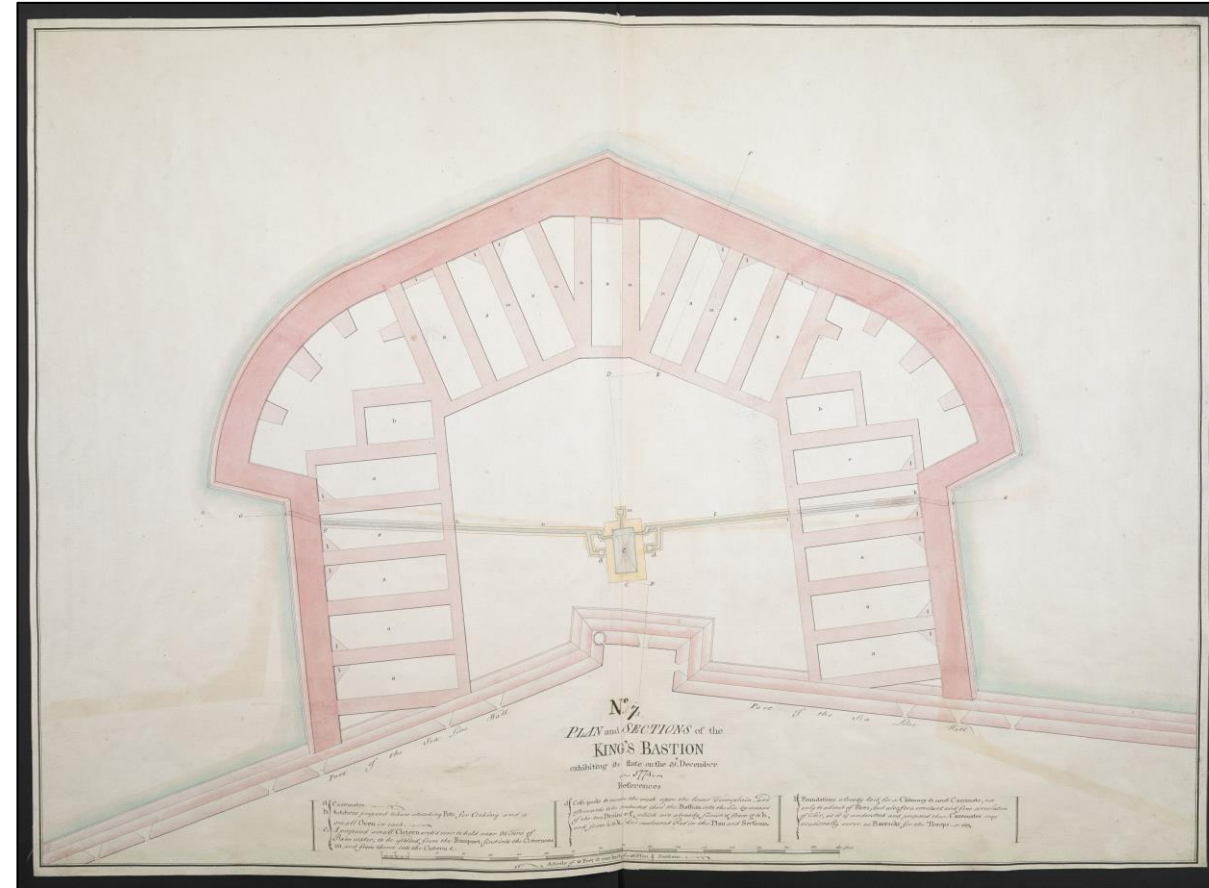


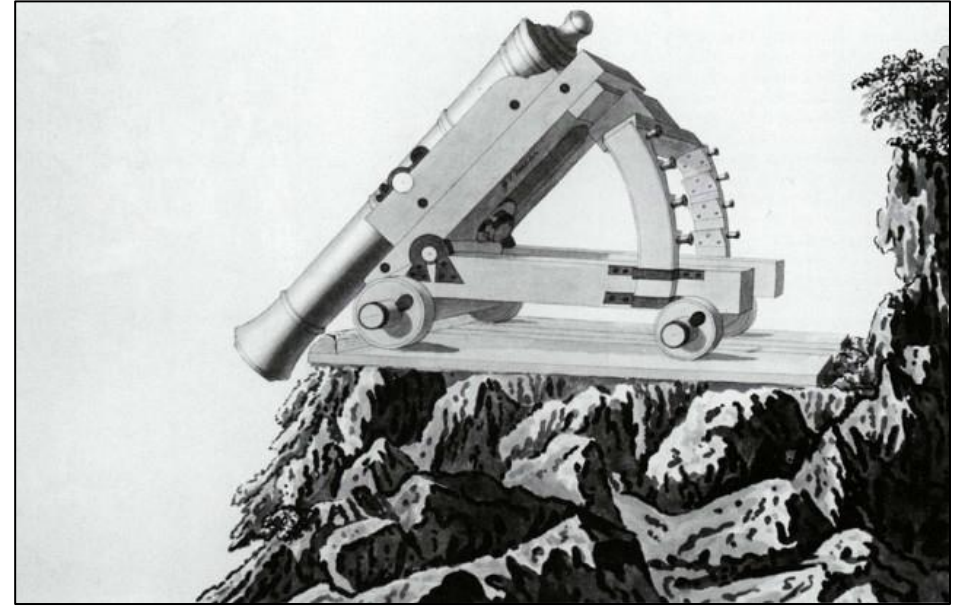
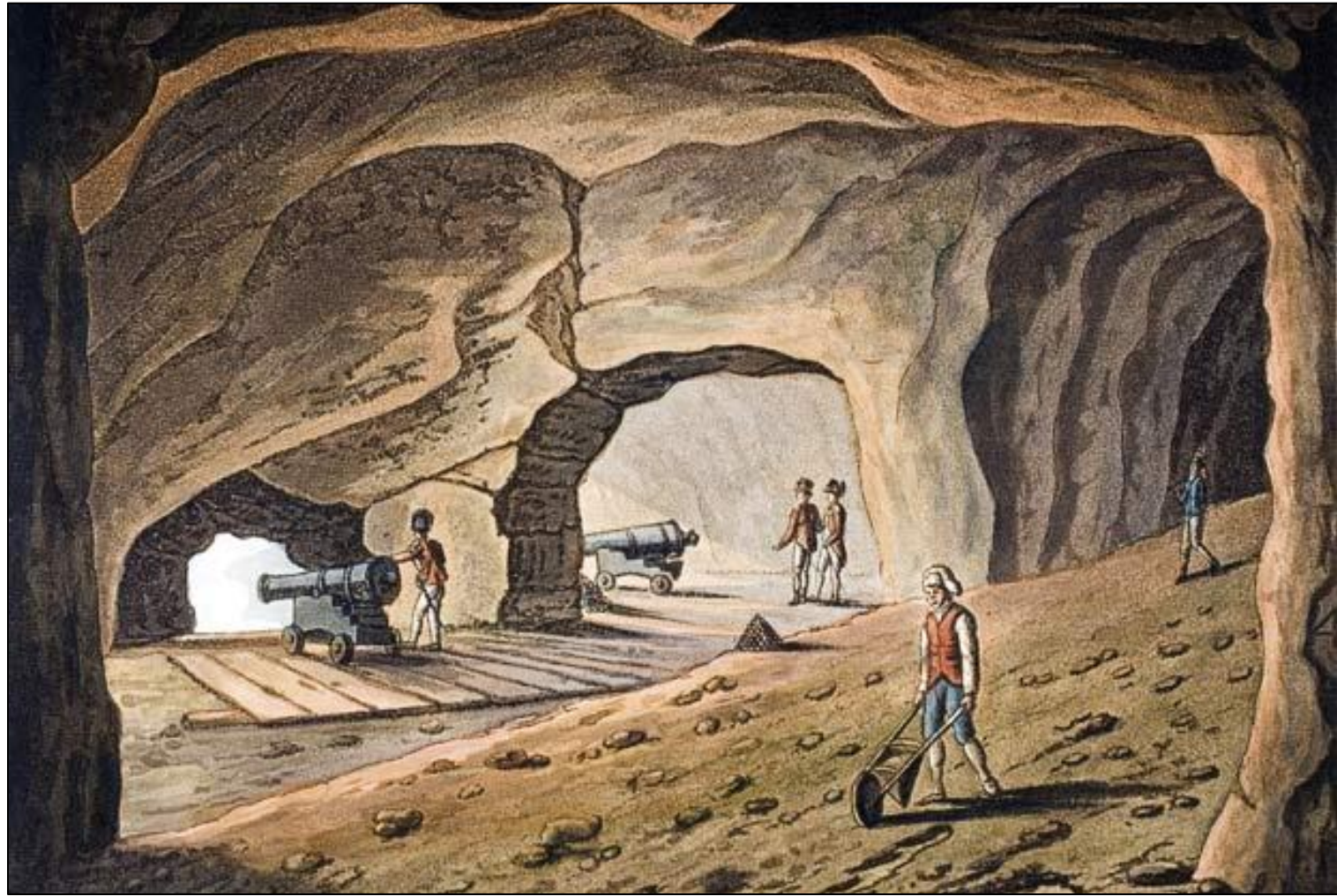
*Ruins of Gibraltar after the Great Siege, 1793*  
Watercolour by Captain Thomas Davis  
Gibraltar National Museum

# Green's improvements

- Construction of new bay facing defenses
- Bomb-proof shelters
- General hospital
- New batteries
- Reconstruction of batteries
- Galleries in 'The Rock'
- The Military Company of Artificers

No. 7. *PLAN and SECTIONS of the KING'S BASTION* by William Green, 1774-1778. Maps K.Top.72.38.2.h.1-2., British Library.





# Relief from the sea

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*The Moonlight Battle off Cape St Vincent, 16 January 1780,*  
Francis Holman (1729–1784), National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.



*Relief of Gibraltar by Earl Howe, 11 October 1782, ca. 1782.*  
National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.

British sortie:  
November 27, 1781

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*To the King's most excellent Majesty, this plate of the sortie made by the garrison of Gibraltar in the morning of the 27th of Novr 1781, is with his gracious permission humbly inscribed [engraving].*

The Society of the Cincinnati.





*The sortie made by the garrison of Gibraltar in the morning of the 27 of Nov. 1781 [engraving]. By John Trumbull and William Sharp, 1798. The Society of the Cincinnati.*

# Spanish model 1757 musket

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[Firing a musket](#)

[Loading a musket](#)





SEBAS

1774  
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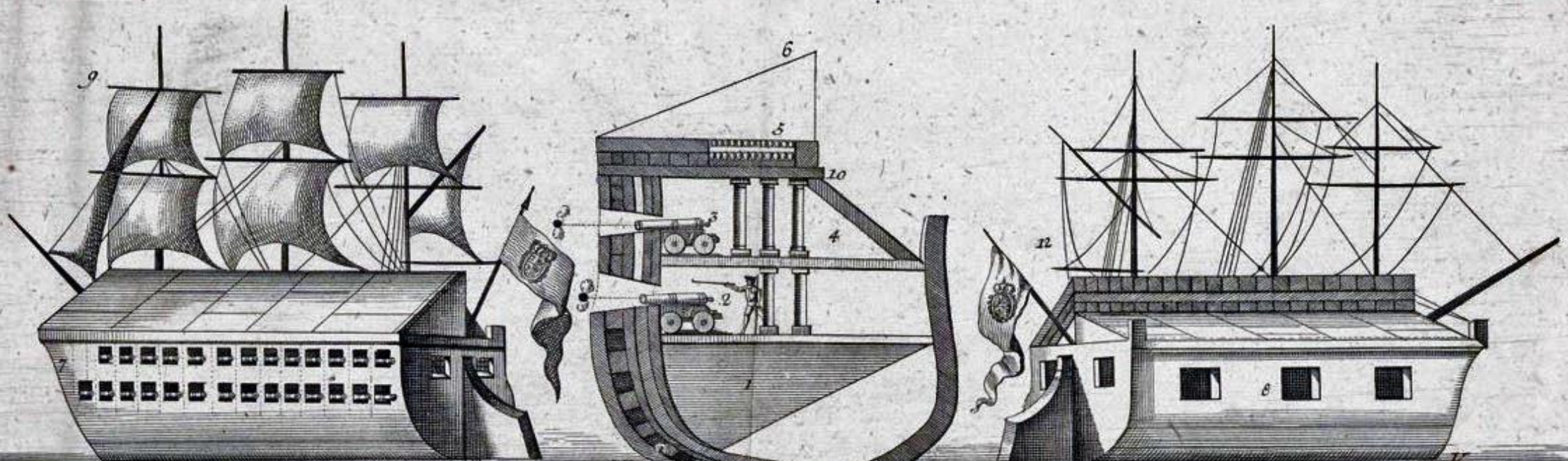
THIS MUSQUET  
WAS TAKEN AT  
THE SORTELLE MADE  
FROM GIBRALTER  
ON THE 25 NOV 1781  
IN THE M.L.M. MORTAR  
BATTERY ~~BUILT~~  
BETWEEN <sup>H</sup> SPANISH  
LINES & OUR  
ADVANCED  
WORKS



F C

MAJOR-GENERAL WILLIAM GREEN CHIEF ENGINEER  
OF GIBRALTAR FROM 1760 TO 1786 INCLUDING THE SEIGE  
FROM JUNE 21<sup>ST</sup> 1779 TO FEB<sup>R</sup> 2<sup>D</sup> 1785





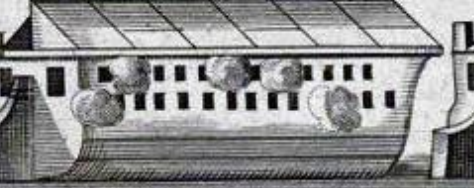
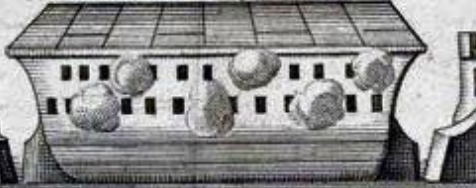
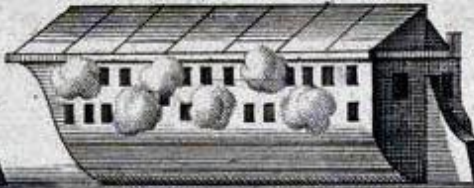
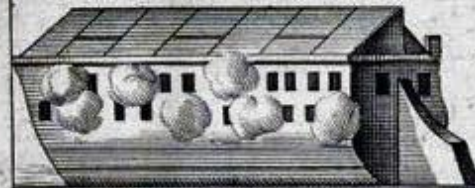
I.  
*Pastora*, von 24 Can.  
 Command. Don Bonav. Moreno.

II.  
*Tulla Piedra*, von 25 Can.  
 Command. Prinz von Nassau.

III.  
*la Paula*, von 23 Can.  
 Command. Don Langara.

IV.  
*Rosaire*, von 21 Can.  
 Commandant. Don Alamos.

V.  
*St. Christoval*, von 19 Can.  
 Command. Don Gravina.



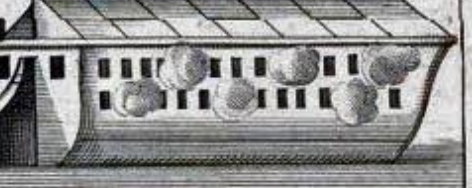
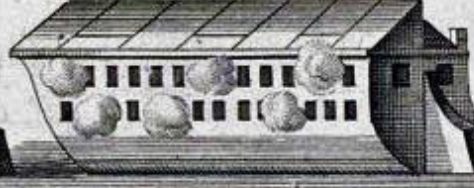
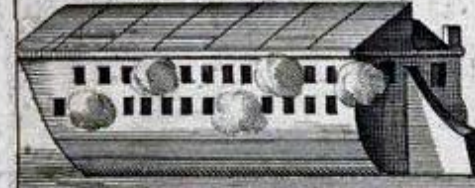
VI.  
*Principe Carlos*, von 10 Can.  
 Command. Don Bafurto.

VII.  
*St. Juan*, von 9 Can.  
 Command. Don Angeler.

VIII.  
*Paula Segunda*, von 9 Can.  
 Com. Don la Cosa.

IX.  
*St. Anna*, von 9 Can.  
 Com. Don Goiconchea.

X.  
*Dolores*, von 7 Can.  
 commandant von einer französisch. Officer





*General Elliott and his Officers observing the destruction of the Floating Batteries, Gibraltar, 14 September 1782.*

Oil-on-canvas by George Carter (1737-1794), 1784.

NAM. 1996-07-107-1. National Army Museum.



*General Elliott and his Officers observing the destruction of the Floating Batteries, Gibraltar, 14 September 1782.*

Oil-on-canvas by George Carter (1737-1794), 1784.

NAM. 1996-07-107-1. National Army Museum.



*Defeat of the floating batteries at Gibraltar, September 1782 (The Siege of Gibraltar),*  
John Singleton Copley (1738–1815),  
1783–1791  
Guildhall Art Gallery.  
Photo credit: City of London Corporation.

# Aftermath

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- The ‘Great Siege’ lasted 1,323 days, from 21 June 1779 – 2 February 1783, making it the longest siege in British history

## British casualties:

- 1,069 dead, from enemy action and illness. 1,010 wounded

## Franco-Spanish casualties:

- 3,752 killed and wounded
- The ‘Great Siege’ diverted resources that likely would have been used in North America

# Green and Gibraltar – Post-Revolutionary War

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- Green provides further recommendations for Gibraltar
- Green created baronet, 27 June 1786
- Green attains the rank of full general, 1 January 1798
- Retires on pension, 1802
- Gibraltar's continued importance to the United Kingdom and a source of soured relations with Spain

# In summary...

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Thank you, and any questions?

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[www.AmericanRevolutionInstitute.org](http://www.AmericanRevolutionInstitute.org)

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