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A CONCISE HISTORY OF:

GIBRALTAR COMMAND (HISTORY & PERSONNEL)

A concise history of Gibraltar Command, a static command responsible for the United Kingdom territory located at the Straits of Gibraltar alongside Spain. In addition, known details of the key appointments held between 1930 and 1950 are included.

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A Concise History of Gibraltar Command (History & Personnel)

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Gibraltar Command

Gibraltar (otherwise known to many servicemen as 'The Rock') is a British overseas territory at the southern coast of Spain at the entrance to the Straits of Gibraltar, the gateway to the Mediterranean Sea. It was captured by the Royal Marines in 1704, and then ceded to Great Britain by the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713. Due to its strategic position on the sea lanes in and out of the Mediterranean, it was the home to a Royal Navy Dockyard and naval base. There was also a small army garrison based in Gibraltar.

The territory has a Governor who in this period was usually a senior army officer (usually of General or Lieutenant General rank), who also acted as the Commander-in-Chief. The senior army officer was a Colonel who held the post of Assistant Adjutant and Quarter-Master-General in charge of Administration. The Commander Royal Artillery and Deputy Director of Medical Services were also Colonel's appointments.

The garrison in Gibraltar increased as tension increased in Europe. Spain was engrossed in a violent civil war from 1936 to April 1939. By the outbreak of the Second World War, it had increased to three infantry battalions and enhanced anti-aircraft artillery. The threat to Gibraltar was perceived to come from Spain, which held long term territorial aspirations over Gibraltar. In addition, Spain had just endured a bitter civil war and was seen to be generally supportive of the Nazi regime in Germany. In addition, with the fall of France in August 1940, its colonies in North Africa had sided with the Vichy regime, and southern France was under the control of the Vichy government. With Italy entering the war on 10 June 1940, Gibraltar was seen as vulnerable to attack and containment. Most of the civilians were evacuated from Gibraltar, with about thirteen-thousand being sent to Casablanca in Morocco. With the collapse of France, and Morocco coming under the Vichy government, these evacuees were both an embarrassment to the authorities, and at risk of internment by the Vichy French. Matters became more difficult after the Royal Navy had shelled the French fleet at Mers-el-Kebir, so with tensions high, a convoy of ships that had repatriated some fifteen-thousand French soldiers evacuated from Dunkirk were used to bring the evacuees back to Gibraltar.

In September 1940, it was decided to send over one-thousand evacuees to Jamaica, with a similar number being sent to the Portuguese island of Madeira. This was due to concerns about the German air raids on London exposing the evacuees to greater risk than remaining in Gibraltar. Eventually, after much negotiation, about ten-thousand evacuees were brought to the U.K., to be housed in London. This was in addition to the now two-thousand on Jamaica, and a slightly smaller number on Madeira. The armistice with the new Italian government in September 1943 meant that the threat to Gibraltar was much diminished. In November of that year, a Resettlement Board was established, and on 6 April 1944, the first party of about one-thousand evacuees arrived back in Gibraltar from the U.K.. Others returned from Jamaica and Madeira, but in the U.K., delays meant that many evacuees had to be relocated to Scotland and Northern Ireland from London.

In 1947, there were believed to be about two-thousand Gibraltarians still living in camps in Northern Ireland, and the last evacuee did not return home until 1951, six years after the apparent end of the Second World War.

At the commencement of the Second World War, there were only two Fortress Companies of the Royal Engineers stationed in Gibraltar. The 1st Fortress Company manned the coast defences searchlights, and the 32nd Fortress Company manned the anti-aircraft searchlights. Following the entry of Italy into the war, the garrison of Gibraltar was reinforced. Additional units of the Royal Engineers arrived, mainly tunnelling companies, in order to construct the underground accommodation and facilities. These were:

- 172nd Tunnelling Company, Royal Engineers;
- 178th Tunnelling Company, Royal Engineers;
- 179th Tunnelling Company, Royal Engineers;
- 180th Tunnelling Company, Royal Engineers;
- Detachment, 1st Tunnelling Company, Royal Canadian Engineers;
- 711th Artisan Works Company, Royal Engineers;
- xxx General Construction Company, Royal Engineers.

The growth of Royal Engineers resources on Gibraltar led to the creation of the post of Chief Engineer, and the appointment of two additional Commanders Royal Engineers. The other crucial task the Royal Engineers had to undertake was to build an air strip on the North Front of Gibraltar. The Royal Engineers were also responsible for working on the fixed defences, on petrol installations and laying minefields. Gibraltar is famous for the tunnels dug into the rock. These date from the earliest occupation of Gibraltar by the British, but the major programme of construction commenced in 1940 under Colonel H. M. FORDHAM, the first Chief Engineer appointed to Gibraltar Command. The purpose of the tunnels was to provide sufficient safe accommodation for the service personnel based in Gibraltar. The intention was to house the garrison of about sixteen-thousand personnel underground to be able to resist a siege for at least a year. This meant providing a water supply, electricity, sanitation, a hospital and a laundry.

Large chambers were carved out of the limestone rock so that Nissen huts and similar buildings could be constructed inside the tunnels. This was to allow the accommodation to be water tight, and to mitigate against small rock falls. Windows with frosted glass were provided in the huts to give a sense of normality for the occupants. Each chamber was about forty feet wide, and about two-hundred feet long. This accommodation was known as '*Fordham's Accommodation*' after Colonel FORDHAM, under whose auspices, construction took place. In 1941, some further Royal Engineers units arrived, namely:

- 575th Army Troops Company, Royal Engineers;
- 170th Tunnelling Company, Royal Engineers;
- 3rd Tunnelling Company, Royal Canadian Engineers.

For the construction of the airfield, other units arrived in Gibraltar, namely:

- 855th Quarrying Company, Royal Engineers;
- 807th Road Construction Company, Royal Engineers;
- xxx Excavator Company, Royal Engineers.

The existing runway was extended into Algeciras Bay to a total length of one-thousand, five-hundred yards, with a width of one-hundred yards. As this proved to be insufficient due to the cross winds, the runway was increased to one-thousand, eight-hundred yards. This was achieved by tipping spoil in the bay. This work was carried out while the airfield remained in operational use. About 6,250 cubic yards of spoil was required to advance the airstrip by fifty yards. Accidents were few, although an aircraft did take off the cab of a tipper lorry one night, fortunately without injuring the driver or causing the aircraft to crash. The extended airfield was ready for use in November 1942 in connection with the Allied invasion of French North Africa, although the fully extended runway was not finished until the middle of 1945. By the spring of 1944, the rundown of the Royal Engineers presence in Gibraltar was underway, and the role of Chief Engineer was abolished, with two Commanders Royal Engineers remaining. There were still many tasks for the Royal Engineers to fulfil, with the two Fortress Companies assisting with other tasks. At the peak period of activity, one company had over seventy tasks allocated to it.

In 1941, two infantry brigades were formed to command the increased military presence. In 1942 and into 1943, the garrison in Gibraltar had risen to some 18,000 men and women. The German Armed Forces did devise plan to capture Gibraltar, codenamed 'Felix' in late 1940. It was due to take place in early 1941, but with the German invasion of the U.S.S.R., the plan was never executed. The plan also required the support of the Spanish leader, General FRANCO, and he was never keen on endorsing or assisting Operation 'Felix'. By late 1943, with the capture of Sicily and the exit of Italy from the war, the threat reduced considerably so the garrison was scaled down. By the end of the war, it was back to two infantry battalions, supporting arms and services.

The first air raid on Gibraltar carried out by Vichy French aircraft from North Africa, and took place on Tuesday 24 September 1940. The next day, the French undertook another air raid, using some sixty-plus bombers. The Italians had commenced small air raids overnight 18/18 July 1940, with two more in 1940. There were four in 1941, and five in 1942; all flown from Sardinia. The last air attack on Gibraltar took place on 19 July 1943, with an insignificant result.

Of more significance were attacks by Italian frogmen on shipping in the harbour and bay. The first attack was on 21 October 1940, without result, but one on 10 September 1941 sank two tankers and a cargo ship. Four cargo ships were sunk on 13 July, and one on 15 September 1942. One U.S. and two British ships were sunk by an attack on 8 May 1943, with the last attack on 3 August 1943 resulting in the loss of one Norwegian, one American and one British cargo ships.

Gibraltar played a major role in campaign against the U-boats in the Bay of Biscay and Mediterranean. Wellington and Sunderland aircraft from Coastal Command operated from Gibraltar with significant success. In addition, the airfield was a key staging point for British and Allied aircraft travelling from the U.K. to Malta, or North Africa. Sadly, one of these flights resulted in the death of the Polish leader-in-exile, General SIKORSKI and his party when his Liberator aircraft crashed into the water shortly after take-off. Operation 'Torch', the joint U.S. and British invasion of French North Africa was overseen from Gibraltar in November 1942.

Lastly, Gibraltar was and remained until recent years, a major base for the Royal Navy. The Royal Navy Dockyard was privatised in 1984, but had not enjoyed a stable and profitable period since then. Several companies have owned the yard, but it remains a ship repair and conversion facility, now known as 'Gibdock'. Gibraltar remains part of the United Kingdom, although Spain still maintains its claim to sovereignty over the 'Rock'.

Governor and Commander-in-Chief

20 October 1933 – 11 August 1938

General Sir Charles H. HARRINGTON, G.C.B., G.B.E., D.S.O.

12 August 1938 – 7 July 1939

General Sir William Edmund IRONSIDE, G.C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O.

7 July 1939 – 14 May 1941

Lieutenant General Sir Clive Gerard LIDDELL, K.C.B., C.M.G., C.B.E., D.S.O., *i.d.c.*, *p.s.c.*

14 May 1941 – 31 May 1942

Field Marshal The Right Honourable The Viscount GORT, V.C, G.C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O., M.V.O., M.C., LL.D., *p.s.c.*

31 May 1942 – 14 February 1944

Lieutenant General Sir Frank Noel MASON-MacFARLANE, K.C.B., D.S.O., M.C., *i.d.c.*, *p.s.c.*

17 February 1944 – 8 February 1947

Lieutenant General Sir Thomas Ralph EASTWOOD, K.C.B., D.S.O., M.C., *p.s.c.*

8 February 1947 – 23 April 1952

General Sir Kenneth Arthur Noel ANDERSON, K.C.B., M.C., *p.s.c.*

Chief of Staff, Deputy Governor and Commander-in-Chief

20 June 1940 – 5 June 1941

Major General Frank Noel MASON-MacFARLANE, D.S.O., M.C., *i.d.c.*, *p.s.c.*

4 March 1941 – 7 November 1941

Major General (Acting) William Wyndham GREEN, D.S.O., M.C.

22 October 1941 – 30 September 1942

Major General (Acting) Sir Colin Arthur JARDINE, 3rd Baronet, C.B., D.S.O.*, M.C., *p.s.c.*

1 October 1942 – 26 March 1944

Major General Frederick Gordon HYLAND, C.B., M.C.

27 March 1944 – 1946

Brigadier (Temporary) Croxton Sillery VALE, C.B.E., M.C., *p.s.c.*

General Staff Officer, 1st Grade2 July 1940 – 1941

Lieutenant Colonel (Temporary) W. G. PIDLSEY, D.S.O., M.C., A.E.C.

General Staff Officer, 2nd Grade20 December 1935 – 26 March 1938

Major J. N. C. MARTIN, D.S.O., M.C., R.A..

27 March 1938 – 1940Major Claude Max VALLENTIN, M.C., R.A.¹19 September 1940 – 1941

Major (Acting) T. H. DYKE, The Queen's R.

20 September 1940 – 1941

Major (Acting) H. C. MEDLAM, Gen List

29 October 1940 – 1941

Major H. R. H. PLOWDEN, Reserve of Officers

1941 – 1942Captain A. H. G. RICKETTS, Durham L.I., *p.s.c.***General Staff Officer, 3rd Grade**19 September 1940 – 1941

Captain A. E. C. BREDIN, Dorset R. (s.c.)

29 October 1940 – 1941

Captain (Temporary) R. W. A. FANE, Gen List

General Staff Officer for Weapon Training18 January 1941 – 1942

Captain (Acting) R. P. C. LEWIS, The King's R.

¹ Promoted Local Lieutenant Colonel on 1 September 1939.

Assistant Adjutant and Quarter-Master-General in charge of Administration

9 October 1936 – 22 December 1939

Brigadier (Local) Henry Percival CURREY, *p.s.c.*

23 December 1939 – 1940

Brigadier (Local) A. T. SHAKESPEAR, D.S.O., M.C., *p.s.c.*

Chief Administration Officer (Brigadier i/c Administration)

29 October 1940 – 4 November 1941

Brigadier (Acting) Reginald Horace PARMINTER, C.B.E., D.S.O., M.C.

15 October 1941 – 4 July 1942

Brigadier (Acting) Philip Sidney WHITCOMBE, O.B.E., *p.s.c.*

27 March 1944 – 1946/7 (Also Deputy Fortress Commander)

Brigadier (Temporary) Croxton Sillery VALE, C.B.E., M.C., *p.s.c.*

Deputy Assistant Adjutant and Quarter-Master-General

5 September 1939 – 9 February 1941

Major F. R. INGLIS, M.C., Gordons.

10 February 1941 – 1942

Major (Acting) H. R. POWER, M.C. Reserve of Officers

Deputy Assistant Adjutant-General

5 September 1940 –

Major (Acting) P. C. WINTERTON, The King's R.

17 October 1940 –

Major (Acting) J. H. S. LACEY, B.A., R.E.

Deputy Assistant Quarter-Master-General

19 September 1940 – 1941/2

Major (Acting) G. RIMBAULT, M.C., Loyal R. (s.c.)

Staff Captain

26 December 1936 – 1 November 1938

Captain A. G. WARREN, Royal Marines

2 November 1938 – 1940/1

Major A. J. B. TARRANT, K.S.L.I.

Commander Royal Artillery

15 October 1934 – 6 October 1938

Colonel G. F. C. WHITE, D.S.O.

7 October 1938 – 1940

Brigadier (Temporary) Raymond Henry Arnold Davison LOVE.

23 September 1940 – 3 May 1944

Brigadier (Acting) George Travers NUGEE, D.S.O., M.C., R.A.

4 May 1944 – 16 February 1945

Brigadier (Temporary) Eric Grenville EARLE, D.S.O., *p.s.c.*²

17 February 1945 – 1946/7

Brigadier (Acting) J. A. VIVIAN, R.A.

Anti-Aircraft Defence Commander

1 September 1940 – September 1941

Colonel (Acting) Duncan Alexander LEARMONT, O.B.E., R.A., *g.*

27 November 1942 – 5 March 1944

Brigadier (Temporary) Edward Victor HALLINAN, M.C.

Major Instructor in Gunnery

28 December 1935 – 20 February 1939

Major F. P. HALLIFAX, M.C., R.A.

21 February 1939 – 30 August 1940

Major Duncan Alexander LEARMONT, O.B.E., R.A., *g.*³

² For a period in 1945, EARLE was Acting Governor of Gibraltar.

³ LEARMONT was promoted to the rank of Acting Lieutenant Colonel on 30 December 1939. In September 1940, he was promoted Acting Colonel on becoming the Commander, A.A. Defence, and then in September 1941 he assumed command of the 15th Anti-Aircraft Brigade in Gibraltar on promotion to Acting Brigadier.

Commander Royal Engineers

1938 – 1939

Lieutenant Colonel J. S. BAINES, R.E.

26 May 1939 – 1 March 1940

Lieutenant Colonel Nevil Charles Dowell BROWNJOHN, M.C., *p.s.c.*, R.E.

2 March 1940 – 18 June 1941

Lieutenant Colonel Robert Alastair HAY, R.E.⁴

Chief Engineer

19 September 1940 – 14 December 1941

Colonel Henry Marshall FORDHAM, O.B.E., M.C., A.M.I.E.E.

5 December 1941 – 1 July 1942

Colonel (Acting) Thomas Wagstaffe Richard HAYCRAFT.⁵

2 July 1942 – 8 November 1943

Brigadier (Acting) Edward Norton CLIFTON.

15 January 1943 – 3 September 1944

Colonel (Temporary) Walter Gordon Rothery NUTT, M.C.⁶

16 December 1945 – 1946/7

Colonel (Temporary) R. L. C. COLWILL, R.E.

Deputy Commander, Royal Engineers

18 January 1941 – 1941/2

Captain (Acting) B. S. HUME, R.E.

Deputy Chief Engineer, Gibraltar

19 June 1941 – 16 January 1944

Brigadier (Temporary) Robert Alastair HAY, R.E.

Command Signal Officer

1938 – 1939/40

Major R. H. GEM, R Signals.

1940 – 1941/2

Major R. J. N. SOLLY, R. Signals.⁷

⁴ Promoted Acting Brigadier and Acting Colonel on 5 July 1940, which may coincide with his appointment. Appointment as D.C.E. reduced to Colonel on 1 December 1943.

⁵ Promoted Acting Brigadier in post on 2 January 1942.

⁶ Promoted Acting Brigadier on 17 October 1943

⁷ Promoted Lieutenant Colonel on 3 January 1941.

Assistant Chaplain-General (also for Western Mediterranean Duties)1938Revered J. J. E. O'MALLEY, O.B.E., M.A. Chaplain to the Forces 1st Class1941Reverend D. B. L. FOSTER, M.A., Chaplain to the Force 1st Class⁸**Assistant Director of Supplies and Transport (Officer Commanding Royal Army Service Corps)**1938

Lieutenant Colonel E. S. HACKER, M.C., A.M.I.Mech.E., R.A.S.C.

1940Lieutenant Colonel C. C. SAUNDERS-O'MAHONY, O.B.E., A.M.I.Mech.E (Reserve of Officers)⁹18th December 1940 – 1941/2

Lieutenant Colonel (Acting) L. A. TUDOR, R.A.S.C.

Deputy Director of Medical Services1938 – 1940

Colonel M. J. WILLIAMSON, M.C., M.B.

1940 – 1941

Colonel (Temporary) W. R. BLACKWELL, C.B., C.M.G., retired pay (Reserve of Officers)

1941 – 1942

Brigadier (Acting) William Pennefather CROKER,

Deputy Assistant Director of Medical Services26 January 1940 – 1941/2

Major (Acting) W. I. C. MORRIS, M.B., F.R.C.S. (Edin), R.A.M.C.

Deputy Assistant Director of Pathology and Hygiene1938 – 1940

Major R. A. MANSELL, M.B.E., M.B., R.A.M.C.

Deputy Assistant Director of Hygiene1940 – 1941/2

Major C. V. MacNAMARA, M.B., R.A.M.C.

Deputy Assistant Director of Dental Services9 November 1940 – 1941/2

Major (Acting) R. EDWARDS, A.D. Corps.

⁸ Acted as Assistant Chaplain-General for Western Mediterranean duties to include Malta.

⁹ On 1 November 1940, SAUNDERS-O'MAHONY was promoted to the rank of Local Colonel, but with the arrival of Lieutenant Colonel TUDOR he became the Assistant Director of Supplies and Transport.

Assistant Director of Ordnance Services

1938 – 1939

Lieutenant Colonel Geoffrey Woodroffe PALMER, R.A.O.C.

3 December 1939 – 3 June 1941

Lieutenant Colonel (Temporary) Albert Roland BROWN, R.A.O.C., *o.*

Deputy Director of Ordnance Services

4 June 1941 – 28 December 1941

Brigadier (Acting) Albert Roland BROWN, *o.*

Chief Ordnance Mechanical Engineer

1938 – 1941

Major K. D. PHELPS, B.Sc (Eng.), A.M.I.Mech.E, R.A.O.C.

Command Paymaster

1938

Lieutenant Colonel I. P. BRICKMAN, O.B.E., R.A.P.C.

1940 – 1941

Lieutenant Colonel C. HOLMES, M.C., R.A.P.C.

Assistant Military Secretary

25 July 1939 – 1941/2

Major (Temporary) H. A. V. QUARE, M.C., Reserve of Officers

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Available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/stream/armylistoct1940grea>

[Accessed 3rd February 2011]

The Half Yearly Army List for the period ending 31st December 1940

Available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylisthalfjan1941grea>

[Accessed 3rd February 2011]

The Quarterly Army List April 1941

Available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylistapr1941grea>

<http://www.archive.org/details/armylistapr21941grea>

[Accessed 3rd February 2011]

The Quarterly Army List July 1941

Available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylistjul1941grea>

<http://www.archive.org/details/armylist1941grea>

[Accessed 3rd February 2011]

The Quarterly Army List October 1941

Available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylistoct1941gre>

<http://www.archive.org/details/armylistoct21941grea>

[Accessed 3rd February 2011]

The Half Yearly Army List for the period ending 31st December 1941

Available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylisthalfjan1942grea>

[Accessed 3rd February 2011]

The Quarterly Army List January 1942

Available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylistjan1942grea>
<http://www.archive.org/details/armylistjan21942grea>
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The Quarterly Army List July 1942

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Part II available on-line at: <http://www.archive.org/details/armylistjul21942grea>
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The Quarterly Army List October 1942

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