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A Plan of the Town and Fortifications of Gibraltar with the Spanish Lines, &c.

Stock#: 39514
Map Maker: Sayer / Bennett
Date: 1796
Place: London
Color: Uncolored
Condition: VG
Size: 21 x 14 inches
Price: SOLD



Description:

Fine cartographic overview of Gibraltar from the early days of the Great Siege (1779-1783), a major event in the European theatre of the American Revolutionary War.

First published circa 1779 and again in 1792, this fine plan and inset maps depict the British outpost at the beginning of the Great Siege of Gibraltar (1779-1783). The plan details the peninsula, a small reserve of British territory only 2.6 square miles in area, along Spain's Andalucía coast. As shown, it is dominated by the 'Rock of Gibraltar', a 1,400 tall limestone mountain, which is historically considered to be one of the Pillars of Hercules - the gates to the Mediterranean world. A small but vibrant trading port occupies the western shore, while numerous military installations guard the promontory from both landward and seaward approaches. The key at the center shows 18 different sites (labeled A-S). To the north, Fort St. Philip (Great Fort) and its bulwarks separate Gibraltar from Spain, then Britain's perennial nemesis.

Historian Edward Rose called Gibraltar "one of the most densely fortified and fought-over places in Europe."

During the middle ages, Gibraltar was once a key Moorish fortress, named Gebel al Tariq ('The Rock of Tariq', the name eventually evolved to become 'Gibraltar' in Spanish), named for Tariq ibn Ziyad, the great Berber general, who invaded Visigothic Spain from 711 to 718 AD. In the early 14th Century it was conquered by the Castilians and became a Spanish base. In 1704, the English Royal Navy seized Gibraltar, and in spite of a Spanish siege in 1727, Britain has managed to retain 'The Rock' ever since.

During the American Revolutionary War (1775-1783), France and Spain, who were close allies, joined the



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war against the British on the American side (in 1778 and 1779 respectively). On April 12, 1779, the two nations signed the Treaty of Aranjuez, wherein they agreed to aid one another in recovering lost territory from Britain (including Gibraltar).

On June 24, 1779, a Spanish force of 13,700 troops began to besiege Gibraltar, constantly testing its defenses and imposing a blockade, along both land and sea. The Spaniards knew that storming The Rock would be difficult, so they hoped that they could 'starve out' the British, forcing them to surrender due to lack of supplies.

At the time Gibraltar was garrisoned by around 7,500 British troops, commanded by General George Augustus Elliot. While the peninsula was able to grow little food, the British had stored up vast quantities of imperishables, such as salt beef and cod, as it was always accepted that a siege was a possibility.

However, what nobody on either side predicted, was that the siege would last 3 years and 7 months (from June 24, 1779 to February 7, 1783) - the longest siege in the history of the British Empire!

In spite of the best effort of both the Spanish and French navies, the British navy managed to violate the blockade, relieving Gibraltar on three occasions. In the spring of 1780, Admiral George Rodney broke through to the base and landed much needed provisions, ordinance and 1,000 fresh troops. A year later, Admiral George Darby repeated the feat.

Surprised and frustrated by Gibraltar's resoluteness, the Franco-Spanish command decided to 'throw the kitchen sink' at The Rock, and to end the spectacle once and for all. They assembled an astounding force of 63,000 soldiers and sailors and on September 13, 1782, mounted a full on assault upon Gibraltar. To everyone's amazement, Gibraltar's defenses held firm, and the attacks were never able to make a breakthrough. In October 1782, British Admiral Richard Howe arrived with a large force, which discouraged any further attacks upon Gibraltar. The Spanish finally lifted the siege on February 7, 1783. The war ended shortly thereafter, and Gibraltar has remained a British possession ever since.

The present example is a later state of the map, re-issued in 1796, although curiously it retains the Sayer & Bennett imprint, although by that time Laurie & Whittle had taken ownership of the plate.

Detailed Condition:

Minor spot in the table.