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[Panama - Battle of Portobello and the War of Jenkins' Ear] A Sequel of the Seat of War in the West Indies...from Admiral Vernon's own draught, the whole illustrated with remarks.

Stock#: 35134
Map Maker: Bowen
Date: 1740
Place: London
Color: Color
Condition: VG+
Size: 14 x 18.5 inches
Price: SOLD



Description:

A very rare broadside, containing a series of maps and views celebrating Admiral Edward Vernon's capture of Portobello, Panama, during the War of Jenkins' Ear.

This fascinating separately-issued broadside provides one of the most vivid and detailed visual accounts of an event that then headlined the news throughout both the British and Spanish empires. Admiral Vernon's seizure of Portobello, a critical entrepot along the Spanish American treasure route, in November 1739, proved to be a massive propaganda victory for the British, even if the military and economic gains were quite modest. Portobello was followed by Vernon's calamitous defeat during the Siege of Cartagena in the spring of 1741. However, due to an early example of a modern public relations campaign, Britons forever saw Vernon as a victorious hero, while the disastrous reality of the War of Jenkins' Ear was largely overlooked. The British government, assisted by journalists and commercial printers, fabricated a



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convincing 'alternate narrative' of the conflict for general consumption. Indeed, while its details are, in large part, factually correct, this finely illustrated broadside was a notable part of the propaganda campaign glorifying the victory in Panama.

To set the scene, the War of Jenkins' Ear (1739-42), which eventually merged into the grander War of Austrian Succession, was fought between Britain and Spain in the Americas. Friction between the two powers has long existed, as Spanish *guarda costas* (the coast guard) dealt rather roughly with British vessels that they accused of trying to illegally trade with the Spanish American colonies. In this vein, the British felt that the Spanish were reneging on their commitment to allow the British conditional access to their markets for the *asiento* (slave trade), as promised in the Treaty of Utrecht (1713). On the other side, the Spanish were resentful of the illegal British traders, and were positively outraged by the frequent attacks by British pirates on their coastal colonial towns and vessels. While the British authorities technically condemned these piratical ventures, in practice they tolerated and, at times, abetted them.

The conflict gained its unusual name from a bizarre incident in which a severed ear was presented to Parliament. It allegedly belonged to a British trader, Captain Robert Jenkins, and had been sliced off by an officer of the *guarda costas* who boarded Jenkins' ship. The long-serving Prime Minister, Sir Robert Walpole, who was continually searching for an excuse to attack Spain, used this incident to his advantage, as the enraged legislators supported a declaration of war. Appealing to the sense of patriotic bravado, Admiral Edward Vernon (1684-1757), an MP with impressive naval experience, promised Parliament that he could capture the Spanish treasure harbor of Portobello with "Six ships only" - a rather audacious claim.

Returning to our broadside, it depicts a great deal of action, containing eight maps and views, along with extensive annotations. Its full title reads:

A Sequel of the Seat of War in the West Indies containing (1) a Map of the Isthmus of Panama exhibiting the Roads with the Course of the River Châgre thro the same (2) Curious Perspective Views of the Harbour, Town and Castles of Puerto Bello, as sent over by Commodore Brown (3) the Appearance at Sea of San Juan de Puerto Rico with it's Castles / from Admiral Vernon's own draught, the whole illustrated with remarks.

The *Large & Accurate Map of part of the Isthmus of Panama*, which dominates the upper-half of the broadside, clearly illustrates the strategic importance of the harbors of Portobello and Chagres. For the last two centuries, vast quantities of silver and gold had been regularly shipped from Peru and Chile to



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Panama City on the Pacific coast. From that point there were two main routes of transporting the treasure across the isthmus to the Caribbean (Atlantic) side, so that it could be shipped onwards to Spain. The shorter route was more arduous and involved taking the cargo by mule train over a trail to Portobello. The other route, while longer, allowed much of the journey to be taken by light boat down the Chagres River to the eponymous port. Both routes were considered dangerous, exposing men to malaria and yellow fever. If that wasn't enough, the region had long been a favored target for pirates, most notably the expedition of Captain Henry Morgan, who in 1670, seized Portobello and amazingly marched across the isthmus to sack Panama City.

On the evening of November 20, 1739, Admiral Vernon's fleet of six ships, 2,735 men, 370 pieces of ordnance, arrived in sight of Porto Bello on the evening of November 20, 1739, and anchored off shore for the night. At dawn on November 21, 1739, the fleet moved in to attack the fort of San Felipe (called "The Iron Castle" by the British after its alternative Spanish name, Castillo de Hierro), on the left-hand side of the mouth of the harbor. This location and others key to the rest of the operation can be seen on the *Perspective View of the Harbour, Town and Castles of Puerto Bello*, while above and to the left we find a ground-plan and a fine view of the fort. While the Iron Castle formidably possessed 100 guns, manned by 300 troops, Vernon's ships moved in quickly and closely and so intensely bombarded the fort's lower batteries that the garrison's defenders had no chance to mount an effective defense. Amazingly, within two hours the fort surrendered.

That afternoon Vernon's fleet moved in on the town itself, located near the head of the bay. The British fired upon the Castillo Santiago, referred to as "Castle Gloria" by the British, of which a fine view and ground-plan of the fort and town surrounds the general map of the harbor. While the British cannons largely missed the fort, they rained down on the town itself, causing panic in the Spanish camp. The next morning, the Spanish surrendered Portobello. Discipline in the Spanish ranks was so poor that the town's governor had to ask Vernon to protect Portobello from being pillaged by his own retreating soldiers. In the town's treasury, the British found the equivalent of £10,000 in Spanish coin, by no means a windfall, but enough to provide a bounty to Vernon's troops. The British remained in the town for a few weeks, before abandoning it and returning to their base in Jamaica. The venture at Portobello was a limited affair and very well executed. It proved deeply humiliating to the Spanish, as it showed that their resources were spread too thin and, in some places, manned by incompetent personnel. However, the victory was of little practical consequence to the British, as they seized relatively little treasure, gained no new territory, and succeeded in disrupting Spanish trade only very briefly.

The true benefit of Portobello was in its use in propaganda. George II, Britain's unloved German king and



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the corrupt and unpopular Walpole, desperately needed a public relations victory. As soon as the news of Vernon's capture of Portobello arrived in England, no effort was spared on the part of the government and its allies in the journalistic community to exaggerate the scale and ramifications of the success.

Commemorative medals were struck, church bells rang, speeches were given, and pamphlets and prints were issued, all portraying Admiral Vernon as an omnipotent hero and Portobello as one of the great triumphs in British history. The public was rallied in to such a sense of patriotic euphoria, that even publishers with no love for the government opportunistically joined the propaganda campaign in an effort to sell copies. This was one of the first modern mass public relations campaigns, and certainly the first to so successfully and absurdly distort popular perception of an overseas military conflict.

Enter Emanuel Bowen (1694-1767), the Royal Mapmaker to George II. Before the action of the war had even began, he issued a broadside, *The Seat of War in the West Indies Containing New & Accurate Plans of the Havana, La Vera Cruz, Cartagena, also of San Augustin and the Bay of Honda in Cuba* (1739), which mapped the general theater of the conflict. Then on July 8, 1740, Bowen published the present broadside as a "Sequel" to *The Seat of War*. Rarer than its predecessor, it is by far the most detailed and attractive printed visual and cartographic record of the capture of Portobello to have been printed on a single sheet. Seeking legitimacy and appealing to the popular reverence of the admiral, Bowen claimed dubiously in the title that much of the broadside was copied "from Vernon's own draught". Like its predecessor, the broadside includes (along the bottom) a view of San Juan, Puerto Rico, an early object of Vernon's interest, but passed over in favor of targets in Panama and Colombia.

This broadside was quite influential during its time, for its views of the Iron and Gloria castles formed for the basis of a painting by Peter Monamy, one of contemporary Britain's most prominent artists. The painting was custom-created to adorn one of London's most popular attractions, Vauxhall Gardens. While it no longer survives, it is known from an engraving, *The Taking of Portobello by Vice Admiral Vernon*, printed in London in 1743, by Peter Bowles.

However, our story does not end here. Also included on the broadside, is the small inset within the main map of Panama, the *Town & Castle of Chagres before it was demolished*. This refers to the attack Vernon made on the other key Caribbean port of the isthmus on March 22, 1740. That day the British easily seized Chagres and its fort, the Castillo de San Lorenzo, which they promptly leveled before departing. News of Chagres only added to the hagiography of the admiral in London.

Upon returning to the British base at Port Royal, Jamaica, the British marshaled the largest fleet hitherto ever assembled in the New World. This juggernaut consisted of 29 ships of the line, 22 frigates and 135



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support craft, carrying 30,000 troops and sailors. Under the overall command of Vernon, the fleet moved to attack Cartagena, Colombia, the largest and most heavily fortified treasure port on the Spanish Main. So confident was Vernon of victory that he wrote letters to London that essentially called Cartagena's capture a *fait accompli*. This assumption was integrated into the existing propaganda campaign, and victory medals were once again struck and books were published expounding on how the British should best exploit their new colony of Nueva Grenada.

In the spring of 1741, the British fleet continually bombarded Cartagena but was thwarted by the city's formidable fortifications and its determined defenders, lead by Admiral Blas de Lezo. Vernon spent most of his time arguing with his army counterparts, and any promising plans to mount a land invasion were passed over. Disastrously, Vernon's men soon fell victim to an epidemic of yellow fever and the campaign has to be called off. Within a short time over 18,000 British troops would perish from disease. It proved to be the most costly defeat, in both blood and treasure, in the history of the Royal Navy until the Battle of Gallipoli in World I. It was such an unmitigated disaster that it could not even be concealed by the admiral's incomparable bravado. Following the debacle, Vernon sent a letter to Blas de Lezo, which read "We have decided to retreat, but we will return to Cartagena after we take reinforcements in Jamaica". To this, Blas de Lezo responded wryly, "In order to come to Cartagena, the English King must build a better and larger fleet, because yours now is only suitable to transport coal from Ireland to London."

Upon hearing news of the disaster at Cartagena, the king and his ministers were stunned and horrified. Long disused laws of press censorship were suddenly and firmly reapplied, promising severe criminal penalties for anyone mentioning the defeat at Cartagena. While the news certainly spread amongst educated circles and military families, it was, overall, successfully suppressed in favor of the triumphalist Portobello narrative. While the calamity of War of Jenkins' Ear brought down Walpole's premiership, George II attained some relief, for the public became distracted by the ongoing War of Austrian Succession (1740-48).

Vernon and Portobello's legacy was largely preserved, and lives on to this day. Portobello Road in Notting Hill, London and the Portobello District in Edinburgh are named after the victory. Mount Vernon, the estate of George Washington near Alexandria, Virginia, was named after Admiral Vernon, under whom George's older brother, Colonel Lawrence Washington, served.

The present broadside is one of the most attractive and informative aspects of the great Portobello propaganda campaign. It is also very rare, we are aware of only one example appearing at auction in the last 25 years and can find no examples appearing in dealers' catalogs over the same period. We are aware



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of only four examples in institutional collections; 2 examples at the British Library, 1 at the Bibliothèque nationale de France and 1 at the José Martí Library in Havana.

Detailed Condition:

Separately-issued broadside with full color.