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[Great Siege of Gibraltar, 1779-1783] Plan Géométral De La Montagne Et De La Ville De Gibraltar : avec une Carte particulière du Detroit de même nom.

Stock#: 38280
Map Maker: Bonne
Date: 1779
Place: Paris
Color: Hand Colored
Condition: VG+
Size: 18.5 x 13 inches
Price: SOLD



Description:

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

This engaging map depicts the British outpost at the beginning of the Great Siege of Gibraltar (1779-1783). The section on the right 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 the Pillars of Hercules - the gates to the Mediterranean world. A compact but vibrant trading port occupies the western shore, while numerous military installations guard the promontory from both landward and seaward approaches. The key on the left side of the section identifies 26 different sites (labeled A-Z). To the north, Fort St. Philip and its bulwarks separate Gibraltar from Spain, then Britain's perennial nemesis.

Historian Edward Rose rightly called Gibraltar "one of the most densely fortified and fought-over places in Europe". The bigger map making up the lower left of the composition shows why this was the case, as it reveals Gibraltar's uniquely strategic position, guarding the entrance to the Mediterranean, while the small inset above, entitled 'Carte de l'Espagne et Portugal' gives a broader overview of the Iberian Peninsula.

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



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and in spite of a Spanish siege in 1727, Britain had managed to retain 'The Rock' ever since.

During the American Revolutionary War (1775-1783), France and Spain, who were close allies, joined the 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 map is the second state of the map, the first having been published by Rigobert Bonne (1729-94) in 1761, in anticipation of the siege (which never occurred) during the Seven Years' War (1756-63). The present 1779 edition of the map was separately-issued, however, some examples were included as 'extra' maps in certain copies of Jean Lattré's *Atlas Moderne ou collection des cartes sur toutes les parties du Globe Terrestre* (Paris, 1783).



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This map is an essential piece for any Gibraltar map collection or, given the historical significance of the Siege, any collection relating to British military history.

Detailed Condition:

Copper-engraved map with fine original wash color, top blank margin irregular, with very minor loss beyond neatline.