

# The Attack on Gibraltar Friday 2nd August 1704

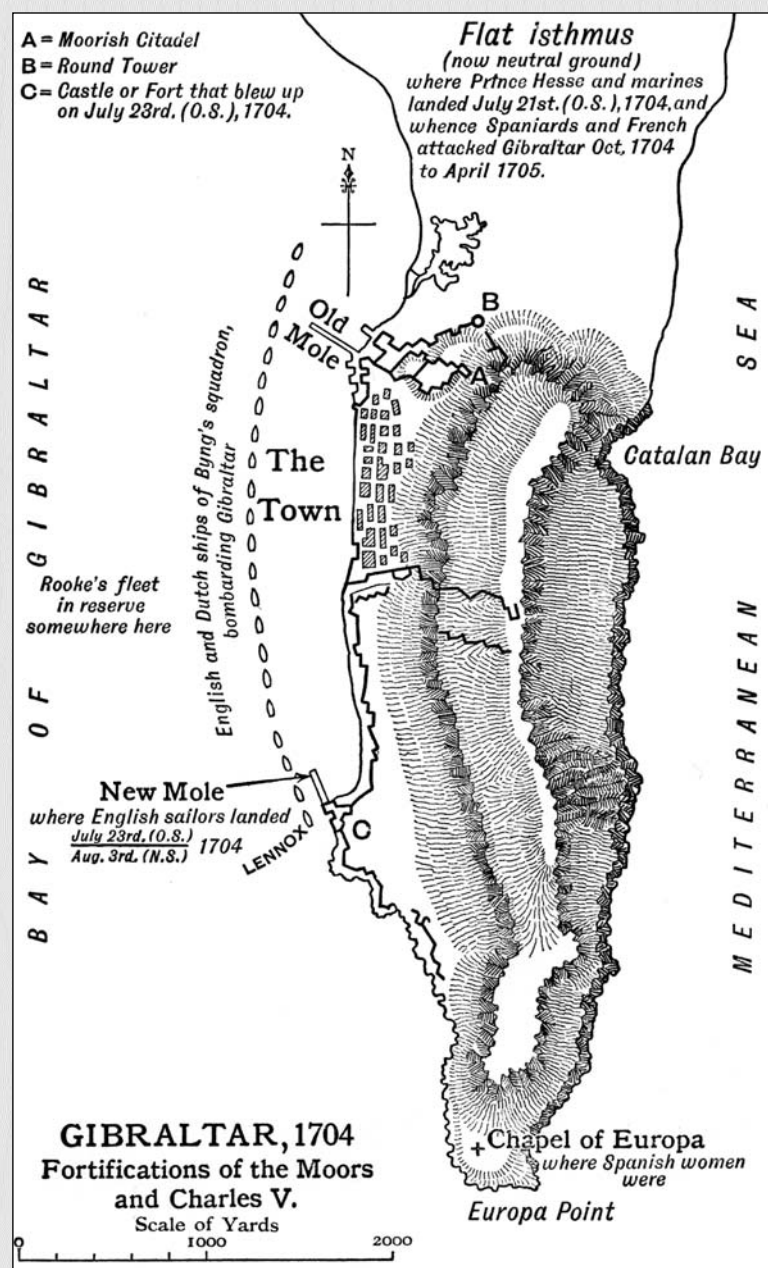
## The Political Background to 1704

by Tito Benady

The governor of Gibraltar at the time was Don Diego de Salinas. Although he was prepared to do his duty and resist the attack as long as possible, he knew that his chances were not good. The fortifications, which had been considerably improved during the previous 150 years, were in good shape and he had over 100 cannons mounted in batteries and along the walls, but the garrison was small and most of the guns could not be manned. He had repeatedly asked the Spanish government for the stores and men to withstand a long siege, but Cadiz, which had been attacked two years before, was seen as priority, and all the available resources were sent there. Salinas later reported, that at this crucial hour he only had 56 soldiers, 'of whom there were not thirty in service'. In addition to these regulars he hastily collected a few hundred civilian militia 'armed as god willed', and 'of such bad quality that before they arrived they began to run away'.

Many of the women and children, frightened by the threat of bombardment took refuge on the Rock, above the town, where the ships' cannon could not reach them. Others found physical safety and spiritual solace in the shrine of Our Lady of Europa.

The day passed in preliminaries. Don Diego sent a defiant reply to Prince George's demand to surrender. He said he would defend the town to the last as a loyal soldier of Philip V, to whom he had sworn his fealty. At the same time the town council managed to send a messenger to the captain general of Andalusia, the Marquess of Villadarias, giving him a complete account of the last two days. It is not clear how the messenger got through the



marines, but presumably could have done so by boat from Catalan Bay.

The wind had died but Byng's ships started slowly warping themselves into their allotted bombardment places, as close as the depth of water permitted; in spite of sporadic shots from the city's batteries. Byng's flagship, HMS Ranelagh went in so close, that at low water she was lying in 3 1/2 fathom of water (21 feet) although she drew over 19 feet. The process of warping was slow and tedious. The ship's boat

would drop a kedge anchor towards the position the ship wanted to reach. The ship then pulled at the anchor to drag herself towards it and dropped her main anchor. The kedge anchor was then lifted by the crew of the boat and dropped nearer the desired position. The process was repeated until the desired position was reached. In this manner, Captain Jumper brought HMS Lennox to within a musket shot of the New Mole. That night, Captain Edward Whittaker of HMS Dorsetshire,

led some boats full of armed sailors and combustible material, to board and burn a French privateer lying off the Old Mole which had been firing at the camp of the marines.

### 23 JULY OR 3 AUGUST ?

The main attack was to begin the following morning, some accounts say it was 23 July and some the 3 August. Which one was correct? Funnily enough both were correct. England was still using the ancient Julian calendar while Catholic Europe was employing the Gregorian calendar of 1582.

The Julian calendar had been created by Julius Caesar in 46 BC and over the centuries had shown some discrepancies. Pope Gregory XIII was disturbed by the way that Easter was advancing in the season and he employed the Neapolitan astronomer Luigi Ghiraldi to investigate. Ghiraldi established that the Julian calendar made the year eleven minutes too long and the calendar was ten days ahead of the real date. This was corrected and in order to avoid the same problem recurring in the future it was decided that centenary years would not count as leap years unless they were divisible by 400. By 1704, the Julian calendar was eleven days behind the Gregorian.

Although the Julian calendar was used in Britain for domestic purposes, the Gregorian was sometimes used for foreign matters, and the difference was marked by putting the letters NS (New Style) after the date, and OS (Old Style) when the Julian calendar was employed.

Today, most reputable historians use the Gregorian calendar when dealing with events that occurred outside Britain in order to avoid confusion.

• Tomorrow: The Attack on Gibraltar 3rd and 4th August 1704