

MATTHIAS STROHN



# THE ROYAL GIBRALTAR REGIMENT

NULLI EXPUGNABILIS HOSTI





THE ROYAL GIBRALTAR REGIMENT



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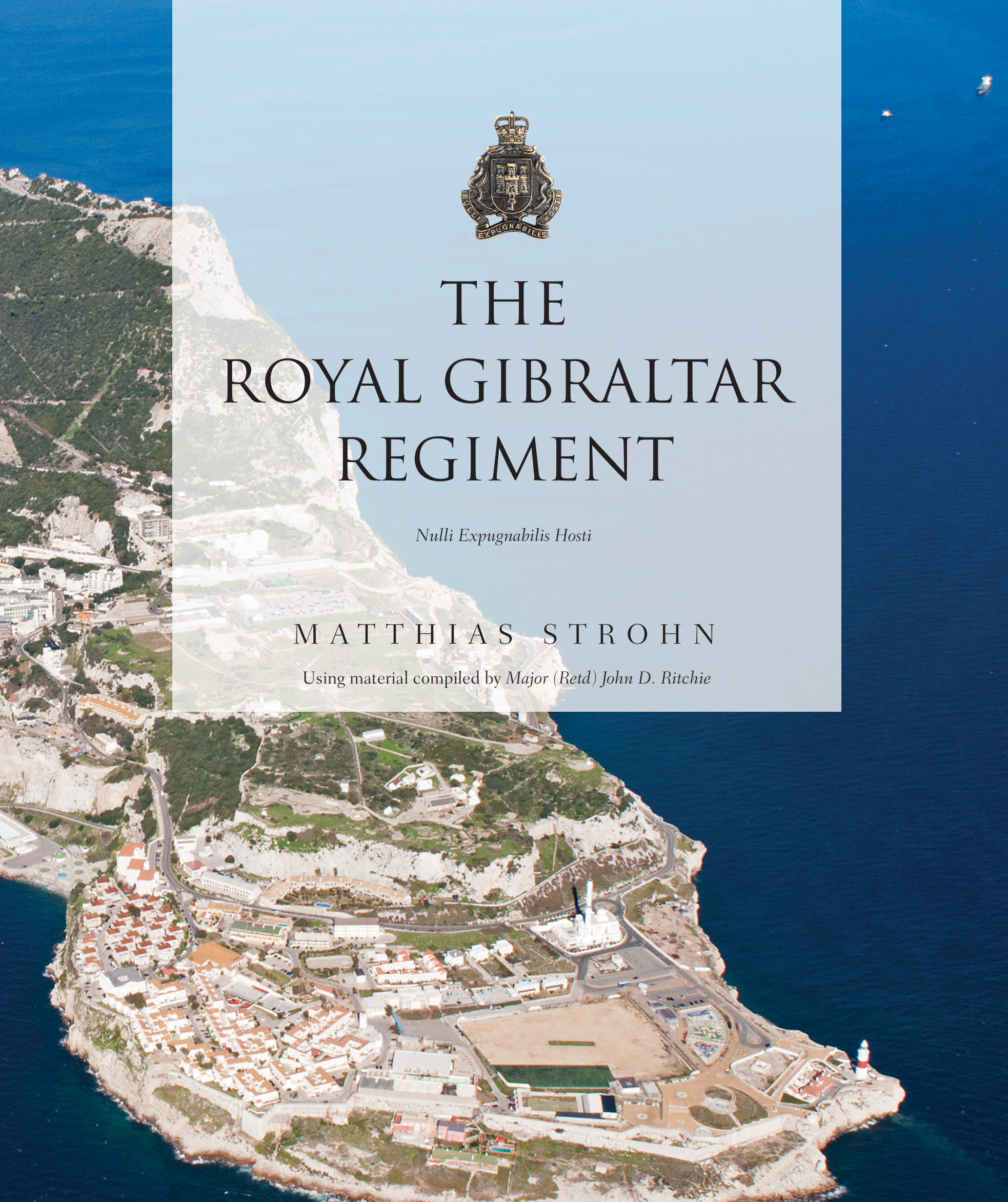


# THE ROYAL GIBRALTAR REGIMENT

*Nulli Expugnabilis Hosti*

MATTHIAS STROHN

Using material compiled by *Major (Retd) John D. Ritchie*





# A TRIBUTE TO MAJOR (RETD) JOHN D. RITCHIE

John Ritchie's first contact with the Gibraltar Regiment was in January 1965 when he was called up with 60 other men to make up the 29th Military Service intake. He described the beginning of his military career with the following words:

I was probably not the most enthusiastic conscript at that time but, something must have 'clicked' in my mind because, after we all marched out at the end of our four months' training, I marched back to join the Permanent Cadre. The Gibraltar Regiment became my career and 'home' for the next 32 years.

Over these years, John Ritchie had a distinguished career. He rapidly rose through the ranks of the non-commissioned and warrant officer corps. A particular honour was the appointment to Port Sergeant at the Ceremony of the Keys in 1972. John was the first Gibraltarian and senior non-commissioned officer in the Regiment to perform this responsibility. Finally, in 1981, he became the Regimental Sergeant Major, a post he held until 1982.

For a man of John's calibre this was not the end. One of his colleagues described John as 'Sgt John Ritchie, who to me was the perfect soldier, I am not surprised he was later commissioned.' And so it happened. As an officer, he held several posts in the Regiment, amongst them that of company commander. He ended his career in 1997 with the rank of major and the position of Second-in-Command of the Regiment.

After his retirement he stayed in touch with the Regiment and tirelessly worked on a project that was very dear to him: a book of 'his' Regiment's history. Over several years and with a dedication seldom seen he compiled a wealth of information, facts and figures. All this found its way into a draft of the history of the Royal Gibraltar Regiment and its preceding formations. Sadly John died on 26 March 2012, before he had finished the book, and this task eventually went to me.

I would like to thank John for his work and also his wife Monica who willingly shared John's work and material with me. Without John's manuscript the finished book that you hold in your hands would have been of a much poorer quality. Isaac Newton once said that he was standing on the shoulders of giants and that only the work carried out by great men in the past enabled him to make his ground-breaking discoveries. In this project, I was standing on John Ritchie's shoulders.

So, to a large degree this really is John Ritchie's book. I hope he approves of it.

Matthias Strohn



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Author's note

In order to open the book to a wide audience and not to deter the non-military reader the use of military jargon has been kept to a minimum throughout the book, and ranks have not been abbreviated. The ranks and positions of people are given as at the time of the events described.

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# PREFACE



The Chief Minister visiting the Regiment on exercise in 2015.

## BY THE CHIEF MINISTER OF GIBRALTAR

The history of the Royal Gibraltar Regiment and its predecessor formations is also the history of Gibraltar. The close links that have always existed between the Regiment and the people of Gibraltar make this Regiment a very special unit. In the past, the Regiment's character as a volunteer and conscript unit ensured that these links were established and maintained between the

people of Gibraltar and the soldiers of the Regiment. The fact that today a large proportion of its professional soldiers and officers is still recruited from within Gibraltar is a strong indicator that this bond has remained unbroken over the years and has survived the many changes the Regiment has gone through.

This special relationship is reflected in the book. It is only right that the book goes back to the beginning of British rule in Gibraltar in the 18th century. There was no Royal Gibraltar Regiment at the time, but the enduring characteristics of the population of Gibraltar were already visible then: a love for the Rock and their allegiance to Britain.

These realities are obvious in all the chapters of the book. The formation of the Gibraltar Volunteer Corps in the First World War was based on the same enthusiasm as the establishment of the Gibraltar Defence Force in 1939, of which I am proud to say my late father was a part alongside so many other brave Gibraltarian men. Changes in name and form in the following years did not alter the underlying principle and unifying bond that also characterise the modern-day Royal Gibraltar Regiment and its identification with the Rock. In today's world, the Royal Gibraltar Regiment is an excellent and fitting ambassador for Gibraltar wherever the unit or individual men and women of this unit go. They are the bravest representation of our commitment to Gibraltar.

I am very happy that we now have a book that tells the story of the Royal Gibraltar Regiment and its heritage and that Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar was able to fund the project.

I wish the Royal Gibraltar Regiment all the best for the future.

*Fabian Picardo  
Chief Minister of Gibraltar*

# FOREWORD



**BY LIEUTENANT-GENERAL SIR JAMES BENJAMIN DUTTON (FORMER GOVERNOR OF GIBRALTAR AND COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE ROYAL GIBRALTAR REGIMENT 2013-15)**

The Royal Gibraltar Regiment celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2014. I am very pleased that this book has been written to record the history of this astonishing military unit.

The Regiment has come a long way in 75 years and the journey is explained in this book. Officially, the Regiment traces its formation back to 1939 when the Gibraltar Defence Force was founded. But it would be short-sighted to omit the earlier days of the Gibraltarian contribution to the defence of the Rock and it is only fitting that this book takes us back to the days of the Great Siege at the end of the 18th century. It also records the Gibraltar Volunteer Force formed during the First World War in 1915: the Regiment has come far since the parades in civilian clothes that we can see in those pictures. Over the years, the character of the Regiment has changed markedly. The key events: the introduction and subsequent end of National Service; the changes to the order of battle; and the Regiment's developing roles from air defence to infantry, are described in the book. The underlying story is one of duty and devotion and the will to succeed. It is obvious that the Regiment has achieved this and will continue to do so. Many members of the Regiment have served with distinction in Afghanistan and Iraq, and at present, the Regiment is at the forefront of defence diplomacy. I doubt if any of the men shown parading in civilian clothes in 1915 would have dreamt of such things.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish the Regiment all the very best for the future and to congratulate and thank all members past and present for their performance and their devotion to Gibraltar and the Crown.

I know that HM the Queen and all Gibraltarians can rely on the Regiment in the future.

*Lieutenant-General Sir James Benjamin Dutton*





# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A book such as this cannot be written without the support of many people. First and foremost, I would like to thank the Royal Gibraltar Regiment for their support throughout the process. I always felt a warm welcome when I went to the Rock and without the help of the entire Regiment this book would not have been produced. And let us not forget, this is the story of the Royal Gibraltar Regiment and the men that made the Regiment what it is today – I am merely recording what they have achieved.

I would like to thank the Governor and Commander-in-Chief of the Regiment, Lieutenant-General Sir James Dutton, for his contribution to the book and his general support for the project.

From the start, the government of Gibraltar showed a keen interest in the project and supported the book throughout the production process. It is no exaggeration to say that without the support from the government this book would not have been produced. I would also like to thank the Chief Minister, the Honourable Fabian Picardo, for his personal interest and his contribution to the book.

The Regimental Council was a delight to work with and I was able to talk to and interview nearly all of its members. They all showed a keen interest in and support for the book, but they did not interfere in the writing process. That is not always the case in projects like this, so the fact that this book was enjoyable to write is due to no small part to the Council.

There are some members of the Regiment who really deserve to be thanked personally. The Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Ivor Lopez, was the driving force behind the project from the start. He established the contact between myself and the Regiment, and he provided more support throughout the project than I could have hoped for. Major Ian Martinez, the Regiment's Quarter Master Technical, holds the regimental archives and he provided a large number of useful images, many of which have found their way into this book. I was particularly impressed by the fact that he organized a photo shoot for the cover image. More images came from Major (Retd) John Navas who had spent many hours with Major (Retd) John Ritchie collating hundreds of photographs. Major Gerald Fitzgerald organized my trips to Gibraltar and ensured that everything went smoothly at all times. Captain John Pitto, the Adjutant, answered many questions and shared his detailed knowledge of the Regiment, without which the book would be of a poorer quality. He must have dreaded checking his email inbox at times, considering the number of emails I sent him.

Monica Ritchie shared with me all the material that her late husband had compiled over many years of hard work. This made my task so much easier. Monica also supplied me with very nice tea and biscuits while we were going through the files and photographs.

Many former members of the Regiment supplied images and stories that characterize the Regiment, some in written form, some in interviews. Many of these stories have found their way into this book. It would be impossible to list all of the people here, but without all your help this would be a very boring and plain book indeed.

The command photographer British Forces Gibraltar, Corporal Scott Robertson, supplied me with many images. He took over 100 photos for the cover alone, so I had quite a selection to choose from.

Brian Reyes was very helpful in providing me with relevant articles from the *Gibraltar Chronicle*.

The Osprey team saw the book through the publishing process and had to deal with the ever-changing drafts of the book. In particular, I would like to thank Ruth Sheppard for the editing and proofreading of the book, Tom Owen-Evans for proofreading and editorial support, and the design team who produced such a great final product.

Several people have read parts of the book or the whole opus and have provided feedback, in particular on the detail of Gibraltar and its inhabitants which probably only a Gibraltarian can fully understand. I – and the book – owe them a great deal; their help has made the book better and more accurate. Needless to say that any remaining errors and omissions are, of course, my fault.

This book was predominantly produced in night shifts, on weekends and during the Sandhurst recess. There were too many evenings on which I deserted my family and spent my time writing rather than with them. And when I was with them my mind was more often than not in Gibraltar. This was not an easy time for the family, and I am deeply grateful for my wife Rocio's support, understanding and willingness to create as much free space for me as possible. The fact that I was writing about Gibraltar did not make things easier for Rocio, who was born and bred in Madrid. Without her support and understanding I would not have been able to write this book.

*Matthias Strohn*  
*Camberley, 2015*



# THE ROYAL GIBRALTAR REGIMENT: HERITAGE AND CHANGE

This is the history of the Royal Gibraltar Regiment and its preceding formations. As such it does not provide a military history of Gibraltar, and those important events in Gibraltar's military history which form part of the narrative – such as the Great Siege – are covered only in relation to the units on whose shoulders the Royal Gibraltar Regiment stands today.

The Regiment with its current name and in its current form is a fairly young organization. On 28 April 1999 the Queen granted the 'Royal' prefix to the Gibraltar Regiment – an honour granted to regiments and corps that have served with distinction. Between 1958 and 1999 the Regiment was simply known as the Gibraltar Regiment.

The continuous history of the Regiment starts with the formation of the Gibraltar Defence Force (GDF), which existed between 1939 and 1958, first as a formation of volunteers, then from 1944 onwards based on conscription and national service. It is in 1939 that the tradition of the Royal Gibraltar Regiment really starts and it is therefore fitting that the Regiment celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2014.

While the emphasis of the book lies on the years 1939 to 2014, it would be wrong not to look further back into the military history of Gibraltar. On paper, there is no unbroken line of tradition between these years and the current Regiment, but, in reality, there is. From the 18th century onwards the inhabitants of Gibraltar have served 'their' Gibraltar and the British Crown. The population's loyalty to the Royal Gibraltar Regiment and the Regiment's devotion to the defence of the Rock are good indicators of this unbroken line of trust and service.

Therefore, the book starts with a chapter which covers the years between 1704, the year when an Anglo-Dutch force seized the city from Spain, and the outbreak of the First World War. The second chapter deals with the Gibraltar Volunteer Corps, which was founded in 1915 and existed until 1920. The rest of the book then examines the 75 years of 'true' regimental history.

Over the centuries, many British Army units have been stationed in Gibraltar in order to defend the Rock against potential enemies and real threats. For long periods of its existence the Regiment stood in the shadow of these active units sent to the military base which Gibraltar used to be. On 1 April 1991, the Regiment was reorganized into an all-infantry unit and took over the duties of the resident battalion. With this step the Regiment was no longer simply Gibraltar's contribution to the British Army, but became the British Army in Gibraltar.

#### THE ROYAL GIBRALTAR REGIMENT'S ANTECEDENTS

3 July 1915–1 February 1920	Gibraltar Volunteer Corps
28 April 1939–29 August 1958	Gibraltar Defence Force
30 August 1958–27 April 1999	Gibraltar Regiment
28 April 1999–present	Royal Gibraltar Regiment

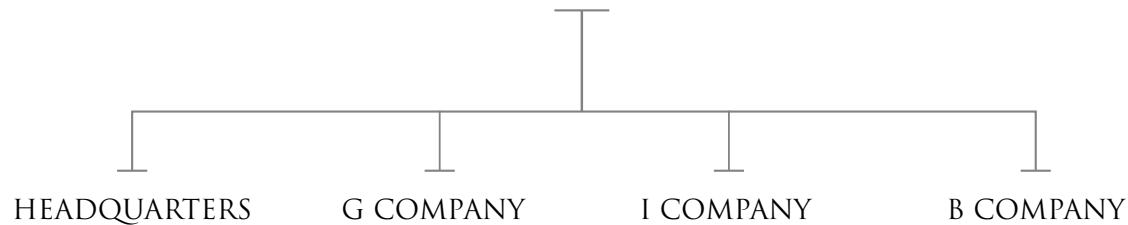
During its history, the Regiment and its predecessors have had many roles and tasks – from infantry via anti-aircraft and gunnery to light infantry. The gunners' tradition is still visible on the Regiment's uniforms today. The white lanyard worn on the Regiment's ceremonial uniforms is an inheritance from the Royal Artillery, where it originally served a functional purpose in initiating the firing of guns. All ranks up to colour sergeant wear a white lanyard on No 2 Service dress and No 6 dress. Commissioned officers and warrant officers wear a lanyard of woven cord in the Regiment's colours of red and grey, worn on No 2 and 4 Service dress and No 6 parade dress. The Regiment's collar dogs, which represent flaming grenades containing the Castle and Key and which are worn on the lapels or collar of all ceremonial uniforms, are another inheritance from the Royal Artillery. The 'Bombs' as they are known by soldiers, are metallic on most uniforms, with embroidered badges being worn on scarlets and officers' mess dress.

The changes to the order of battle and the consequences for the Regiment and its men will be explored in this book. At the time of writing, the order of battle is that of a light role infantry battalion organization.

The Second-in-Command of the Regiment, Major Fitzgerald, with the Commander British Forces Gibraltar, Commodore Ian McGhie in 2014. Clearly visible on Major Fitzgerald's uniform are the officers' lanyards and the collar dogs. Also note the regimental badge, a yellow (golden) key on red background. The key, taken from the Gibraltar coat of arms, symbolizes Gibraltar's role as the 'key to the Mediterranean'.



## THE ROYAL GIBRALTAR REGIMENT ORDER OF BATTLE



The Regiment comprises four companies: Headquarters Company, G Company, I Company, and B Company. Headquarters Company is the logistical backbone of the Regiment and is made up of tradesmen such as chefs, mechanics, clerks and signallers. G Company is an operational rifle company which is deployable at a moment's notice to any task. It is at a high state of readiness for operations in Gibraltar and regularly deploys troops overseas. The company's recent operations have ranged from supporting the police in counter-terrorist exercises to maritime interdiction operations in fast boats. Although still a rifle company, I Company differs slightly in its role as all the specialists are grouped in this rifle company. Named the Force Support Company it supports all other sub-units with roles such as heavy weapons, snipers and explosive ordnance disposal. B Company is a reserve rifle company which is made up of volunteers from every walk of life. These soldiers commit some of their spare time to training. When called upon B Company assists and augments the regular companies on local operations.

## THE REGIMENT'S COLOURS

On the battlefields of old, regiments would form lines and advance against the enemy, literally shoulder to shoulder. Perhaps the greatest motivation of these scared men as they marched into battle was the companionship of their fellow soldiers about them. It was this bond that made the Regiment, as it still does today.

Regiments needed a powerful visual symbol which illiterate and panicking soldiers could readily identify on the battlefield. It was to this that the troops would rally and it was behind this symbol that the lines would advance. Standards and banners had been used for centuries, even the ancient Romans marched behind the symbol of an eagle, but regiments in Tudor times did not serve the emperor or queen, but their colonel.

Governor Admiral Sir Varyl Cargill Begg presents the first Colours to the Regiment on 25 September 1971, ending the gunners' tradition in which guns are treated as Colours.





The Queen's Colour.

The Colonel of the Regiment was the founder and financial backer of his private regiment and was seen as a figurehead, so it was his heraldic symbolism that was chosen to lead the regiment into battle – the Colours were born.

A regiment's Colours came to epitomize its ethos and, although they are nothing but sheets of embroidered silk, they have come to be treated with reverence. On parade the Colours will always be carried by a junior officer (an ensign) escorted by armed senior non-commissioned officers. The officer senior in rank is called the 'senior ensign' and carries the Queen's Colour. The junior officer carries the Regimental Colour. Even when cased in their protective leather covers the Colours are marched under armed escort.

The Colours of the Royal Gibraltar Regiment consist of two banners or flags, one known as the Queen's Colour and the other as the Regimental Colour. They measure 3 feet high by 3 feet 6 inches wide.

The Queen's Colour is the senior in precedence. It is carried on parade only when a guard will be presided over by a member of the royal family, His Excellency the Governor and Commander-in-Chief or a visiting foreign head of state. It is only trooped for members of the royal family, HE the Governor and Commander-in-Chief and on the occasion of presentation of the Colours. The Regiment can carry the Regimental Colour on all ceremonial parades if the Commanding Officer so desires.



The Regimental Colour.

## THE QUEEN'S COLOUR

The Queen's Colour is the Union Flag. In the centre are two concentric gold circles, between which runs the inscription 'The Royal Gibraltar Regiment' in gold. Above this is the Imperial Crown. It has two tassels and a suitable staff with a crown on top of the shaft.

## THE REGIMENTAL COLOUR

The Regimental Colour bears the Red Cross of St George on a field of limestone grey (Gibraltar being a large limestone rock formation). In the centre are two concentric gold circles, between which runs the inscription 'The Royal Gibraltar Regiment'. The outer circle is surrounded by a wreath of Candytuft (*Iberis Gibraltarica*) – a native flower of Gibraltar which is found in great profusion on the Upper Rock in late winter and spring. Within the inner circle is the crest of the Regiment – the Castle and Key in red and white (Gibraltar's colours). The Imperial Crown is above the circles, and beneath is a scroll with the regimental motto *Nulli Expugnabilis Hosti* ('We shall never be expelled by the enemy'). On the upper canton next to the staff a grenade in gold denotes the link with the Royal Artillery. The Colour has two tassels and a suitable staff with a crown on top of the shaft.

RIGHT The celebrations of the 70th anniversary of the Regiment in 2009 included a field service. During a field service, the drums and Colours are used as the altar. Here, the new Regimental Colours can be seen clearly.

BELOW The blessing of the new Colours at their presentation during a parade at Devil's Tower Camp on 1 July 1998.

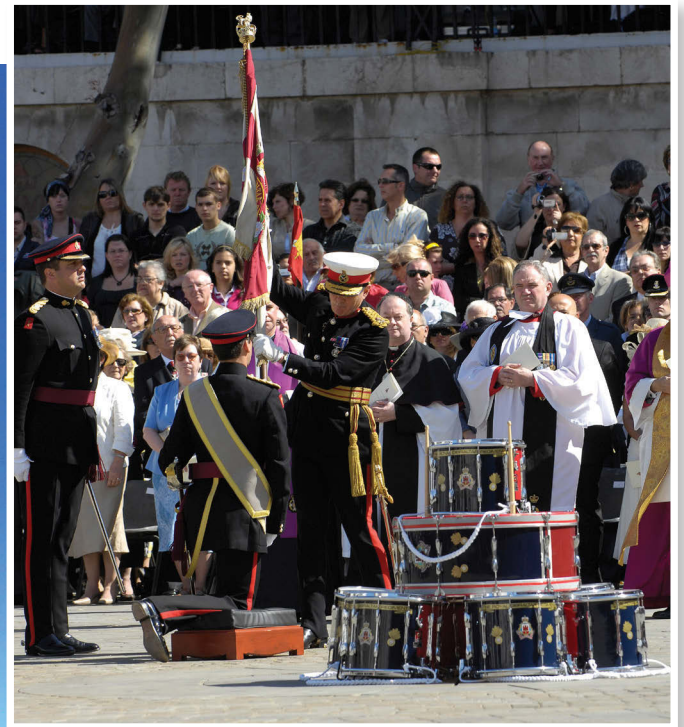


ABOVE RIGHT Old Colours are laid up in King's Chapel, 1998.

RIGHT Colours parade, 1998.

Before the Gibraltar Regiment's presentation of its first Colours in 1971 it followed a different tradition. Being primarily an artillery regiment it followed the Royal Artillery's custom of treating the guns as the Regiment's Colours and the guns were accorded the same respect as is now paid to the Colours themselves. Woe betide the gunner who was caught by his battery sergeant major sitting idly on one of the guns.

On 1 July 1998 HRH the Duke of Kent presented the new Colours, on behalf of Queen Elizabeth II, to the Gibraltar Regiment. The presentation of new Colours took place during a parade at Devil's Tower Camp. The old Colours were laid up in the King's Chapel. Normally, Colours are not replaced until 25 years from presentation. However, due to the royal prefix being granted to the Regiment, the Colours were rededicated on the Regiment's 70th anniversary in 2009 with the royal title included.



LEFT The new Colours are marched off after the ceremony on Grand Casemates Square, 2009.

ABOVE The Governor, Lieutenant-General Sir Robert Fulton, presents the new Colours. On the left Major Ivor Lopez, who carried the Queen's Colour as a young ensign in 1998.

CHAPTER ONE

**IN THE BEGINNING:  
1704-1914**

