

## The Rubble of Gibraltar

A small peninsula with an area of 2.6 square miles and a pre-war population of 30,000, Gibraltar has always been of strategic importance due to its proximity to the exit from the Mediterranean. The name comes from the Arabic Jamal Tariq (the Rock of Tariq). The British have maintained a garrison in Gibraltar since it was captured by the the Dutch and Royal Marines in 1704 as part of the War of Spanish Succession. As part of the treaty of Utrecht in 1713 it was given to Britain and ever since Spain has tried to get it back. It was of major strategic importance in the Crimean War against Russia and this role only increased when the Suez Canal opened. In 1967 Spanish moves to regain it were dashed when a referendum was in favour of retaining the links with the United Kingdom instead of a power sharing agreement. A further referendum had been proposed for 1999 but events would make this impossible (and no longer necessary).



*Illustration 1: A view south showing the civilian airport and the Rock itself.*

With France opting out of NATO and Italy openly hostile it was the only NATO base in the Western Mediterranean after Spain closed the American base at Rota. There is also the airport which is unusual in that it crossed the main street which had to have barricades across it when aircraft were landing or taking off! Of more use militarily was the RAF Gibraltar military air base. There are also an army base (Devils Tower Camp which was the headquarters of the Royal Gibraltar Regiment), a naval base (HMS Rooke) and a semi-secret listening post.



*Illustration 2: Royal Gibraltar Regiment troops search inside the Rock's tunnel complex for simulated intruders (MoD)*

closure of the three quarter of a mile border resulted in heavy civilian casualties (eventually in March the Spanish relented and allowed survivors to exit and these have been absorbed into the local population). 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn The Royal Green Jackets and the Royal Gibraltar Regiment effectively ceased to exist, the survivors mainly acting as extra marines on Royal Navy ships that escaped.

The port, base and town are now nearly deserted with the only inhabitants being desperate pirates and fishermen (often the same person) who have nowhere else to go. As an ecological aside the species of Rock Ape no longer exists there. French warships are a routine sight nearby.

### **Royal Gibraltar Regiment (effectively destroyed)**

Technically not part of the British Army as it consists of troops recruited by the local government, it however follows British doctrine and is trained by British advisers. The locally recruited troops (consisting of two companies or regulars and one of territorials) used to defend Gibraltar. Originally the Gibraltar Regiment it was given Royal status in August 1997 in recognition of the role it had taken on in

In December 1996 in an uncanny repeat of events of the Falklands War, Spanish police arrested two suspicious persons who were planning a frogman attack on shipping in the harbour. This time instead of Argentine naval personnel there were Soviet Naval Speznatz. This time instead of sending them home they were quietly handed to British intelligence officers on the border. Their subsequent fate is unknown.

Used heavily by the Americans Gibraltar became the port from which aid was sent to Turkey in 1997 and the base for the carriers that launched the retaliatory strikes on Greece when that convoy was attacked off Ismir. Heavily mined by NATO, this has been augmented by other nations and passage through the Straits is a risky proposition.

As such a strategic target it was an obvious target for a nuclear strike which hit on 27<sup>th</sup> November 1997. Being hit by a 1Mt air burst weapon, most of the base was destroyed. Most of the ships had enough warning to get at least partially away but the Spanish



*Illustration 3: Royal Gibraltar Regiment official TRF*

defending the base areas in Gibraltar (including acting as boarding parties intercepting suspicious ships). It took huge losses in the nuclear attack on the base in November 1997. The few remaining survivors were added to marine units of ships that had been based in the port. As a new distinction the unit has started to unofficially wear a 1 1/2" x 2" badge showing the rock on the right sleeve replacing the key TRF worn previously. This is usually black on green in subdued and white on black in normal pattern but a number of variations in colours and size exist.

#### **2/Royal Green Jackets (effectively destroyed)**



Deployed to Gibraltar in September 1997 after being withdrawn from Norway in August (being made up to strength with a composite company of Gurkhas although still short of heavy weapons) to reinforce the Gibraltar Garrison as this had become the only NATO naval base in the Western Mediterranean. Took huge losses in the nuclear attack on the base in November 1997. The few remaining survivors were added to marine units of ships that had been based in the port.

*Illustration 4:  
2RGJ soldier  
searching the Rock  
for survivors prior  
to evacuation  
(MoD)*