



Scots who made their mark in.....

The Armed Forces



Sir George Elliott, hero of Gibraltar

George Elliott, born into a noble family at Wells House in the Borders, was one of the most distinguished Scots in the British Army in the Eighteenth century, serving in the three major wars, The War of Austrian Succession (1742-8) The Seven Years' War (1754-63) and the Great Siege of Gibraltar which featured within the American War of Independence (1775-83).

Elliott was born in 1717 as the tenth son of Scottish politician Sir Gilbert Elliott, the 3rd Baronet of Stobs whose family dominated Borders politics, the family name being deliberately spelled as it is to differentiate from other lines.

After his education at the University of Leiden in The Netherlands Elliott went to France to study at the military school in La Fère a small commune in Picardy and before he was 20 had served for two years with the Prussian Army.

Perhaps through nepotism, in 1741 Elliott joined the Horse Grenadier Guards of which his uncle William Elliot (sic) was Lieutenant-Colonel and fought in the War of Austrian Succession- at Dettingen (in which Britain's German-born King George II led his army to victory in the field), and at Fontenoy, where Elliott served under the Duke of Cumberland with whom he then returned to fight at Culloden.

After three years service as an *aide-de-camp* to King George II (GB 2011) in the closing years of his life, Elliott became a colonel with the 1st Light Horse and during

the Seven Years War (which was effectively a world war) he fought in the German theatre distinguishing himself both at Minden and Emsdorf.

Promoted to Major-general in 1759 he took part in the capture of Belle Île (a French held island off Brittany) in 1761 and was 2i/c when Havana was captured the following year when Britain invaded Cuba, another theatre of the Seven Years War. This was particularly lucrative for Elliott in terms of his £25,000 prize money which allowed him to purchase the Heathfield estate in Sussex. Promotion to Lieutenant-General followed in 1765.

Governor of Gibraltar

Then in what was to prove to be the most momentous phase of his career he was appointed Governor of

Gibraltar 1967 showing Elliott and map of the peninsula is based on a painting of him by Sir Joshua Reynolds in 1787, part of which appears immediately above the stamp.



Gibraltar in late May 1777 and the following year made General. (Gibraltar 1967) Elliott found the Rock which had been taken from the Spanish at the start of the century to be run-down and neglected, with the defence garrison of fewer than 6000 troops having a very low morale on account of their conditions. Elliott, feeling he had been sold a pig in a poke demanded substantial investment from London and fearful of a Spanish attempt to retake the territory facilitated civilian repatriation to Britain.

In mid-Summer two years later Gibraltar, for ever a territorial ownership issue, found itself besieged by French and Spanish forces within the context of American Independence. Elliott now used his vast military experience to prepare Gibraltar to rebuff attacks. He demolished towers and spires that might fall if hit by shells and dug up cobbled streets to reduce the chance of ricochets.

The inspiring and imaginative Elliott then led the defence of Gibraltar for 43 months, during which re-supply of the garrison was fraught with obvious difficulties. Rations were reduced to the minimum and officers prevented from using valuable flour for their wigs. On a number of occasions he personally led sorties to demolish enemy guns and munition depots. When the attackers resorted to floating batteries as shown in Gibraltar 1967, based on J.S. Copley's painting of September

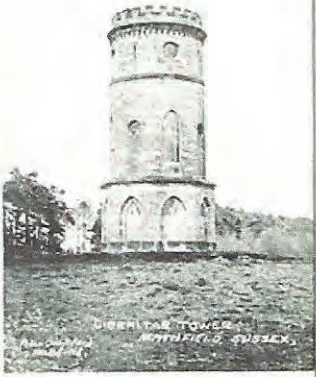
1782 Elliott repulsed them with red-hot cannon balls.



Eventually the defenders' dogged resistance persuaded the attackers, who at times vastly outnumbered the defenders and of whom many were international mercenaries that their task was hopeless and the siege petered out.

As a result of his leadership and successful strategies in keeping Gibraltar British, General Elliott was given a peerage

in 1787 becoming the First Baron Heathfield of Gibraltar. The final stamp in the 1967 set shows the Gibraltar memorial tower shown also on an old post card on his Sussex estate. Nearby lies the mansion (shown below) of Heathfield Park which was begun in the Seventeenth century and extended by General Elliott.



After his installation as Knight of the bath in May 1788, General Elliott set out to return to Gibraltar but became ill and stopped at Aachen (aka Aix-la-Chapelle) to rest and take the waters there. However, it appears that he overdid this treatment and died of a stroke ("palsy") his body initially being buried there before exhumation for return to England.

A marble monument and statue exist in the south transept of St Paul's Cathedral, London and a pub in the village of South Hinksey, Oxfordshire is named *The General Elliott* in his honour.

Memorials of course can be found on the Rock e.g. this column erected in 1858 and shown on Gibraltar 1938 and 1995.



A 1983 set entitled Fortress Gibraltar in the 18th Century shows the Landport Gate, the Koehler Gun* and the King's Bastion**



(*British soldier and engineer George Frederick Koehler is known for creating a gun that recoiled allowing it to fire down the side of a mountain without sending the gun carriage flying into the air).

(**King's Bastion is a coastal bastion on the western front of the fortifications of Gibraltar, protruding from the Line Wall Curtain. which overlooks the Bay. It played a crucial role in defending The Rock during the Great Siege. From it the attacks on the Floating Batteries were launched).



Within the 16 stamp History of Gibraltar souvenir sheet one stamp (enlarged here) shows Elliott directing operations during the Great Siege)



Umm al Qiwain 1968 reproduces a large part of Sir Joshua Reynolds' 1789 painting of General Elliott, which is shown below in full. Note bottom left the inclusion of the vitally important Koehler gun.

