



Gibraltar: Challenge, Change & Continuity

The Friends of Gibraltar Oral History Project (1930 to 1970)

Jerry Robinson interviewing Major General Richard Keightley on 17th September 2013

Track 1

RK – Born in Aldershot; military background; Education; Military career; career in the health service and subsequently farming.

First visit to Gibraltar with his wife in 1958, newly married on honeymoon spent one night at The Convent;

RK describes the Convent as a happy family house, not official, the family used all the main rooms; very good staff, the offices were in the basement.

RK: Family's military history, his parents met at Sandhurst, maternal grandfather was Brigadier and lived there with his daughters. Family career/history during WWII.

RK's father became Governor of Gibraltar in 1958.

JR: did you grow up steeped in military life?

RK: Father didn't talk shop with the family, natural for my brother and I to follow father into the military;

JR: was it assumed that you would go into military life

RK: I don't think it was assumed by my parents, but I wanted to, it was a service and an exciting life. Very different to nowadays.

JR: Tell me about your father's life in Gibraltar?

RK: It was an interesting time, when we first went there we didn't appreciate the political situation and background, we used to go regularly for our holiday every year as a family always very close;

RK: trips to Spain; the Governor's cottage on The Rock; The Governor's beach, launch. *It was very much colonial and empire, the way things were done in those days and it wasn't questioned by anybody. The Gibraltarians quite liked that aspect of it;*
Parents had both Gibraltarian and Spanish friends.

JR: Post-war relationship between Gibraltar and Spain?

RK: There was never any antagonism that we detected; visits to Algeciras at New Years Eve; Playing polo in The Campo; golf; bull fighting.

JR: Crossing the border?

RK: We just drove across, the troubles with the border started later about 1964.

Track 2

RK: Visiting Gibraltar for Christmas 1959; frequent visits to Spain, anecdote about a broken down Spanish tank in Algeciras with its gun pointing towards the Convent; Ceremony of The Keys; Swimming tank and tennis court in the Convent garden.

Visit to Gibraltar in 1961 with new born baby, RK's father had employed a Spanish nanny.

Visitors to the convent: Princess Mary the Princess Royal came for a month every summer for her holidays, Gibraltar was a discreet place; Official visit by the French Fleet; visit by the British Home Fleet; Gibraltar full of sailors;

JR: What was the social life like?

RK: Meeting official visitors at the airport, Royal visitors, senior politicians; entertaining in the Convent; family entertained Gibraltarians and Spanish, the British Ambassador in Madrid used to visit.

RK's father enjoyed riding, riding picnics in the countryside in Spain; photographs in album about this, riding at the bull farms and bringing in the bulls with the Spaniards.

JR: importance of building relationship with Spain

RK: father very good with people, a lot of experience; this was crucial for the relationship between the governor local population and Spaniards kept it on an even keel – we detected no antagonism between the various factions on either side of the border

JR: during WW2 – conflict of opinion in Spain?

RK: didn't know much about that but sure that is correct, whatever political leanings all seemed very friendly when we met them

JR: receptions with local people?

RK – we didn't attend many of them, RK remembers his father paying official visit to the governor of Algeciras when his launch was escorted by British war ships, (photograph in album, Patrick Keightley also talks about this)

JR: Did you have much contact with local people?

RK: No apart from when played polo or golf – we used to go to the theatre, used to meet more Spaniards than Gibraltarians; family often entertained in Spain; recalls visiting a family called The Osbornes who were sherry makers the other side of Malaga;

JR: Daily routine in the town of Gibraltar/Main Street?

RK: Ceremony of The Keys; Cathedral services; The Kings Chapel. RK's father was interested in photography and had a dark room in the yard behind The Kings Chapel.

JR: the process of change from colony to British Overseas Territory – did you see the change coming?

RK – we all did, the British Empire no longer viable, and he would have realised that; as the Governor he would oversee this; Legco, transition was a smooth natural progression. Importance of good staff

JR: Did you meet the Colonial Secretary

RK recalls meeting people socially; RK didn't attend official military functions as in Gibraltar on leave

JR: have you been back?

RK: Recently went to a wedding in Spain and then went to tea at the Convent; RK describes the convent and how it had changed from his father's time there. His father left Gibraltar in 1962.

JR: Feelings about Gibraltar now?

RK: remarks on current situation between Spain and Gibraltar. Gibraltar is a vibrant place.....when the military visited a lot of fun was had by servicemen in Gibraltar.

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