Ferdinand-Marie, Vicomte De Lesseps Encyclopedia Article

Ferdinand-Marie, Vicomte De Lesseps

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Ferdinand-Marie, Vicomte De Lesseps

1805-1894

French diplomat and engineer who supervised construction of the Suez Canal and started work on a sea level canal across Panama. Lesseps began his career as a diplomat, holding several posts between 1825 and 1854. He directed the construction of the Suez Canal between 1860 and 1869 and, in 1881, began work on the French Panama Canal, later abandoned. He was charged with fraud and sentenced to five years in prison (later suspended) for his part in the Panama Canal debacle.