

FORT ST. ELMO

The strategic position where Fort St. Elmo is built was already recognised since the Late Middle Ages. The Militia Roster of 1417 lists a permanent watch-post at Santu Eramu. However, the Ottoman razzia of 1488, a watch-tower was built in the same place.

After the arrival of the Hospitallers' in 1530, the Ottomans again carried out a razzia in 1551. Due to the devastation left by this attack, a star-shaped fort was constructed by the military engineer Pietro Pardo. During the Great Siege of Malta, the Ottomans started attacking the fort on 28th May 1565, and it took the Turks nearly a month to capture this Fort.

After the Hospitallers' victory during the Great Siege, reconstruction works on the Fort started immediately and it was enlarged, fitted with barracks, ovens and cisterns. During the latter decades and centuries, the fort was enlarged again, including the building of the Vendome Bastion in 1614. A polverista was constructed in this bastion in the 18th century (the site nowadays housing the National War Museum). The construction of the Carafa Bastions, designed by the military engineer Carl Grunenberg and supervised by Blondel, secured the foreshore around Fort St. Elmo and enclosed the fort within a new enceinte in 1687.

During the early British Period a continuous musketry parapet was built, fitted with loopholes, continuing onto the adjacent Vendome battery. In 1855 the polverista within Vendome Bastion was converted into a permanent armoury for the reception of small arms removed from the Palace Armoury. It was the outer ring of bastions and the cavalier which housed most of the heavy armament of Fort St. Elmo. Works were done on Abercrombie's Bastion in the early 1870s. During the inter-war period (1919-39) a number of gun emplacements were constructed to house the new twin 6-pdr QF guns.

It is important to say that during the first Italian attacks of 11 June 1940, six Maltese Royal Malta Artillery gunners lost their lives. However, the fort played an important part in the defeat of the Italian seaborne attack of 26 July 1941 on the Grand Harbour.