

Fort St. Elmo occupies a strategic position at the tip of the Sceberras peninsula, keeping watch over the mouths of the Grand Harbour and Marsamxett Harbour. During the Medieval period, this strategic position was already recognised and exploited. As a matter of fact, reference to a permanent watch-post at *Santo Eramo* can in fact be found in the Militia Roster of 1417; together with reference of a watchtower, built after the Ottoman razzia of June 1488.

The Knights of the Order of St. John, who arrived in Malta in 1530, concluded that the proper defence of Marsamxett and the Grand Harbour required the building of a fort at the tip of this peninsula. Following a harsh Ottoman razzia in 1551, and various reports indicating a looming Ottoman siege, Grand Master De Homedes issued an order for the immediate erection of a fort.

A star-shaped fort was constructed in circa 6 months, by military engineer Pietro Pardo, under the supervision of Knight Fra Leone Strozzi. By 1565 the fort acquired a cavalier, a covertway, a terraille, and a ravelin which was hastily built only a few months before the Great Siege of 1565.

The Ottomans first attack on Fort St. Elmo occurred on the 28th May 1565. The fort, which was heavily bombarded day and night, was defended by the knights and the Maltese within it till the last man standing. After standing strong for nearly a month, the fort fell in the hands of the Ottomans on the 23rd June.

The Order of St. John's victory over the Ottomans led to the foundation of a new fortified city built on Mount Sceberras. This city, included a reconstructed and enlarged fort designed by military engineer Francesco Laparelli, who also designed the grid-iron street plan for the new city, Valletta.

Additions and alterations were carried out to the fort over centuries. In 1614, the Vendome Bastion was built, and later a polverista was added to the same bastion. Further alterations and additions were also carried out during the British Period, adapting the fort to the various advances in military technology. This included a number of gun emplacements constructed with the purpose of housing the new twin 6-pounder QF guns.

Fort St. Elmo also played an important role during World War II. During the first Italian air raids, 6 RMA gunners lost their lives; they were the first victims of the war. It also played an essential part in the defeat of the Italian seaborne attack of 26th July 1941 on the Grand Harbour.