



## Fact sheet Island Fortress

St Helena's first line of defence is its extreme isolation and coastline of cliffs that provide few safe landing places. The British reinforced these natural obstacles with fortifications and garrisons to defend their claim to this strategically important island.

The first task for the earliest British settlers in 1660 was to fortify James Valley. During the East India Company era (1659-1833), landing places were defended with walls, batteries of cannon and forts. Lookout posts were built around the island where guards kept watch day and night.

Paid soldiers were reinforced by militia or trained civilians. St Helena's Regiment and Artillery defended the island and helped fight English battles elsewhere, such as the capture of the Cape in 1795 and Buenos Ayres in 1806.

Defence was the top priority during Napoleon's exile (1816-1821). Thousands of additional soldiers were garrisoned here and navy ships patrolled local waters. Both Ascension Island and Tristan da Cunha were possessed to prevent rescue attempts.

Later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century defences were strengthened by the construction of a fort at High Knoll and expansion of Ladder Hill Fort.

Saints now enlist in the British Armed Forces and have taken part in conflicts such as the World Wars and the Falklands War.