



WORDS AND THEIR STORIES

'Holding Down the Fort' Is a Big Job

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And now, *Words and Their Stories*, from VOA Learning English.

A fort is a place of protection. It is a **fortified** structure with strong walls and doors, complex locks, **barriers**, and other security features. It is used as a defense. It is a place often protected by soldiers and occupied by officials. Someone always is in charge or responsible for a fort.

And that is where our expression comes in.

If someone asked you to hold down the fort, you are responsible for a place while those who supervise it are away. In other words, you are in charge! You are the chief!

For example, once a friend and I were at my house preparing for a party. But then I got an emergency call from my brother who needed a ride. So, my friend held down the fort at home and welcomed party guests while I helped my brother.

Sometimes we just say hold the fort. This also means staying behind to take care of things. Again, whoever is holding the fort is in charge. They are responsible for what happens. And they may be responsible for the safety of others.

For example:

Marion is the most responsible of the group. So we left her at the house to hold the fort.

There is another way we use the word “fort” in an expression.

In the American state of Kentucky, there is a famous fort – Fort Knox. Fort Knox is a protected place in the United States. Why is it protected? Fort Knox is a place where lots of gold is kept.

Needless to say, it is heavily guarded. So, when we want to describe a place that is hard to get into, we can compare it to Fort Knox. A place that is like Fort Knox is **inaccessible** usually because it is locked or heavily guarded. We can also say a place is as safe or as secure as Fort Knox.

Now, let's hear these two expressions used by two friends.

A: Hi, Sam! What brings you to my place?

B: Well, Maxine is holding down the fort at home. So, I thought I'd stop by to see if you want to hang out.

A: Sure! How about a walk around the neighborhood? I feel like I've been sitting all day.

*B: Sound good. Let's walk past that **construction** project down the street.*

*A: They've been working on that house for months. I'm curious about the **renovations**.*

B: Maybe we can sneak into the place and look in the windows.

*A: That's a really bad idea. The property is locked up tighter than Fort Knox and probably has many security cameras. If you **sneak** in ... you're on your own.*

And that's all the time we have for this *Words and Their Stories*. Until next time ...

I'm Anna Matteo.

Anna Matteo wrote this lesson for VOA Learning English.

Words in This Story

fortified – *adj.* made stronger or more secure

barrier – *n.* something material that blocks or is intended to block passage

inaccessible – *adj.* not accessible

construction – *n.* something built or put together

renovate – *v.* to make like new again : put in good condition: **renovation** – *n.* the act of making new again

sneak – *v.* to go about in a sly or secret manner

We want to hear from you. Do you have a similar expression in your language? In the Comments section, you can also practice using any of the expressions from the story.

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