

Origin of the Maltese Cross

The Maltese Cross is a symbol of protection—a badge of honor. Its story is hundreds of years old. When a courageous band of crusaders, known as the Knights of St. John, fought the Saracens for possession of the Holy Land, they encountered a new weapon unknown to European warriors. It was a simple, but horrible device of war; it wrought excruciating pain and agonizing death upon the brave fighters of the Cross. The Saracen's weapon was fire!

As the Crusaders advanced on the walls of the city they were attacked by glass bombs containing naphtha. When they became saturated with the highly flammable liquid, the Saracens hurled a flaming tree into their midst. Hundreds of Knights were burned alive. Others risked their lives to save their brothers in arms from dying such painful deaths. Thus, these men became the first firefighters. Their heroic efforts were recognized by fellow Crusaders who awarded each hero with a badge of honor—a cross similar to the one firefighters wear today.

Since the Knights of St. John lived for nearly four centuries on a little island in the Mediterranean Sea, named Malta, the Cross became known as the Maltese Cross. The Maltese Cross is a symbol of protection. It means that the firefighter that wears this Cross is willing to lay down their life, just as the Crusaders sacrificed their lives for their fellow firefighters so many years ago. This Cross is badge of honor signifying that firefighters work in courage—a ladder-rung away from death.