

NOTES FROM THE FIRE BARN
The Maltese Cross
Compiled from various sources by Lt Rob Dixon

History of the Cross of Malta

To appreciate fully the original meaning of the Cross of Malta we must look back a thousand years, to the Crusaders serving in the Middle East. There we find the Knights of St. John the world's first great brotherhood of warriors pledged to chivalry. The Knights of St. John represented all walks of life. They were noblemen and priests, artisans and laborers. Regardless of those differences, however, they were united by a solemn pledge of unwavering courage and compassion. Together they fought against oppression. They carried their crusades far from home across deserts and seas, into the Holy Land, Cyprus, Rhodes and Malta. At the same time they administered to the sick, the needy and to the poor.

The Crusaders adopted the Cross of Malta as their insignia because its eight points represented the eight Beatitudes prescribed in the Sermon on the Mount. Those, in effect, declare (1) blessed are the poor in spirit, (2) the meek, (3) the pure, (4) the merciful, and (5) the peacemakers, (6) blessed are they that mourn, and (7) seek righteousness, and (8) blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness sake. The Cross of Malta had a religious origin but the Knights of St. John also made it their battle standard for the liberation of all men, women and children who suffered oppression. The ideals for which the original Crusaders fought parallel the principles of democracy today, freedom and justice.

The Maltese Cross

The badge of a firefighter is the Maltese Cross. This Maltese Cross is a symbol of protection and 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 a horrible device of war; it wrought excruciating pain and agonizing death upon the brave fighters for the cross. The Saracen's weapon was fire.

As the crusaders advanced on the walls of the city, they were struck by glass bombs containing naphtha. When they became saturated with the highly flammable liquid, the Saracens hurled a flaming torch into their midst. Hundreds of the knights were burned alive; others risked their lives to save their brothers-in-arms from dying painful, fiery deaths.

Thus, these men became our first firemen and the first of a long list of courageous firefighters. Their heroic efforts were recognized by fellow crusaders who awarded each here a badge of honor - a cross similar to the one firemen wear today. Since the Knights of St. John lived for close to four centuries on a little island in the Mediterranean Sea named Malta, the cross came to be known as the Maltese Cross.

As the crusaders sacrificed their lives for their fellow man so many years ago, the Maltese Cross is your symbol of protection. The Maltese Cross is a firefighter's badge of honor, signifying that he works in courage –