

The historical story of the first firefighters and paramedics:

"THE MALTESE CROSS"



The Maltese Cross is a symbol of protection a badge of honor; its story and tradition 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 honorable device of war. It wrought excruciating pain and agonizing death upon the brave fighters for The Cross. The Saracens' weapon was fire. As the Crusaders advanced on the walls of the Saracens' city they were struck by glass bombs containing naphtha. When they became saturated with the highly inflammable 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 painful fiery deaths.

Thus, these men became the first firefighters; and the first of a long list of courageous firefighters and first-aiders. Their heroic efforts were recognized by fellow Crusaders who awarded each hero a badge of honor, a cross similar to the one firefighters wear today. Since the Knights of 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.

The Maltese Cross is your symbol of protection. It means that the firefighter who wears this cross is willing to lay down his or her life for you, just as the Crusaders sacrificed their lives for their fellow man so many years ago.

The Maltese Cross is a firefighter's badge, signifying that he or she works in a profession of courage, pride, honor and danger, and is just a ladder-rung away from death.



Located south of Sicily in the Mediterranean Sea, the 95 square mile island of Malta has no rivers or lakes, no natural resources, and very few trees. Due to its placement at the crossroads of the Mediterranean, it has been of great strategic value since before recorded history. Its military importance was never greater than during the

millennium of conflicts between Islam and Christendom, especially during the Crusades (c.A.D.1095-1291) and the following defense of Europe.

St. John the Baptist was shipwrecked on Malta in A.D.60. In A.D.1090, during the earliest part of the crusades, a monastery in his honor was established there by the Normans. In 1530 by the Imperial decree of Charles V, The Military Order Of Knights Hospitalers Of Saint John Of Jerusalem moved their headquarters from Rhodes to Malta. They were thereafter commonly referred to as the Knights Of Malta.



Not long after establishing their Order, the Knights of St. John, as they were then known, set upon a crusade to free the Holy Land. There, in A.D.1095, they encountered the Saracens and a weapon new to Western Europeans, or at least a new version used in a new way. It was a simple but terribly effective device of war. It found its way through the strongest armor. It wrought excruciating pain and agonizing death. It is still in use today.

The Saracens weapon was fire or "Greek Fire" to be specific. It was a gelatinous flammable liquid composed mostly of naphtha, sulfur and quicklime. The Saracens had learned about it the hard way 300 years before at the hands of the Byzantines. Constantine IV had used it against the Saracens in A.D.673 and again in A.D.718. The Crusaders had known of it, though not how to make it. The Saracens were particularly

adept at delivering it. They used intricate and complicated engines of war, the exact design of which, like the formula for "Greek Fire" itself, has been lost.



On castle walls and the prows of ships, bronze tubes were employed that emitted jets of liquid fire, too much the same effect as today's flamethrowers. Glass bombs were filled with "Greek Fire", and used much the same as today's Molotov Cocktail. Special arrows and spears were used, these being many times more effective than using other flammable materials. The combination of these things hurled down from city walls brought the First Crusade to a standstill. The Saracens had a better formula for "Greek Fire", they had it in great quantity, and they had the means to deliver it.



Into this proverbial fire of war was born, arguably, the first known dedicated, well-organized, Western European fire suppression and fire rescue service. They were The Knights Of St. John, or rather Brigades within the Army of The Knights Of St. John. Their symbol was what we today call the Maltese Cross. Through the use of ingenuity, bravery and brute strength, they fought to suppress the "Greek Fire" hurled down upon them and rescue fallen comrades in arms, all the while fighting their enemy as any Knight.



As you may have gathered from above, our word "hospital" derives from the work of these warrior/monks. Hospices dating from around A.D.1000 had sheltered pilgrims on their way to the Holy Lands. Around A.D.1160 the Knights Of St. John converted one of their hospices into the first modern infirmary for the sick and injured. By adding a permanent staff of five physicians and three surgeons, they created the first hospital. Having previously established Fire Brigades, The Knights Of St. John had effectively invented the Fire and Emergency Medical Services.



The Knights of St. John would also become the masters of "Greek Fire", learning its secrets and integrating it with the heavy horse and armor of the European Knight. Defending their base on Malta in A.D.1565, The Knights Of St. John are said to have destroyed 30,000 soldiers of Süleyman the Magnificent's Ottoman Empire.

"For no greater love hath any man than this, that a man lay down his life for others."



Crusading Knights meet The Saracens, some of whom ask for Baptism, while others continue to fight. (Les Chroniques De France, British Library, MS. Royal 16G VI, F.442)

Born out of the chaos of the early middle ages, the armored, mounted warriors, The Knights of St. John revolutionized warfare. Founded in Jerusalem in a monastery dedicated to St. John The Baptist, they became the corner stone of the new political feudalism. The monks called themselves the Brothers of St John, or Hospitalers. For more than six centuries the medieval knights dominated the battlefields. At first, the church attempted to tame them, but later enlisted them to help with the first crusade of 1095. The knights received status that became the envy of kings, princes and princesses. They were master mariners, builders, and navigators. They were the first firefighters and the first paramedics at least the first organized group.



The capture of Damietta by St. Luis, 1248 with the ships of the Order in the harbor



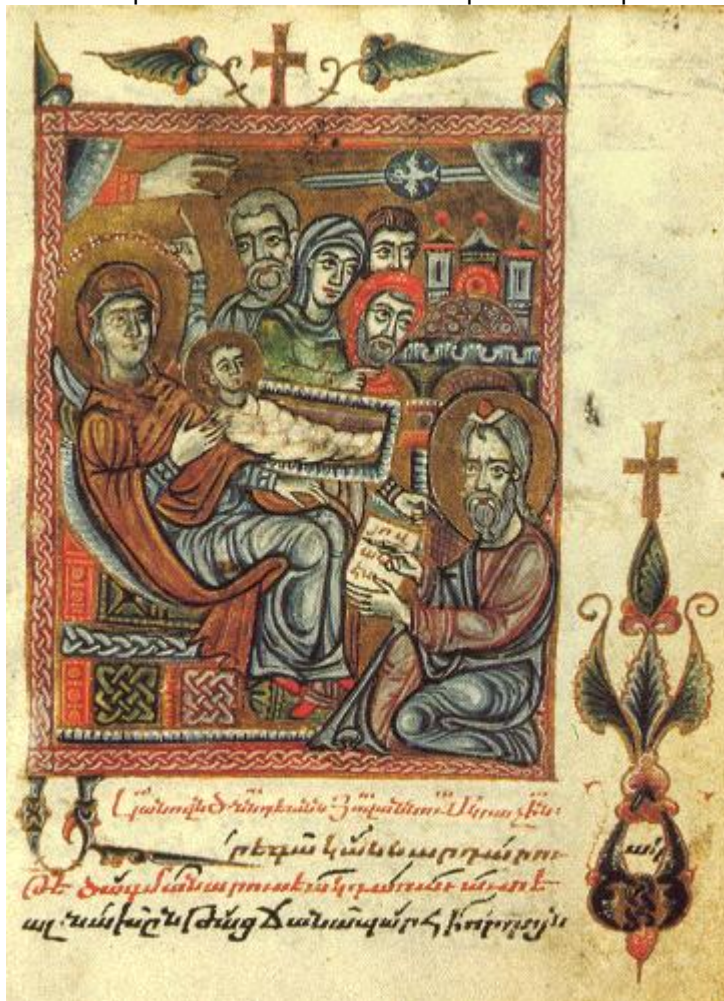
Twelfth Century armor: A Knight (Crusader) wears a surcoat over mail. A round helmet, a mail covering for his neck, (ventral) and mail stockings. (British Library, MS. 2A XXII, F. 220)

The Knights of St. John of Jerusalem gave Malta the heritage of the insignia of the fire service. It is the Cross Pattee-Nowy, or the "Cross of Calvary," otherwise known as the "Maltese Cross." This cross represents the fire service ideals of saving lives and extinguishing fires. It also represents the unselfish "public service" dedication to man and environment. And the inherent qualities that fire departments and public safety personnel around the world hold such as; charity, loyalty, chivalry, honesty, integrity, honor, pride, gallantry, generosity, commitment, dedication, selflessness, discipline, protection, devotion, ethics, dignity, and dexterity. The fire service borrows the cross from the "Knights of Saint John the Baptist of Jerusalem," a charitable, non-military organization that began their existence during the 11th and 12th centuries.



KNIGHTS OF ST. JOHN OF JERUSALEM

The Hospitallers had St. John the Baptist for their patron.



The Birth of Saint John The Baptist with his father, Zechariah, writing his name on a tablet from the Patzak Hymnal of 1335 (ms. 1578, fol. 179) The Knights of St. John, The Baptist, of Jerusalem, now commonly known as the Knights of Malta, can trace their origin to a group of monks attached to a hospice built in the Holy Lands in Jerusalem to aid travelers visiting the Holy Land. The monks were known as the Freres Hospitaliers de St. Jean de Jerusalem or The Knights Hospitalers Saint John. Their mission: "to care for our lords sick and our lords poor."



Saint John The Baptist

The need for an identifiable emblem for the Knights had become crucial. Because of the extensive armor, which covered their bodies and faces, the Knights were unable to distinguish friend from foe in battle. They chose the "Cross of Calvary" as their symbol or insignia since they fought their battles for a holy cause. Members of "The Order" were required to abide by eight obligations or aspirations.

These eight obligations were:



- **Live in truth;**
- **Have faith;**
- **Repent of sins;**
- **Give proof of humility;**
- **Love justice;**
- **Be merciful;**
- **Be sincere and whole-hearted;**
- **Endure persecution.**

The Most Venerable Order of The Knights of St John of Jerusalem is commonly referred to as the Cross of Malta. It is in fact The Amalfi Cross (Star of Malta).

The four arms represent.

- **Faith**
- **Justice**
- **Temperance**
- **Fortitude**

The Eight Beatitudes.

Mathew Chap 5:3-8

- Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.
- Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.
- Blessed are they, which do hunger, and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.
- Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.
- Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.
- Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.
- Blessed are they, which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

The eight-pointed cross or star is a symbol used by the knights to denote the eight obligations or aspirations of the knights. A white or silver cross on a dark background was

adopted by these "Knights of Hospitallers," as they were also known, because of their charity toward the sick and poor in setting up hospices and hospitals.



Noble aspiration indeed especially for individuals who came from very rich and powerful European families. Members of The Order wore a black habit and a camelhair cloak of the same color. The white eight-pointed cross covered their breast. The eight-pointed cross was also on their standard (flag) against a scarlet background.

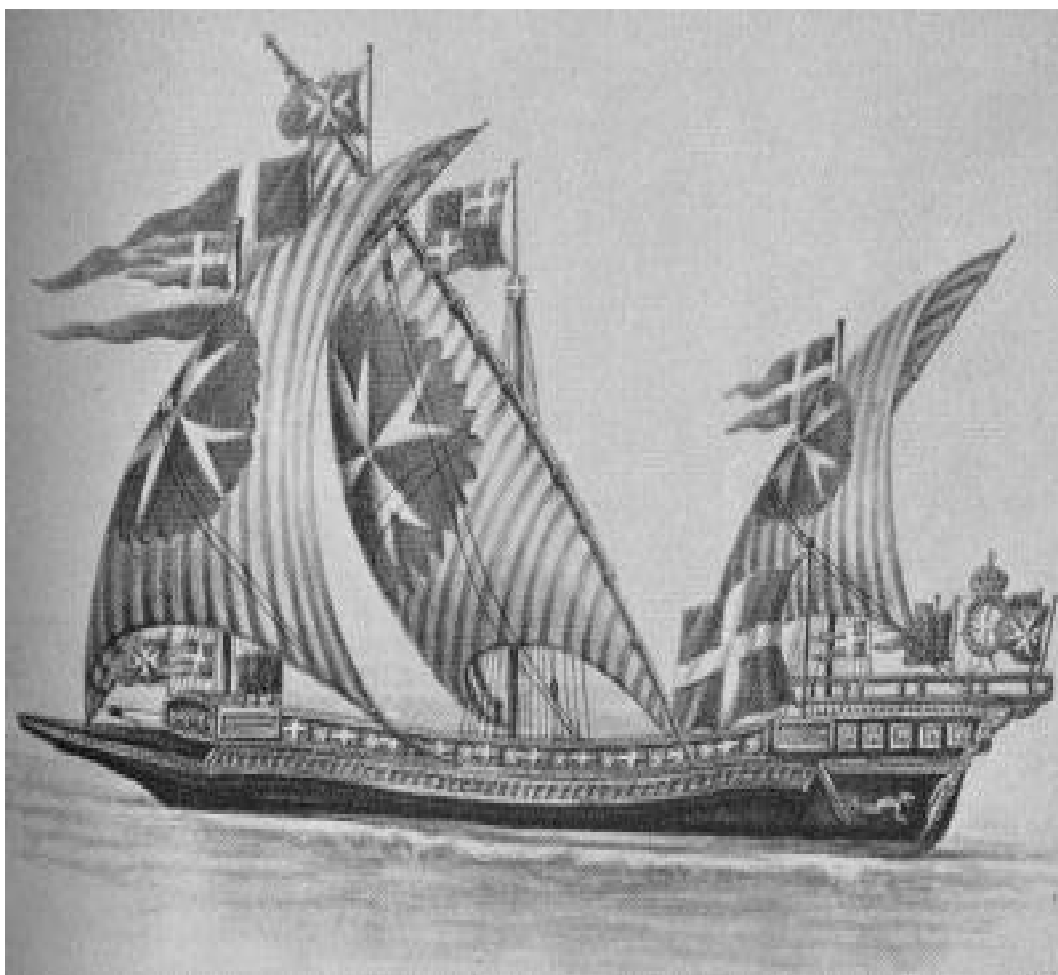


The "Cross of Calvary" was later called the "Maltese Cross" and represented the principles of charity, loyalty, chivalry, gallantry, generousities to friend and foe, protection of the weak, and dexterity in service. During the Crusades, many knights became firefighters out of necessity. Their enemies had resorted to throwing glass bombs containing naphtha, rosin, sulfur, and flaming oil into the sailing vessels of war transporting the knights. Or lobbing the "glass bombs" (Molotov cocktails) at the troops. Many knights were called to do heroic deeds by rescuing fellow knights, and extinguishing the fires.



The Knightly Virtues:
Rescuing a maiden in Distress
(British Library, Harleian M.S. 443I, F. 98V)

The Hospitallers of St. John of Jerusalem the most important of all the military orders, both for the extent of its area and for its duration. It is said to have existed before the Crusades and is not extinct at the present time. During this long career it has not always borne the same name. Known as Hospitallers of Jerusalem until 1309, the members were called Knights of Rhodes from 1309 till 1522, and have been called Knights of Malta since 1530. The origins of the order have given rise to learned discussions, to fictitious legends and hazardous conjectures. The unquestionable founder was one Gerald or Gerard.



Over time, the monks started offering armed escort to travelers as they passed through perilous Syrian territory. Following the success of the First Crusade, the Hospitallers evolved into a military order. Around 1113, Pope Pascal II acknowledged the Hospitallers as a religious order. They were bound by the Augustinian rules of Chastity, Poverty and Obedience. However, more was expected of the members of "The Order." Later they assisted the Knights of the crusades through their goodwill and also through military assistance in an effort to win back the Holy Land. The Knights of St. John eventually moved to the Island of Malta, the island for which the Maltese Cross was named.



The fall of Acre in 1291. The Knights of Saint John form the rear guard and hold back the Mamelukes while the Christian survivors of the siege embark on the ships.

The Knights of Rhodes (1309-1522) The Knights of Rhodes, the successors of the Hospitallers of St. John, were distinguished from the latter in many ways. In the first place, the grand master of the order was thenceforward a temporal sovereign in that island, which constituted a true ecclesiastical principality, under the nominal suzerainty of the Emperors of the East. Secondly, although Villaret's first care was to build a new infirmary, the care of the sick took a secondary place, as the members of the order had scarcely occasion to devote themselves to any save the members of the community. The name knights then prevailed over that of hospitallers.

The history of the Hospitallers of Jerusalem is involved in that of the Latin Kingdom of the same name, with which the order was associated in prosperity and adversity. When the kingdom was at the height of its glory, the Hospitallers possessed no fewer than seven strongholds, some situated on the coast, others in the mountains; of these Margat and Kral, in the territory of Tripoli, are the most famous. They enjoyed the revenues of more than one hundred and forty estates (Castalia) in the Holy Land. As to their European possessions, a writer of the thirteenth century credits them with about nineteen thousand manses or manors. It was necessary to organize a financial administration in order to assure the regular payment of revenues of these widely scattered possessions.

The Knightly Order of St. John of the Hospital of Jerusalem, at the time of the First Crusade, ministered to "Our Lords the Sick", be they Christian, Jew or Muslim. In order to provide protection to pilgrims to the Holy Land, the Order also established military and

naval services and serves valiantly in many battles, including those of Acco, Rhodes and Malta.



The sacred infirmary in Valetta with Knights treating patients

The Hungarian Knights' Jerusalem almshouse was founded in 1135, and their first hospital in Hungary was opened in 1147. Two hundred years later, at the fatal battle of Muhi in 1241, when Hungary was unable to stop the assault of Djenghiz Khan's Mongols, the Knights save their king and escorted him to safety on the Adriatic coast.

While the Order of St. John became a mixed order that of the Templars was purely military from the beginning, and on this point it can claim priority, despite the contrary assertions of the Hospitallers. The Templars followed a different monastic rule and wore a different habit -- the white habit of the Cistercians, whose rule they followed, with a red cross, while the Hospitallers had the black mantle with a white cross. In war the knightly brothers wore above their armor a red surcoat with the white cross.

They dispersed to their commanders and begged Charles the V to grant them the island of Malta, which was a dependency of his kingdom of Sicily, and this sovereignty was

granted them in 1530, under the suzerainty of the kings of Spain. The Knights of Malta (1530-1798) at once resumed the manner of life they had already practiced for two centuries at Rhodes.



Reception into the brotherhood of the Knights of Saint John at Malta from an engraving: year 1586

With the collapse of the Crusader Kingdoms in the early 14th century the Order was driven out of the Holy Land. It established its seat successively on the islands of Cyprus, Rhodes, and finally Malta, and with its fleet became a military power to be reckoned with. (The island was lost to Napoleon Bonaparte, when the Knights, faithful to their vows not to fight Christian powers, surrendered to the attacking French in 1798.)



A Knight of the English Tongue from the Grand Master's Palace, Valetta

From the parent stem of what is today the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, headquartered in Rome, branched off in the mid-sixteenth century those Knights who accepted the Reformation of the Church. They grouped themselves around the historically independent-minded Bailiwick of Brandenburg. The present Order of St. John of the Hospital at Jerusalem (Johanniter) today has "commanders" or Associations in Germany, Austria, Hungary, Switzerland, France and Finland.

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historically independent-minded Bailiwick of Brandenburg. The present Order of St. John of the Hospital at Jerusalem (Johanniter) today has "commanders" or Associations in Germany, Austria, Hungary, Switzerland, France and Finland. There are now in existence only four great priorities, one in Bohemia, and three in Italy. There are still commanders and several classes of knights, with different insignias, but all wear the same eight - pointed Maltese Cross. Close links are maintained with the Roman Catholic branch, the Sovereign Military Order of the Knights of Malta. Their seat is in Rome, and their Grand Master has the rank of Cardinal.

Their first obligation is to collect contributions for the support of hospitals. Thus this Protestant branch of the order has returned to the ideal of its first founder in the time of the First Crusade. Moreover, in times of war, since 1870, the order has been devoted to ambulance service on the field of battle. The actual conditions for admission into the order are: nobility of sixteen quartering, the Catholic Faith, attainment of full legal age, integrity of character, and corresponding social position.

Irrespective of their confessions, the orders - linked in an "Alliance" - carry forward the same traditions and profess the same principles, the foremost being "to serve our lords, the sick and the poor". The Knights of Saint John have assisted with medical supplies and sent doctors and nurses to Vietnam, Biafar, Bangladesh and Ireland. Permanent hospitals are maintained all over the world.

Eventually, as stated above, the Knights became known as the "Knights of Malta," their symbol also became associated with Malta and is now known as the "Maltese Cross." The Maltese Cross is a much cherished symbol of the Maltese people and the cross has become part of Malta's heritage and culture. Many souvenirs are adorned by the Maltese Cross. The cross is also used in all kinds of jewelry including earrings, necklaces, bracelets, broaches, pendants and cuff links. Now all throughout the world, ambulance services and hospitals have affiliated themselves with The Order or at least the ideals and vision.

The crusade continues...