

The Maltese Cross



The Maltese cross is known around the world as a symbol of the fire service. It is often seen painted on fire trucks, on the clothing of firefighters, depicted on firefighter's badges, and is quite often the chosen design of firefighter tattoos. So where did the Maltese cross come from, and how did it get to be known as a symbol of the fire service? The Badge of a Fire Fighter is the Maltese Cross. The 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 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 for the cross. The Saracens 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 Fire Fighters and the first of a long list of courageous Fire Fighters. Their heroic efforts were recognized by fellow crusaders who awarded each hero a badge of honor, a cross similar to the one fire fighters 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. The Maltese Cross is your symbol of protection. It means that the Fire Fighter who wears this cross is willing to lay down his life for you just as the crusaders sacrificed their lives for their fellow man so many years ago. The Maltese Cross is a Fire Fighter's badge of honor, signifying that he works in courage...a ladder rung away from death.

The Fireman's "Ring of the Bell" Tradition

The ceremonial ringing of the bell in memory of those who died in the line of duty is an age old tradition of the Fire Services that dates back over 150 years. The tradition reflects respect and honor to those who gave their lives to their duty. A distinctive bell ringing marks the end of an emergency and a return to quarters. In memory of all who died during the attacks on September 11, 2001 the bell is rung five times in series of fives (5 x 5 x 5 x 5 x 5). Multiplied out this equals 3,125, a number very close to the number of people who died as result of the attacks.