



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 firefighter 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 firefighter's 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 firefighter 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 firefighter's badge of honor, signifying that he works in courage - a ladder rung away from death.