

## Knights of Malta

Here's a really small fraternal category! Technically, they're the Hospitallers of St. John of Jerusalem, a Catholic fraternal organization, and, as you might have guessed, they trace their history all the way back to the Crusades. Originally, it was 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 still in existence. 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.

Strictly speaking, therefore, the Hospitallers of Jerusalem only began with Raymond of Provence, to whom they owe their rule. This rule deals only with their conduct as religious and infirmarians, there being no mention of knights. It especially sets forth that the hospital shall permanently maintain at its expense five physicians and three surgeons. The brothers were to fulfil the duties of infirmarians. To accompany and defend at need, the arriving and departing pilgrims, Raymond defrayed the cost of an armed escort, which in time became a veritable army, comprising knights recruited from among the crusaders of Europe, and serving as a heavy cavalry. With this innovation originated the most ancient military dignity in the order—the marshal, to command the knights. Later, the grand masters themselves went into battle. Thus the Order of St. John imperceptibly became military without losing its original character.

The actual conditions for admission to the order are: nobility of sixteen quarterings, the Catholic Faith, attainment of full legal age, integrity of character, and corresponding social position. There are now in existence only four great priories, one in Bohemia, and three in Italy. There are still commanders and several classes of knights, with different insignia, but all wear the same eight-pointed Maltese cross.

The Protestant Baliwick of Sonnenburg in Prussia disappeared after the secularization of its property in 1810. Nevertheless Frederick William IV created a new confraternity of "Evangelical Johannittes" (1852), under the master (Herrenmeister) always chosen from the royal family, and with a great number of other dignitaries. Admission to the order is subject to numerous conditions, ancient nobility, corresponding social position, and entrance fee of 900 marks, a probation of at least four years as a knight of honor before admission of the accolade which confers the title of Knight of Justice. 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.



I don't have any statistics on what covers are available; I've only recently begun this category, myself, and I have something like three or four, including this nice 40-strike.

I find Fraternal organizations such as this interesting because almost all of the Fraternal organizations have long histories spanning numerous world events.