

Gourmet Group Fetes Signal Corps During 150th Anniversary Year

By Melissa Ziobro, Command Historian

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The Gourmet Recipe Exchange Group, a branch of the Fort Monmouth Officers' Wives Club (OWC), met Wednesday 3 February at MG and Mrs. Randolph P. Strong's home on 19 Allen Avenue, Fort Monmouth. The group's celebration of an overlooked bit of Signal Corps heritage is particularly timely during this, the Corps' 150th anniversary year.

BG Jeffrey W. Foley, Chief of Signal, recently wrote, "Since 1860 Signal Soldiers have provided the Army with unique skills and equipment to ensure reliable, rapid, and secure communications for commanders from Bull Run to Baghdad."



Mrs. Borgna-Strong and Mrs. Friedersdorff pose with a chair Mrs. Friedersdorff embroidered with the Signal Corps insignia in 1978. 2010 marks the 150th anniversary of the Corps.

And so the Gourmet Group convened and shared food and recipes per their normal meeting routine. A brief presentation by the Command Historian on the histories of Fort Monmouth, the Officers' Wives Club, and the Commanding General's quarters followed.

The highlight of the meeting, though, was the dining room chairs.

The dining room chairs?

Yes, the dining room chairs. Twelve of them, in fact, all featuring unique, hand-stitched U.S. Army Signal Corps insignia.

Mrs. Lori Borgna-Strong, wife of U.S. Army CECOM LCMC Commander MG Randolph P. Strong, found the chairs in her attic when she moved into the Commander's Quarters last year. She explained that they spoke to her not only because MG Strong is a Signal officer, but because the chairs bear the date 1978: the same year MG Strong graduated from West Point and earned his commission in the Signal Corps.

Mrs. Borgna-Strong brought the chairs out of the attic and placed them in her dining room.

She began investigating their history. Small brass placards on the backs of the chairs helped. They bore the names of the stitchers: 11 women and one man. Mrs. Borgna-Strong's research led her to Joyce Friedersdorff, one of the stitchers. Mrs. Friedersdorff just happens to be a fellow member of the OWC. She remembered the chairs well.

Mrs. Friedersdorff shared that Ellen Stoner, the wife of U.S. Army Electronics Command and Fort Monmouth Commander MG John K. Stoner, suggested the project. Mrs. Stoner was inspired by OWC needlepoint classes offered by Peg Laflam. Mrs. Stoner asked Mrs. Laflam, wife of COL Robert Laflam, to create the pattern for the chairs based on the fact that Fort Monmouth was known as the Home of the Signal Corps for many years.

Mrs. Laflam was, and still is, well known in the world of needlepoint. Many years after her family's tour at Fort Monmouth, she earned the National Academy of Needlearts' 2003 Lifetime Achievement Award. Mrs. Laflam passed away in 2006.

Mrs. Stoner solicited volunteer stitchers from among the members of the OWC. Women affiliated with not only the U.S. Army Signal Corps but also the Ordnance Corps, Chemical Corps, Field Artillery, the U.S. Navy, and Fort Monmouth's civilian population worked on the project.

Ms. Friedersdorff recalled the painstaking task taking over six months.

When asked if she would do it again despite the time and effort expended, Joyce replied "Oh, sure!"



Mrs. Effie Van Deusen, wife of Fort Monmouth Commander BG George Lane Van Deusen, formally organized the Officers' Wives Club in 1941. Prior to that, many Officers' wives met informally at the ladies homes.

According to OWC president Becky Carpenter, current OWC membership totals 70 women. This includes the wives of active duty military and civilians, of retired veterans and civilians, and of some foreign liaison officers.

The Gourmet Recipe Exchange Group dates back to at least the 1970s. According to former OWC president Teresa Moore, membership currently totals 22. Current members must leave the group before new ones may join. Mrs. Lynne Weigand and Mrs. Loris Ebner serve as co-chairs.