# The Signal Corps

**by 2nd Lt. Michael Coffman**

The Signal Corps has been united by member associations since the days of its founder, Brig. Gen. Albert J. Myer. The first such organization, the "Order of the Signal Corps," also known as the U.S. Army Veterans Signal Corps Association, was formed by Myer himself in August 1865 to preserve the spirit of a Corps that had been formed by Congress only two years earlier and which was supposed to last only for the duration of the Civil War. Instead, the Corps has lived to inexorably alter the history of military communications. By the close of the Civil War, Signal soldiers were bonded by a fierce sense of pride and dedication, in many respects a tribute to the respect and awe felt for Myer. This intense devotion to duty was best summarized in a speech delivered by Myer to the first reunion of the "Order" in 1870, "...the Corps you constituted carried, by its zeal, its devotion (and) its duties, before untried, through a war of four years, never surpassed in one day in magnitude from the first collision at Bull Run to the end, at Lee's surrender." Myer added that the Signal Corps won the "highest praises from the Army and the Navy — from Sherman, who was not lavish of praise; and from Porter, who loves everything that helps fighting."

The turn of the century saw the demise of this proud veterans organization, remembered today primarily for their publication, *US Army Signal Corps in the War of the Rebellion,* printed in 1898.

In spirit, however, the Order of the Signal Corps lived on. It took on a new and vigorous body some four decades later.

The capabilities that private industry demonstrated during World War II in the unprecedented mobilization of the civilian sector to a wartime industry suggested a strength in the democratic system that few could have anticipated. In a very true sense it was the knowledge that the tremendous industrial power of our nation could be quickly and effectively mobilized that was the significant factor in preserving peace in the delicate postwar balance between European reconstruction and Soviet expansionism.

This partnership between private industry and the Signal Corps helped insure an industrial establishment committed to responding to the Signal community. In founding the Army Signal Association in 1946, Chief Signal Officer Maj. Gen. Harry C. Ingles responded to this need and was met with resounding enthusiasm, not only from the Signal community but from the President of the United States. In addressing the first convention of the A.S.A. through a personal letter, President Harry Truman noted that, "...this association's program for maintaining close relations between the Army and the communications, electronics, and photographic industries is an important contribution to the industrial preparedness which must buttress the future security of our country." In its second year, membership topped 7,000 and a permanent military-industrial liaison had been fused.

The security of our nation, however, necessitated a posture that had by world events been forced to relinquish much of its preoccupation with a nostalgic past in order to confront the stark reality of a hostile, cold war C-E environment that pitted aggressors on an electromagnetic battleground that made unprecedented demands on research and development. It was, in fact, this awareness that expanded the Army Signal Association into its current organization, the Armed Forces Communications Electronics Association.

# Association

Although industry had in effect made the move to consolidate their commitment to the Signal Corps almost immediately following World War II, the creation of a military counterpart was delayed for over thirty years. The expansion of Signal training — especially with the advent of the Korean conflict — resulted in centers at both Camp San Luis Obispo, California, and Camp Gordon, Georgia, in addition to the traditional home of the Signal Corps at Fort Monmouth, once the old Camp Vail. This expansion had produced a fragmentation in the Signal Corps that hindered the consolidation of tradition and the sense of a professional home.

The Signal Corps Association, founded in October 1979, represents this final consolidation. It is based at Fort Gordon, Georgia, which has become the professional home for Signal soldiers worldwide. As a Non-Appropriated Fund Instrumentality (NAFI), the Association is governed by Army regulations and exists primarily as an "opportunity for interested individuals to aid in preserving for posterity the proud heritage of the US Army Signal Corps ... and to enhance the educational and recreational value of the Signal Corps Museum," as stated in the Constitution of the Association. Through this institution, an extension mission will reach worldwide to not only Signal soldiers but to the civilian and retired military community.

By encouraging subscriptions to THE ARMY COMMUNICATOR, by increasing public awareness of outstanding Signal soldiers, and by creating a Hall of Fame for outstanding contributors to the Signal Corps tradition, the Signal Corps Association of today can intensify the pride and devotion that Signal Corps professionals feel and revitalize the spirit of Albert J. Myer and the Order of the Signal Corps.

## Association Symbol

Although the U.S. Army Signal Corps dates its history from the appointment of Maj. Albert J. Myer as first Chief Signal Officer in 1860, the familiar crossed flags and flaming torch were not official symbols of the Corps until twenty years later. Nevertheless the Signal flag device was worn unofficially by the Union Army as early as 1862, and the various Signal motifs became common symbols of a fledgling Corps strongly aware of its identity and proud to assert its influence as the voice of command.

With the close of the Civil War and the subsequent deactivation of the Signal Corps in August of 1865, Gen. Myer founded the "Order of the Signal Corps" for the purpose of "devising means for maintaining good fellowship among the members of the Corps who had faithfully served during the late war, and for preserving the reminiscences of the same." As a badge for the members, Myer devised an insignia of a golden eagle clutching in its talons a Signal flag.

Today, that symbol lives on as the insignia of the Signal Corps Association. It honors the dedication and pioneering accomplishments of all who have served the Corps and seeks to inspire all those who will follow.