

TEXAS CIVIL WAR MUSEUM
PRESENTS SPECIAL PROGRAM
INSIGNIA EMBROIDERING—A LOST ART

For Immediate Release
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FORT WORTH— On Saturday, July 25, the Texas Civil War Museum will feature a special demonstration by Mr. Jan Zirkle of Hurst. Mr. Zirkle has been hand embroidering museum-quality Civil War insignia since 1993 and has previously exhibited his talents at the Texas Folklife Festival in San Antonio, as well as providing demonstrations to various living history groups. Mr. Zirkle has constructed items for a variety of museums, and was the manufacturer of a special set of South Carolina Militia shoulder insignia worn by the commander of an honor guard for the internment of the final crew of the Confederate submarine H. L. Hunley, after the ship was recovered from its watery resting place. He is also well known among “progressive” re-enactors as a source for highly accurate reproduction insignia.

The embroidery technique dates back to the Middle Ages, when it was used to embellish the heraldic ornaments worn by mounted knights. Its heyday in this country was during the Civil War, when manufacturers here and in Europe produced thousands of insignia for wear by soldiers (primarily officers) on both sides. Although the vast majority of today’s US military insignia are made by machine, many European countries still use insignia of this type for their special ceremonial uniforms.

The supplies are simple, with the main material being very thin wire spun into tiny extended coils (much like a miniature “Slinky”), known by the general name of bullion. There are three main types of bullion and it is available in both a gilt and silver finish. An underlay of the basic shape of the insignia (made from a number of materials) is attached to a background cloth of wool or velvet, which in turn is glued onto a thin stretcher fabric. That goes into an embroiderer’s hoop or stretching frame and the embroidery begins. Each piece of the bullion is separately cut to the necessary length, then is sewn into place by running a needle and thread through the center. This process is repeated literally hundreds of times until the basic shape is complete. Afterwards various details are added using additional types of bullion or other specialized wires. As you might suspect, the process is tedious and a single cap ornament can take as much as 12 hours to complete.

Mr. Zirkle will be exhibiting his skills throughout the day in the cavalry gallery of the Texas Civil War Museum. His pattern will be a design from the museum’s military collection. We invite you to come to the museum to witness an art form that has nearly disappeared in this country. The presentation is free with paid admission.

Hours: 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Admission: Adults \$6, Students age 7-12 \$3, Children 6 and under, free with adult. Group and active military discounts available.

The museum location: 760 Jim Wright Freeway North, Fort Worth 76108. (West Loop 820 N.) Information about the museum may be obtained by calling 817.246.2323. Much more information is available at the museum’s Web site: www.texascivilwarmuseum.com