

# The Civil Air Patrol Story

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## BIRTH OF CAP

Civil Air Patrol was conceived in the late 1930s by legendary New Jersey aviation advocate Gill Robb Wilson, who foresaw aviation's role in war and general aviation's potential to supplement America's unprepared military. Wilson, then aviation editor of *The New York Herald Tribune* and later NJ Aeronautics Commissioner, first sold the idea to New Jersey's governor, who created a statewide organization. Wilson then convinced New York mayor (and National Civil Defense Chief) Fiorello La Guardia of the need for a civilian air defense organization. The new Civil Air Patrol was born on December 1, 1941, just days before the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor.

The CAP insignia, a red three-bladed propeller in the Civil Defense white-triangle-in-blue-circle, began appearing on private aircraft everywhere. (The red markings were later deleted for aircraft in combat areas to prevent confusion with enemy insignia.) CAP initially planned only on liaison flying and interdiction of infiltrators on the East Coast and the southern border, but CAP's mission grew when German submarines began to prey on American ships.

## COASTAL PATROL

America entered the war with meager maritime defenses on the East Coast. Gasoline and oil shortages grew and vital war supplies for Europe were nearly choked off as enemy subs operated with impunity—often within sight of the beach. Tankers and freighters were going to the bottom in record numbers. While the American military frantically geared up to meet the threat, ships were torpedoed in the mouth of the Connecticut River and in the Saint Lawrence. One surfaced sub actually motored right into outer New York harbor on January 15, navigating by reference to a New York City tourist map and visible landmarks like the Ferris wheel at Coney Island. Subs could blast their prey at night as targets became silhouetted against still brightly lit coastal resorts. Usually unopposed, they could attack on the surface using deck guns to conserve torpedoes. Even years later, New Jersey teens termed their secluded romantic interludes on the beach, “Watching The Submarine Races.”

As tankers burned, Philadelphia-based Sun Oil (Sunoco), along with other concerned companies, established a “Tanker Protection Fund” to establish civilian coastal patrol bases until government financial support caught up. Volunteers came from everywhere and within months, some 40,000 signed up, ranging from over-age World War I fliers to aviation heroes and Hollywood celebrities.

CAP pilots provided their own airplanes and equipment, and often couldn't cover expenses on their \$8 per flying-day government pay, which often arrived two months late. Civic organizations across the nation chipped in with “Sink-a-Sub Clubs,” staging fundraisers for Coastal Patrol.

The military required an initial 90-day trial in early 1942 to prove civilians could do the job, so Coastal Patrol began as an experiment at the three “hot spots” of the submarine bloodbath: Atlantic City, New Jersey; Rehoboth Beach, Delaware; and Lantana, Florida. Flying up to 200 miles offshore were pilots whose previous overwater experience had been crossing the wide part of the Delaware River from below Wilmington over to the South Jersey side. They wore military uniforms and “U.S.” insignia so they would be prisoners of war if captured, not shot as guerrillas.

Atlantic City's initial flight was out only 15 minutes when it spotted its first torpedoed tanker and started coordinating rescue efforts. The presence of CAP raised tanker crew morale during the war and was even credited with convincing torpedoed tankermen to accept another assignment back at sea. A CAP crew first interrupted a sub attack on a flight out of Rehoboth Beach, saving a tanker off Cape May, New Jersey. Since radio calls for military bombers were often unproductive, unarmed CAP fliers dived in mock attacks to force subs to break and run.

Many CAP aviators earned membership in the “Duck Club” for their numerous engine failures and subsequent ditchings at sea. Radio calls to CAP’s communications network, if made in time on weak one-watt sets, brought CAP twin-engine Grumman Widgeon amphibians to the rescue. The first Air Medals of World War II presented in person by President Roosevelt went to CAP pilots Eddie Edwards and Hugh Sharp for one such rescue, which saved one of two crewmembers down in a bitterly cold wintertime ditching. Edwards had to perch on the Widgeon’s wing to counterbalance the loss of the opposite pontoon, ripped away in the rescuers’ landing. A half-frozen Edwards clung there for 11 hours as the unflyable Widgeon was water taxied all night to shore.

CAP planes got bombs and depth charges after a crew watched in vain as a grounded sub off Cape Canaveral, Florida, escaped before the military arrived. CAP Coastal Patrol flew 24 million miles, found 173 subs, attacked 57, hit 10 and sank two. By Presidential Executive Order, CAP became an auxiliary of the Army Air Forces on April 29, 1943. The military had resisted “those country-club pilots” and their “toy planes,” but 21 CAP Coastal Patrol bases from Maine to Texas had soon deterred close-in submarine operations. By August 31, 1943, it was time for Coastal Patrol to stand down. A German commander later confirmed that coastal U-boat operations were withdrawn “because of those damned little red and yellow airplanes.”

## **OTHER WARTIME MISSIONS**

CAP went on to target towing operations, courier service for the Army, liaison and cargo flights between war plants, Southern Border patrol against enemy infiltrators crossing from Mexico, and air search and rescue. Non-flying CAP members guarded airfields and trained a rapidly growing corps of CAP cadets. CAP searched for many military planes that had gone down on training or ferry missions around the United States. After a B-24 crash landed one winter atop Mount Baldy near Taos, New Mexico, a CAP Taylorcraft made six successful landings at 12,800 feet to deliver survival rations and recover crucial equipment. Nevada CAP actually had its own cavalry of sorts, conducting ground rescue operations in rough territory on horseback, including 24 mounts transferred from the Army’s now-obsolete Cavalry at Ft. Riley, Kansas.

Inland operations were typified by the flying of Liaison Pilot Bill “Pappy” Madsen, operations officer for the “Mountain Boys” flying from Peterson Field in Colorado Springs, Colorado. CAP’s operations in the Rockies actually pioneered many routes and mountain flying concepts still in use today. Colorado-based courier pilots operated 100 scheduled flights a day over 50 routes, carrying 3.5 million pounds of cargo to military bases in 17 states. Seven courier pilots died in the mountains of the West, with a like number perishing in the East on flights between war plants.

Women were actively recruited by CAP. In addition to support duties at Coastal Patrol bases, women pilots flew inland liaison, forest fire patrol and other missions. By war’s end, women made up 20 percent of the Civil Air Patrol. These women were not immune to duty’s dangers. Margaret Bartholomew, commander of the Cincinnati courier station, was lost in the western Pennsylvania mountains after departing Williamsport, unaware of a surprise storm ahead. Departing just as new weather information reached Williamsport, Bartholomew did not hear the tower’s desperate attempts to recall her flight.

In all, Civil Air Patrol flew a half-million hours during World War II and 64 CAP aviators lost their lives.

CAP’s role after the war was much in question, and it was widely expected to fade away along with most other wartime institutions. But military and political leaders rose to praise CAP’s unusual commitment and accomplishment. At a special dinner in Washington, DC in March, 1946, President Harry Truman, Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn, and no less than 300 members of Congress and 50 AAF generals gathered to praise its work. President Truman later signed a bill granting CAP a national charter, placing the organization in a unique status similar to the American Red Cross. The United States Air Force was created as an independent armed service in September 1947, and the Civil Air Patrol was permanently designated as its official auxiliary the following year.

# The Peacetime CAP

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Since air search and rescue had been one of CAP's primary missions during the war, it was obvious there was no other organization with the equipment and training to continue this vital job in the post-war years. Even though there were plenty of military aircraft available, they cost far too much to operate and flew too fast for accurate spotting of downed planes and personnel. Military pilots were expensive to train as well, and mission requirements limited their availability for search and rescue work. Civil Air Patrol, with its proven record of volunteer service using light aircraft, was put to work.

By 1954 CAP was flying over 50 percent of the search and rescue hours flown in the country according to the Air Force Air Rescue Service, and was saving the country \$46 million a year—the cost equal to the military and flight pay of the 12,000 fliers that would have been needed to fly the missions had CAP not been available.

In October 1954, Navy pilot Joe Meder became one of the many crash survivors who owe their lives to CAP. Flying at night at 40,000 feet in stormy skies, he was forced to eject from his burning Banshee jet fighter. Falling almost 30,000 feet as he wrestled with his ejection seat, he was able to separate from it and get his parachute open, only to have it rip and begin to lose air. He slammed into the ground, breaking both ankles and numerous other bones, and puncturing a lung. He crawled 150 feet before collapsing in a rain drenched bean field. Nearing death, Meder was spotted at first light by CAP pilots Vince Causmaker and John Zonge who were part of a two-state air and ground search team.

When floods ravaged Kentucky, Virginia and West Virginia in 1957, CAP ground, air and radio teams swung into action. CAP planes flew vital serum and vaccines to forward areas unreachable by heavier military aircraft. Ground teams helped in the evacuation of cities and towns. In the Hazard, Kentucky area, the CAP radio net handled most of the traffic for the emergency agencies, coordinated the activities of Army rescue helicopters, controlled CAP activities in the area, and broadcast weather advisories from the U.S. Weather Bureau.

By the 1960s and '70s, CAP was logging over 75 percent of the search and rescue hours flown each year. The burgeoning civil aircraft fleet was the primary impetus for the continued need for a growing CAP organization, but the CAP's parent organization, the U.S. Air Force, sometimes had to use Civil Air Patrol's search and rescue skills as well. When an F-111 fighter-bomber went down in the southwest, CAP members from six states were called up in a 15-day search and rescue operation. CAP pilots flew over 80 percent of the 1,400 sorties flown.

On May 18, 1980, Mt. St. Helens in Washington exploded, devastating approximately 150 square miles and triggering massive mud-flows, floods and ashfalls. When the county sheriff asked the Civil Air Patrol for help, CAP members were quickly on the scene, establishing a 24 hour headquarters, plotting leads, aiding search and rescue missions, and updating weather advisories. CAP teams assisted in several out-lying command centers and worked in ash cleanup crews.

During the 1990's Civil Air Patrol experienced an ever-increasing number of missions. Some of the notable natural disasters which CAP responded to include the San Francisco earthquake of 1991 and the Midwest floods and major hurricanes in the southeast during the mid-nineties. Today, Civil Air Patrol flies more than 85% of all federal inland search and rescue missions directed by the Air Force Rescue Coordination Center at Langley Air Force Base, Virginia. The many disaster relief efforts, together with CAP's ongoing search and rescue and counter drug missions, have substantially increased the flight hours and man-hours that CAP provides to communities all across this nation and in Puerto Rico.

Also noteworthy, was a reorganization and restructuring of CAP's national headquarters in 1995. This resulted in replacing active-duty and civil service employees with a CAP Corporate staff. A small contingency of Air Force personnel was left in place to oversee CAP operations.

# CAP Today

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## **AEROSPACE EDUCATION**

Civil Air Patrol has an outstanding aerospace education program focused not only on members, but on the general public as well. CAP has a congressional tasking to stimulate public interest in aerospace issues. Each year, CAP supports over 100 workshops in colleges and universities across the nation which reach more than 3,000 educators. These workshops highlight basic aerospace knowledge and focus on advances in aerospace technology. Textbooks, learning tools, and visual aids geared to stimulate interest in aerospace matters are also provided for teachers to use in their classrooms. CAP sponsors the annual National Congress on Aviation and Space Education, the premier aerospace education conference held in the nation, involving over 1,000 educators from around the nation and often overseas.

## **CADET PROGRAMS**

The CAP Cadet Program continues to introduce thousands of young people from 6<sup>th</sup> Grade to age 21 to aviation, and offers them outstanding summer programs including some that offer an opportunity to solo in a light airplane at low cost. The CAP Cadet Program is designed to motivate and develop well-rounded young people, who in turn will become model citizens and the future leaders of our nation. CAP cadets progress at their own pace through a 16-step program including aerospace education, leadership training, physical fitness and moral leadership. Cadets can compete for academic scholarships to further their studies in such areas as engineering, science, aircraft mechanics and aerospace medicine. They can also compete for scholarships leading to solo flight training. Many outstanding cadets have an opportunity to go overseas in exchange programs with youth in other countries, and some of these exchange cadets even experience flying opportunities with foreign air forces.

Many of today's leaders, in and out of aviation, have benefited greatly from their experiences as Civil Air Patrol cadets. Each graduating class of the U.S. Air Force Academy is heavily populated with former CAP cadets—up to 8 percent in recent years. West Point and the U.S. Naval Academy also admit many CAP cadets each year. CAP cadets who enlist in the Air Force are immediately promoted two pay grades (to E-3) if they have completed the second phase of CAP cadet training.

1994 marked the introduction of the CAP Drug Demand Reduction Program (DDR). Targeted toward Active, Guard, and Reserve Air Force family members and members of the local community (typically within 30 miles of an Air Force installation), units participating in DDR actively perform the following activities:

- Promoting CAP as an alternative lifestyle.
- Encouraging youth to remain in school.
- Educating youth on the dangers of drugs.
- Providing alternative activities to drugs.

## **EMERGENCY SERVICES**

CAP is still best known for its search and rescue mission. Civil Air Patrol air and ground teams perform 85 percent of inland search-and-rescue missions for the Air Force Rescue Coordination Center. These volunteers donate their time and labor, receiving reimbursement for fuel and oil only, thus saving the taxpayers millions of dollars. More than 100 lives are saved every year by CAP members performing search and rescue missions!

CAP's disaster relief missions, such as those during hurricanes and floods, often don't make headlines, but CAP provides both air and ground transportation and an extensive communications network. CAP provides an aerial photo platform for many disaster relief responder agencies. Many CAP aircraft are equipped with slow scan video technology that enables them to transmit damage assessment photos, flood stage observations and traffic conditions to the agency within seconds of taking the photo. CAP members also fly disaster relief officials to remote locations and support local, state and national disaster relief organizations with manpower and leadership. CAP ground teams provide vital assistance to disaster relief operations.

The CAP Emergency Communications Network spans the country with a data and voice net built to survive the loss of civil communications. With one of the most sophisticated communications networks in the nation, CAP supports local, state, and federal agencies during disaster relief, search and rescue and many other emergencies. The fleet of 530 CAP-owned aircraft communicates on CAP's own dedicated frequencies, while new systems coordinate and track search flights via sophisticated datalink.

The youth-centered CAP Drug Demand Reduction Program is only one of Civil Air Patrol's activities in our country's "War on Drugs." Since 1986, CAP has made major contributions to the counterdrug fight by providing aerial reconnaissance, airborne communications support, and airlift of law enforcement personnel. CAP units fly almost 38,000 hours in support of counterdrug efforts each year.

As the official auxiliary of the U.S. Air Force, it's not surprising that Civil Air Patrol performs vital Air Force missions upon request. This support includes air search and rescue on USAF directed missions, light transport, communications support and low-altitude route surveys.

All in all, there are numerous reasons for enthusiastic, aviation-oriented volunteers to join one of this country's premier service organizations. Please read on to learn how to join the Civil Air Patrol and find out some of the benefits of CAP membership.

# Joining Civil Air Patrol

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As you can see from CAP's proud history, the volunteer men, women, and young people from every state, Puerto Rico, and our nation's capital have dedicated themselves to performing Civil Air Patrol's "Missions for America." We would love to have you on the team!

We have a place for you. . . mission observer, communications specialist, media relations, personnel, safety, teaching cadets, training, and many more. More than likely, there is a unit near your home waiting for you to join.

## INITIAL CADET MEMBERSHIP

All applicants for cadet membership must meet the following prerequisites:

1. Twelve years old (or attending 6th grade) through 18 years old.
2. Enrolled in or graduated from a public or private school or college with a satisfactory record of academic achievement.
3. Not married.
4. Not a member of the active duty Armed Forces.
5. United States citizen or alien lawfully admitted for permanent residence in the U.S..
6. Good moral character.

## INITIAL SENIOR MEMBERSHIP

All applicants for senior membership must meet the following prerequisites:

1. Possess the desire, willingness, and capability to promote the objectives and purposes of Civil Air Patrol.
2. Must be at least 18 years old. Active duty members of the Armed Forces can join CAP as a senior member at any age.
3. United States citizen or alien lawfully admitted for permanent residence in the U.S.
4. No felony conviction by any court of record whether federal, state or military.
5. No pattern of arrests and/or convictions including but not limited to sex offenses, child abuse, Driving Under the Influence of Alcohol (DUI), dishonesty and violence.
6. If you were previously in the active duty military, you must have been discharged under honorable conditions.

## **MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS**

**REWARDS & RECOGNITION:** As a CAP volunteer, your rewards are not monetary, but they are as tangible as money in the bank. Nothing compares to the sense of satisfaction that comes with a job well done, particularly if that job is saving lives or aiding communities. As a CAP member, you will be recognized as a vital member of a national team with a tremendous heritage of serving those in need—and doing it well. Advancement in Civil Air Patrol is clearly visible to your friends, family and business associates by the distinctive CAP uniforms with their military-style grade insignia, ribbons and badges. Some members choose to quietly serve and not wear a uniform.

**TRAINING:** Civil Air Patrol offers aerospace education and a wide variety of leadership and technical training opportunities for all CAP members, including Air Force correspondence courses. Special training is also conducted for those participating in search and rescue as mission pilots, observers or ground team members. Communications training is highly specialized and presents unique opportunities to network with other communicators from around the country. These new skills, and the self-confidence that goes with them, make you even more valuable in the workplace and in other community activities.

**UNIFORMS:** Civil Air Patrol members are easily recognized in the community since they wear a variety of distinctive uniforms. Since CAP is the official US Air Force auxiliary, members are also authorized to wear the Air Force uniform with distinguishing CAP badges and insignia. Wearing Air Force blue is a tremendous way to publicly demonstrate support and affiliation with this branch of our Armed Forces.

**MEETINGS AND CONVENTIONS:** CAP members gather regularly at meetings and conventions around the country. There is also a national convention held in a different city every year. Air travel to and from the convention may be provided by the Air Force if available.

**INTERNATIONAL CADET EXCHANGE PROGRAM (IACE):** Each year a limited number of cadets and senior member escorts travel to a variety of foreign countries as part of an aviation cadet exchange program to further a program of international goodwill and understanding.

**CAP SUPPLY DEPOT:** Civil Air Patrol operates a depot in Amarillo, Texas, which carries a large stock of aircraft parts and equipment at discount to members for their own aircraft. Communications equipment of all kinds is also available.

**RENTAL CAR DISCOUNTS:** The Hertz Corporation offers rental car discounts to CAP members for both business and pleasure travel. A special Hertz identification card is furnished to each member upon request. Rates and discounts may be obtained by calling Hertz at 1-800-654-3131.

**CIVIL AIR PATROL VISA CREDIT CARD:** The CAP affinity VISA card offers senior members and the parents of cadets an opportunity to apply for a credit card that actually supports CAP. Each time the card is used in a transaction, a donation is made by the bank to support CAP. The CAP emblem and the member's grade are embossed on the front of this distinctive credit card.

**TAX BENEFITS:** As a Federally chartered non-profit organization, Civil Air Patrol is tax exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the IRS Code. This entitles members to claim various expenses as charitable contributions. These include (1) membership dues, (2) expenses for uniforms and training materials, (3) out of pocket expenses while participating in CAP activities, (4) mileage on personal vehicles, and (5) travel and living expenses while participating in CAP activities.

If you are interested in joining Civil Air Patrol, call **1-800-FLY-2338**  
and ask for a membership information package.

or

Visit cap's internet home page on the World Wide Web:

**<http://www.capnhq.gov/>**