



# Civil Air Patrol • Level One Foundations Course • Module One

## CAP History and Organization

### GOALS FOR THIS MODULE

1. Discuss the historic origins of CAP.
2. Identify and describe the three primary missions of CAP.
3. Outline CAP's basic organizational structure.
4. Explain why CAP considers squadrons to be the heart of the organization.
5. Describe the role of CAP-USAF.

Civil Air Patrol boasts a rich history built on the spirit of volunteerism. The CAP mission has changed over the years. CAP members no longer search for Nazi submarines, but members continue to donate countless hours in community service. Today, CAP is known for its three humanitarian missions: aerospace education, cadet programs, and emergency services. As the U.S. Air Force auxiliary, CAP is organized following a military style chain of command.

## PART I

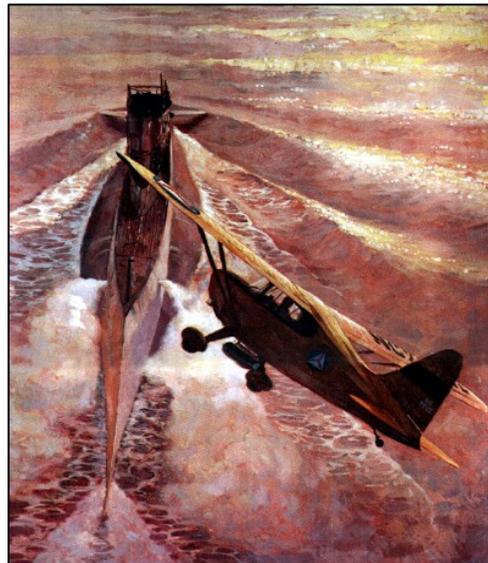
### Legacy of Bravery

Civil Air Patrol was conceived in the late 1930s by legendary New Jersey aviation advocate Gill Robb Wilson, who foresaw general aviation's potential to supplement America's military operations. With the help of New York mayor Fiorello La Guardia, the new Civil Air Patrol was established 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. CAP's initial focus was reconnaissance flying, but the civilian group's mission expanded when German submarines began to prey on American ships off the coast of the United States. In response, CAP planes began carrying bombs and depth charges. A CAP crew from Rehoboth Beach, Delaware was the first to interrupt a Nazi sub attack, saving a tanker off Cape May, New Jersey. Coastal patrol missions were dangerous work.

By the end of the war, CAP's coastal patrol had flown 24 million miles. CAP found 173 submarines, attacked 57, hit 10, and sank two. A German commander later confirmed that coastal U-boat operations were withdrawn from the United States "because of those damned little red and yellow airplanes." By the end of the war, 64 CAP members had lost their lives in the line of duty.



Following the war, Congress created the U.S. Air Force in 1947 and designated CAP as its official civilian auxiliary in 1948.

## PART II

# 21st Century Missions

Today, CAP performs three main missions, as chartered by the U.S. Congress:

### Aerospace Education

CAP builds enthusiasm for aviation and space through its aerospace education programs. CAP's cadets and adult members learn about aviation history and the scientific principles



that make flight possible. Conferences, textbooks, websites, and activity guides are available to CAP members.

The public benefits from CAP's aerospace education programs as well, since CAP provides educators at all grade levels with resources to incorporate aviation, space, and technology themes into their school curriculum.

### Cadet Programs

Through CAP's Cadet Program, young people from age 12 to 20 develop into responsible citizens and are inspired to become tomorrow's



aerospace leaders. The program is organized around five elements: leadership, aerospace, fitness, character, and

activities. As cadets participate in these five elements, they progress through a series of sixteen achievements, earning honors and increased responsibilities along the way. Adult volunteers supervise the cadets and help them develop leadership skills. CAP inspires in youth a love of aviation and strives to equip them with the discipline and skills they will need to succeed in adult life.

### Emergency Services

Best known for its members' work in search and rescue and disaster relief missions, CAP is expanding its role in the 21st century to include an increasing number of homeland security and counterdrug missions and is incorporating digital and hyperspectral imaging technology into its life-saving work.



CAP members undergo rigorous training to perform safe and cost-effective

missions, serving as pilots, communicators, ground team members, and numerous other roles. Shortly after 9/11, a CAP aircrew was the first to fly a civilian aircraft over Ground Zero, providing authorities with vital images of the fallen World Trade Center.



## PART III

# Organizational Structure

Civil Air Patrol is a private, nonprofit corporation chartered under a special act of Congress. Additionally, CAP is the auxiliary of the U.S. Air Force when it performs Air Force assigned missions. The volunteer side of the organization uses a structure that is similar to a military chain of command.

### Policy-Setting Boards

At the top of the organizational structure is the CAP Board of Governors which is accountable to the Congress. The BoG is comprised of Air Force officers, CAP volunteers including the CAP national commander and national vice commander, and representatives from aerospace-related organizations.

Assisting the BoG in setting CAP's goals and policies are the National Board and National Executive Committee. These two boards are comprised exclusively of CAP volunteers, except for one Air Force representative.

### CAP Regions

CAP divides the United States into eight areas known as regions. Each region is known by a geographic name (e.g., Northeast Region, Pacific Coast Region). Regions are mostly administrative units. Their main role is to monitor and support the five to nine wings in their geographic area.



### CAP Wings

There are 52 wings in CAP, one for each state, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. A wing is comprised of the wing headquarters and all units within its geographical boundaries. Wings have operational and administrative responsibilities and normally maintain working relationships with state and local government agencies primarily with departments of emergency management.

### CAP Groups

In wings that have a large geographic area or are highly populated, the wing commander may create groups. The main role of the group is to supervise and assist its squadrons. Some groups are active, fully staffed units that frequently host training activities. Other groups are staffed only by a handful of members who focus mostly on administrative support and serve as a liaison between the squadron and the wing.

### CAP Squadrons

The squadron is the community-level organization of CAP and the heart of the

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organization. In CAP, the basic operational unit is the squadron. All other echelons work to support it. Wing commanders may activate squadrons whenever there is a minimum of 15 members in a unit, three of whom must be adult members. There are approximately 1,500 squadrons in CAP nationwide.

CAP charters three types of squadrons:

- *Senior Squadron* - comprised entirely of adult members
- *Cadet Squadron* - comprised primarily of cadets, with a minimum of three adult members to meet supervisory, administrative, and training requirements
- *Composite Squadron* - comprised of both adult members and cadets; conducts activities for both adults and cadets

## CAP Flights

The flight is the smallest CAP membership unit. To organize a flight, a minimum of eight members are required, three of whom must be adult members. Typically, a flight is formed in sparsely populated areas where there are insufficient numbers of individuals to start a squadron.

## CAP National Headquarters

Located at Maxwell Air Force Base in Alabama, CAP National Headquarters assists the volunteer leadership at the national, region, wing, and unit levels in carrying out CAP's missions. The headquarters implements policy but does not set policy. A staff of about 150 civilians (many of whom are CAP members) supports the more than 55,000 volunteers throughout the nation. These civilian employees include wing administrators who provide administrative support and are located in the 52 wing headquarters across the nation.

## CAP-USAF

CAP-USAF serves as CAP's link with the Air Force. Located in CAP National Headquarters at Maxwell Air Force Base, CAP-USAF oversees and advises CAP. CAP-USAF falls under Air University in the Air Force Education and Training Command. It is comprised of active duty, reserve, and civilian Air Force personnel. Most CAP wings also have a state director (an Air Force civilian employee) and Air Force reservists who assist CAP leaders at the state and local levels.



## Conclusion

There are many strengths in CAP's missions and organizational structure. As a result, new members have unlimited opportunities to gain knowledge and experience across a wide spectrum of interests in an atmosphere of teamwork and mutual respect. They can become rated or certified in numerous specializations and can pursue opportunities to serve at a staff level. Members at every level have a true sense of loyalty and ownership in CAP. New CAP members can be proud to be part of an organization with such a rich heritage of national, state, and community service.