

THE EYES OF THE HOME SKIES

From emergency transportation and reconnaissance during hurricanes and floods, to inland search-and-rescue missions, to training young fliers, the Civil Air Patrol looks out for the homeland
By Peggy Howe

Known as “the minutemen” of World War II, they were volunteer, civilian aviators who patrolled and defended our nation’s borders while the military geared up for action overseas. Prior to the war’s outbreak, they organized among themselves, preparing their case and their airplanes to offer auxiliary services to the military. And on Dec. 1, 1941, a few days before Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, the civilian air defense became an official organization, the Civil Air Patrol.

One of the nation’s first CAP squadrons formed in Manteo, Dare County. Like their counterparts along the Eastern Seaboard and Gulf of Mexico, fliers from North Carolina scouted and chased German submarines, including several off the Outer Banks, that were harassing and attacking U.S. merchant ships. After the war, the civilian planes were credited with identifying 173 enemy submarines, attacking 57 and sinking three. The CAP fliers were more nimble and just as courageous as the military fighter pilots in these missions and were later recognized for the key role they played throughout the war. And many were women. By the end of the war, women made up 20 percent of the Civil Air Patrol.

As the civilian auxiliary of the U.S. Air Force, today’s CAP conducts nationwide programs involving nearly 62,000 cadets and senior members, including 2,900 from North and South Carolina associated with the North Carolina Wing, as state divisions are called. Nationally, CAP flies more than 4,500 aircraft, including about 4,000 member-owned planes. These volunteer fliers and support personnel perform more than 85 percent of the inland search-and-rescue missions assigned by the Air Force. Missions include disasters such as hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, earthquakes and volcanoes. CAP members save an average of 100 lives per year. When the World Trade Center twin towers were attacked on Sept. 11, 2001, CAP volunteers across the country sprang into action for such duties as transporting blood, monitoring airports, transporting government officials and manning state emergency operations centers. Since all commercial and private aircraft were grounded that day, CAP planes were the only non-military planes in the air.

Other CAP assignments include extra security for large gatherings such as the Olympics and the Super Bowl. More recently, as terror alert signals are elevated, CAP volunteers are helping with homeland defense as did the earliest sub chasers at Manteo.

At the first mention of any problem in North Carolina, as the State Emergency Response Team (SERT) convenes at state government’s Administration Building in Raleigh, CAP representatives are there, too. During Hurricane Isabel in September 2003, Lt. Col. Arthur Parker, a longtime CAP



A CAP cadet helps victims recover their belongings from tornado wreckage in Morgan County, Tenn.

member now serving as N.C. Wing communications repeater officer, was on duty at the Emergency Operations Center in Raleigh, directing radio transmissions all over the region. He was communicating with CAP aircrews while they transported officials who conducted damage assessment for eastern North Carolina’s Touchstone Energy cooperatives. CAP members from North and South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia flew over the region, covering the entire disaster area from Wilmington to past Elizabeth City.

Throughout the hurricane recovery, said Lt. Col. Aaron Harper, director of the North Carolina CAP division, pilots reported wires down, relayed information to the statewide N.C. Association of Electric Cooperatives, assessed property damage, reported stranded livestock and people, photographed the area and relayed vital information to rescue and repair crews.

CAP pilots offered valuable information during many earlier storms as well, including last year’s severe ice storm in the Piedmont, plus the memorable Hurricane Fran and especially Hurricane Floyd, with its subsequent extensive flooding.

During the 1993 Mississippi River flooding, members from North Carolina Wing participated in air reconnaissance of affected areas. In 1996, North Carolina Wing was involved with both hurricanes Bertha and Fran. During the Bertha mission, North Carolina CAP was the first to use, in an actual mission, a new digital imaging system for aerial photography. Images were immediately transmitted to a mission base where governmental emergency personnel got a first-hand look at the damage while the aircraft was still in the area.

CAP Tennessee Wing

Maj. Fred Eldredge, commanding officer of the Beaufort area squadron, recently described the CAP's work after Hurricane Floyd. "We did 'high bird' above the flood, then 'low and slow' along the beach to photograph the erosion, damage and new inlets that had formed. We [distributed] the photographs in real time by downloading them."

Cadet and education programs

The state's CAP division, led by Col. Harper, is an agency of the N.C. Department of Crime Control and Public Safety. In addition to disaster relief and many other volunteer activities, members attend regular practice sessions for upgrading skills in all three areas where CAP focuses its mission: Emergency Services, Cadet Programs and Aerospace Education.

In its cadet programs, CAP offers young people age 12-21 opportunities for educational and professional development, including everything from their first airplane ride to scholarships for flying, educational programs, even leading up to scholarships to the U.S. Air Force Academy. There are almost 27,000 cadets nationwide. Three cadets in North Carolina's Raleigh-Wake squadron have received 4-year Air Force ROTC scholarships. CAP offers introduction to virtually any career related to flying "from music to meteorology."

The Aerospace Education arm of CAP extends to both its members and the general public. CAP's national headquarters at Maxwell Air Force Base in Alabama provides materials for the educational program. CAP is active in local schools and colleges, supporting curricula in aerospace technology and related fields. The programs are now reaching down into the elementary grades with field trips, science fairs, art contests and model building, plus teacher recognition for participation. Each year CAP supports more than 100 college, university and

NASA workshops, reaching hundreds of thousands of educators across the country. Teachers are eligible to attend the annual National Congress on Aviation and Space Education. More recently, these educational activities have been extended to the growing home school population.

First in Flight

The Rev. (Lt.Col.) Royce Beacham has served with the North Carolina Wing for more than 50 years. His father and he were instrumental in forming the first CAP squadron in Manteo in December 1941. He has served as chaplain for several North Carolina CAP squadrons. But his family goes back even further in the annals of American flight. His grandfather, William Thomas Beacham, was part of the U.S. Lifesaving Service crew helping the Wright Brothers as they worked getting their aircraft off the ground a century ago at Kitty Hawk. Among the records of that event is a photograph of a small boy and his dog running alongside the Wright flyer as it taxied across the dunes. That five-year-old was Col. Beacham's father, who grew up to serve in the U.S. Coast Guard and saw combat in both World War I and II. Col. Beacham himself served in combat during World War II in the U.S. Navy.

During the December 2003 observance of the First Flight Centennial in Dare County, Col Beacham was among the CAP cadets and senior members who joined National Park Service rangers from all over the country to help with various duties, including greeting visitors, crowd control, visitor screening and security. While there, cadets, seniors and visitors had a first-hand demonstration when a live emergency locator transmitter (ELT) sounded, accidentally activated by a helicopter on the field. These transmitters are on aircraft and boats, and they emit a homing signal when activated. CAP missions often involve

continued on p. 28

Senior members of CAP's Northeast Region assisted in damage assessment and the transport of public officials after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

Gary Spector





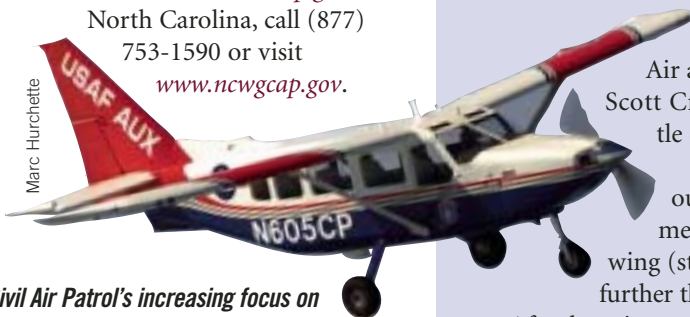
Above photos from left: Lt. Col. Arthur Parker, N.C. Wing, shows ham radio equipment linked to satellite networks worldwide. (Photo by Peggy Howe). North Carolina Wing Lt. Col. Linwood Barkley unloading supplies needed by the American Red Cross after Hurricane Isabel in Sept. 2003. (Photo by Lt. Col. Anthony Biondo Jr., N.C. Wing). Lt. Col. Royce Beacham, a founder of the Manteo squadron, conducts cadet programs and serves as chaplain at summer encampments at military bases. (Photo by Peggy Howe).

continued from p. 27

locating these ELTs. The ELT signal during the Centennial was located and turned off, said Lt. Col. Larry Ragland.

CAP's First Flight anniversary duty was led by Col. Ragland, a long-time CAP member, now serving as deputy director of NC Wing's Emergency Services. Another long-time CAP member is Brig. Gen. Dwight Wheless of Manteo, who as vice commander is the second-highest ranking officer of the Civil Air Patrol nationally.

The Civil Air Patrol welcomes new squadrons, cadets and senior members. For details, call 1-800-FLY-2338 or visit www.cap.gov. In North Carolina, call (877) 753-1590 or visit www.ncwgcap.gov.



Marc Hurchette

Civil Air Patrol's increasing focus on homeland security is evident in its recent purchase of this Gippisland GA8 Airvan. The Airvan offers more cabin room for observers and reconnaissance equipment.

My time with the Civil Air Patrol

While a senior member of the Civil Air Patrol for some years, I thoroughly enjoyed the diverse opportunities offered by CAP's local, state, national and even international programs. Among the highlights was IACE — the International Air Cadet Exchange — an annual summer program that acquaints CAP senior members and cadets from the U.S. with air cadet programs in other countries. Cadets from other countries also visit the United States programs. Begun in 1947, IACE now includes exchange programs in all parts of the free world.

Along with Capt. Gaye Findlay, a senior officer from Canada, my assignment was to lead 18 air cadets, approximately 17-18 years old, on a two-week tour of eastern Canada. Our group included girls from England, Ireland, Wales, France, Sweden and Holland.

Throughout the tour, we were guests of senior squadrons in Ottawa, Toronto, Montreal and the Niagara Falls area. Canadian senior and cadet members escorted our cadets as we toured military installations, government complexes and historic sites, and we enjoyed sightseeing and entertainment outings.

Since many of the visitors already were student pilots, activities included brief flights in varied airplanes as well as gliders.

A special treat in Toronto was observing the daily "tattoo," an elaborate musical presentation with drums, bugles and uniformed soldiers marching on parade grounds in front of government buildings.

For some, the IACE experience led to further careers. Some cadets and escorts formed long-lasting friendships, including me. One of our group, with her husband, attended the recent First Flight Centennial at Kitty Hawk and spent Christmas 2003 with us in Raleigh.

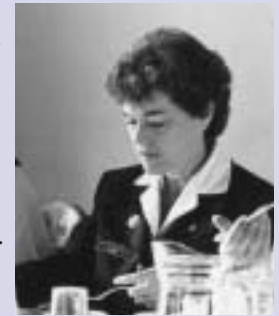
Another highlight is the annual National Congress on Aviation and Space Education, held in various convention sites throughout the U.S. The 2004 gathering is scheduled for Atlanta. The meeting, offered to educators nationwide, is designed to bring together all kinds of educators from across the country to learn from a variety of gifted speakers and motivational teachers.

Air and space celebrities regularly appear, including such notables as Scott Crossfield and Chuck Yeager, and often members of space shuttle crews.

Other programs include check rides for pilots as well as various seminars on pertinent topics. In addition to regular local meetings, members can attend various other gatherings, including wing (state) meetings, regional and national meetings, each designed to further their practice and training, as well as to interact with other groups.

After learning and practicing, CAP volunteers are on call for emergencies — from your neighborhood to the entire nation.

Former Civil Air Patrol member and flier Peggy Howe is a writer in Raleigh.



Peggy Howe attending the International Air Cadet Exchange in Canada, 1984.