

CAP'S CIVILIAN COMBAT PILOTS

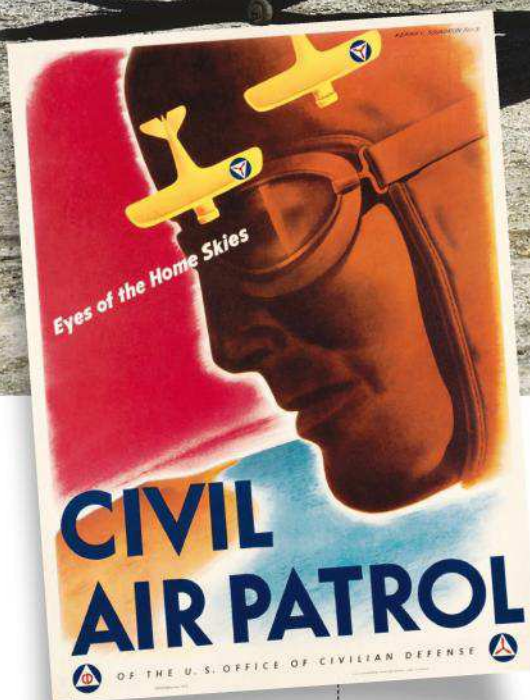
DURING THE EARLY STAGES OF WORLD WAR II, THE CIVIL AIR PATROL PLAYED A VITAL ROLE IN HELPING DEFEND AMERICAN MERCHANT SHIPS FROM MARAUDING U-BOATS BY DAVID T. ZABECKI



FLYING MINUTE MEN On July 11, 1942, Civil Air Patrol crewmen Wynant Farr and John Haggins drop a depth charge from their Grumman Widgeon on a surfacing German U-boat off the New Jersey coast, in *A Dangerous Game*, by Keith Ferris.



NATURAL DISASTERS ALWAYS PLACE HIGH DEMANDS ON THE NATION'S EMERGENCY SERVICES.



The 2017 hurricane season was particularly difficult, with Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria battering the southern United States and Puerto Rico in rapid succession.

For Harvey alone, more than 170 Civil Air Patrol volunteers from 19 states supported air operations in Texas, flying various disaster relief

missions, including transporting medical supplies and conducting aerial photoreconnaissance of key infrastructure sites and inland waterways. Last year, the nationwide CAP fleet amassed more than 100,000 flying hours.

The Civil Air Patrol came into being during the dark days immediately preceding America's entry into World War II. In 1941 there were more than 128,000 licensed private pilots in the U.S., operating some 25,000 light aircraft from 2,500 airfields. Many of those pilots, including aviation writer Gill Robb Wilson, worried that when America was finally drawn into the war, all civil aviation would be grounded for the duration, as had happened in Germany. They also thought that if properly organized, private aviation could be a valuable national

asset, relieving military fliers of some of the burden of liaison, light transportation and coastal and border reconnaissance work. With the backing of U.S. Army Air Corps chief General Henry "Hap" Arnold and the Civil Aeronautics Authority (CAA), Wilson was instrumental in establishing the New Jersey Civil Air Defense Services, the forerunner of CAP.

Other states established similar organizations on the New Jersey model, which in turn led to the initiative to form a national-level organization. On May 20, 1941, the federal government established the Office of Civil Defense, with former New York mayor Fiorello LaGuardia as its first director. Advocates for a national civilian air organization, including Wilson and publishers Thomas Beck and Guy Gannet, lost no time in petitioning LaGuardia with a plan for a Civil Air Patrol organized into 48 state wings as part of the Civil Defense office. LaGuardia, a former World War I bomber pilot himself, enthusiastically endorsed the plan, but he also knew that the support of the Air Corps (soon to be redesignated the U.S. Army Air Forces) was critical to its success. Arnold, in turn, established a board headed by Brig. Gen. George Stratemyer to evaluate the proposal. The board quickly recommended that the Army Air Forces

EYES IN THE SKIES

A CAP crewman hand-props a Stinson 105 prior to a patrol from Bar Harbor, Maine.

provide a team of officers to help set up and administer the new organization. LaGuardia signed the order creating the Civil Air Patrol on December 1, 1941—six days before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The AAF assigned Maj. Gen. John Curry as CAP's first national commander, with Wilson as his executive officer.

Immediately after Pearl Harbor, the government placed limited restrictions on private civilian flights along certain areas of the West Coast. Captain Earle Johnson, another CAP founder, was less than impressed with the aerial security measures for the country's interior, especially around airports and critical war industries. Taking off in his own private plane one night in early 1942, Johnson dropped sandbags onto the roofs of three war plants on the outskirts of Cleveland. Completely undetected, he notified the various plant managers the next morning that they had been "bombed." The CAA reacted immediately by grounding all private flights until far more comprehensive security measures could be implemented. These included background checks on all licensed pilots, guards at all airports and approved flight plans required for all flights. The new rules resulted in a huge influx into the ranks of CAP, which gave private pilots greater opportunities to fly under the auspices of an official U.S. government organization.

Although the Japanese attack initially caused federal authorities to focus on the West Coast, the first real threat emerged on the East and southeast coasts, as German U-boats started operating within a few hundred yards of the shoreline, often sinking merchantmen and tankers at the rate of two a day. The U.S. Navy was spread too thin to be everywhere at the same time along the 1,200-mile eastern sea frontier, from Halifax to the Florida Keys. Nor did the AAF have enough aircraft to screen the coast and provide adequate early warning to ships. The idea of using civilian pilots and their private aircraft for such a hazardous mission was a measure of desperation. It was a huge risk, but there was no viable alternative.

CAP was authorized to establish and conduct the Coastal Patrol Experimental Program on a 90-day trial basis. Gill Robb Wilson stepped down as CAP's national executive officer to assume the mission of organizing the Coastal Patrol. Officially established on March 5, 1942, it flew its first over-water combat patrol that same day from a base in Rehoboth, Del. The other bases in the trial program were in New Jersey and Florida. By September CAP was operating from 21 Coastal Patrol bases from Maine to the Texas-Mexico border. The bases were initially under the operational control of the Eastern Defense Command's I Bomber Command, but in October they were



THE IDEA OF USING CIVILIAN PILOTS AND THEIR PRIVATE AIRCRAFT FOR SUCH A HAZARDOUS MISSION WAS A MEASURE OF DESPERATION.



placed under the 25th and 26th wings of the AAF's Antisubmarine Command.

The initial flights were reconnaissance missions only, consisting of a pilot and an observer with a donated maritime radio. They operated as far as 150 miles from shore, and the crews' only over-water gear consisted of kapok life vests. The volunteer pilots received \$8 a day, the ground crewmen \$5. Volunteers ranged from garage mechanics to millionaire sportsmen, farm hands and even grandfathers.

Whenever a patrol spotted a U-boat, the crew broadcast its position to merchant ships in the area, as well as to the Navy and AAF. The CAP plane then stuck with the sub as long as possible to vector in any intercepting forces. The patrols also radioed in reports of tankers and merchant ships that had been hit, and the position of survivors in the water.

In May 1942, one patrol sighted a U-boat sitting on the surface. Not knowing the aircraft was unarmed, the crew executed a crash dive, but the sub hung up on a sandbar. The CAP pilot circled the sitting duck for more than half an hour, but the U-boat finally managed to work loose and get

MULTIPLE ROLES Top: Members of CAP Tow Target Unit No. 22 in Clinton, Md., show off their personalized target sleeve. Above: CAP nurses train in parachuting to isolated locations at Norwood, Mass., in July 1942.



GATHERING OF EAGLETS
CAP members and their families and aircraft assemble at Lansing, Mich., in 1942.



HONORED AIRMEN
President Franklin D. Roosevelt awards Air Medals to CAP crewmen Edmond Edwards (right) and Hugh Sharp (middle) while Director of Civilian Defense John Landis looks on.

away just before land-based bombers reached the target. Shortly after that, CAP planes started carrying bombs and depth charges slung from jury-rigged external racks.

CAP claimed its first U-boat kill on July 11, 1942, when Captain Johnny Haggins and Major Wynant Farr, flying a Grumman G-44 Widgeon armed with two depth charges, bombed a sub they had been shadowing for three hours, just as it came up to periscoping depth. The resulting oil slick and surface debris seemed to confirm the kill, and for

many years after the war that and one later claimed kill were credited to CAP. However, no corroborating evidence has been found in the extensive records the Kriegsmarine kept on all 1,154 of its commissioned U-boats. Those records indicate no U-boats missing off the East Coast during the period that the Coastal Patrol was active. Nor do the war diaries of the Navy's Eastern Sea Frontier and the Gulf Sea Frontier record any mention of CAP aircraft sinking a U-boat.

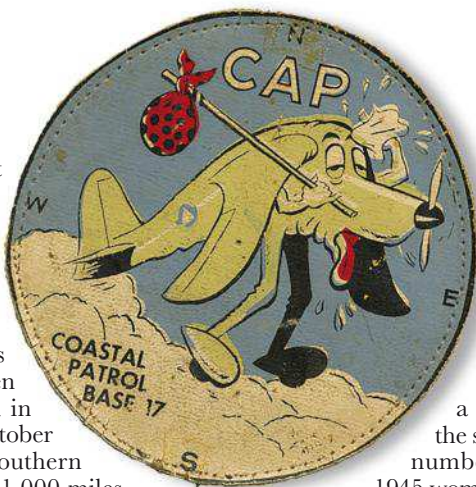
The very legality of the Coastal Patrol was highly dubious, of course. Despite wearing semi-military uniforms and having military rank titles, the CAP crews were officially civilians. Had any of them been shot down and captured, they would not have received prisoner of war status under the Geneva Conventions. The CAP members knew this, yet they continued to volunteer to fly the hazardous missions.

Coastal Patrol stood down on August 31, 1943, by which time both the Navy's and the AAF's anti-submarine forces had grown large enough to handle the mission. During the almost 18-month period, CAP had flown 86,685 over-water sorties, spotted and reported 91 merchant vessels and 363 survivors in distress, reported 173 U-boat positions and dropped 82 bombs on 57 of those subs. In the process, it lost 90 aircraft and 26 crew members. After the war, 824 Coastal Patrol pilots and observers received Air Medals, and Edmond Edwards and Hugh Sharp were each awarded a second Air Medal with V Device for valor for their rescue of a CAP pilot who had ditched at sea.

As the war progressed, CAP assumed addi-

tional missions to augment the AAF. Between August 1942 and August 1944, the Courier Service transported some 3.5 million pounds of cargo for the First, Second and Fourth air forces, flying combined daily routes spanning 16,380 miles. Seven Courier Service pilots died in the line of duty. Between October 1942 and April 1944, the Southern Liaison Patrol screened the 1,000 miles along the Rio Grande from Brownsville, Texas, to Douglas, Ariz., to prevent illegal border crossings. The patrol flew 4,720 missions, losing 13 aircraft and suffering two crew fatalities. For three years CAP's Target Towing Service supported search-light target tracking and live-fire training for both aerial gunnery and anti-aircraft fire. The cost was 25 aircraft and seven pilots killed.

Search and rescue was the wartime mission that still defines CAP to this day. CAP aircrews flew more than 25,000 hours of SAR missions during the war. With their ability to fly low and slow, and their knowledge of the local terrain, they were far more efficient at such missions than military pilots. In a single week of February 1945 alone, CAP pilots located the wreckage of seven military aircraft. Once a wreck was found, CAP often sent ground rescue teams to the location to secure the crash site and search for survivors. In the Florida wing, which was commanded by Zack



Mosely, creator of the classic aviation comic strip *The Adventures of Smilin' Jack*, ground teams pioneered the use of swamp buggies for rescue missions in the marshy Everglades.

The Civil Air Patrol was a co-ed organization from the start, and attracted a large number of women pilots. By 1945 women accounted for some 20 percent of CAP's membership. More than half the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs) started out in CAP.

On October 1, 1942, the Cadet Program was instituted for boys and girls between the ages of 15 and 17. Within less than a year, there were more than 20,000 young people in the program. The CAP cadets received training in first aid, Morse code, meteorology, navigation, aircraft construction and other basic ground school subjects. Many went on to qualify for private pilot licenses. As the war progressed, the CAP Cadet Program became a screening point and an entry path for the AAF's Aviation Cadet program.

Soon after the Coastal Patrol was up and running, Earle Johnson (by then an AAF major) replaced Currey as CAP's national commander, remaining in that role until February 1947. On April 23, 1943, a presidential executive order transferred jurisdiction for the Civil Air Patrol

SEARCH AND RESCUE WAS THE WARTIME MISSION THAT STILL DEFINES THE CIVIL AIR PATROL TO THIS DAY.

ESPRIT DÉCOR The squadron emblem of Coastal Patrol Base 17 (above) appeared on CAP aircraft (below) operating from Suffolk County Army Air Field in Riverhead, N.Y.



OPPOSITE TOP & RIGHT: CAP NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS; OPPOSITE BOTTOM: AP PHOTO/GEORGE R. SKADDING; ABOVE RIGHT: HISTORIC NET ARCHIVE

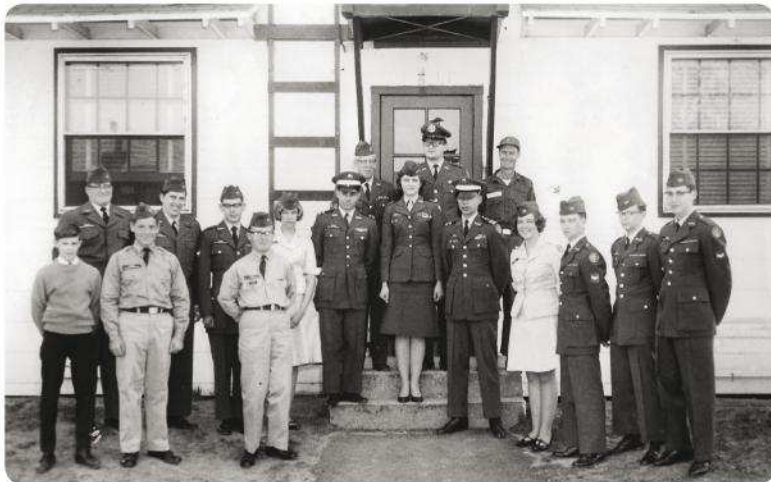
CAP CADETS Members of the Cadet Squadron at Westover Air Force Base in Massachusetts in 1964 include author David T. Zabecki (in front of steps).

from the Office of Civilian Defense to the War Department, and CAP became an auxiliary of the Army Air Forces. That December the AAF loaned 288 Piper L-4 Grasshoppers to CAP for use in the Aviation Cadet recruiting program. By the end of 1944, CAP had given more than 78,000 prospective recruits orientation flights and had actually recruited an oversupply of aviation cadets.

As World War II ended, it seemed to many that CAP's raison d'être ended with it. Although most of the AAF's senior officers were enthusiastic supporters, the sharp budget reductions that started

in 1946 brought increasing pressure on the military's ability to fund CAP. Concerned about the organization's future, General Arnold convened a conference of the 48 wing commanders to plan a path forward. They decided to incorporate CAP as an organization dedicated to aviation education and civilian emergency services.

On July 1, 1946, Congress passed Public Law 476, incorporating CAP as a nonprofit organization "solely of a benevolent character." CAP members would never again participate in direct combat operations, and the organization intended to operate without the help of the Army Air Forces. But after the U.S. Air Force was established as a separate service in 1947, CAP and USAF officials started meeting to reevaluate their future relationship. On May 26, 1948, Congress passed Public Law 557, establishing CAP as the official civilian auxiliary of the Air Force.



Headquartered at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Ala., the Civil Air Patrol today operates under the USAF's Air Education and Training Command. It currently has 33,500 senior members and 24,500 cadets, and maintains a fleet of 560 light aircraft. In times of emergency, it can also draw from its members' 4,300 privately owned aircraft. Although civilians in every legal sense, CAP members wear modified USAF uniforms with distinctive CAP insignia, and are organized along military lines.



NEXT GENERATION
CAP cadets learn the fundamentals of air navigation and map reading in 1956.



SKYHAWK LINEUP

Cessna 172s, part of CAP's 560-aircraft fleet, await their next cadet training flights at Coles County Memorial Airport near Mattoon, Ill.

CAP's three primary missions are emergency services, aerospace education and the cadet programs. Today CAP flies 85 percent of all inland search-and-rescue missions under the operational control of the Air Force Rescue Coordination Center at Tyndall Air Force Base in Florida. CAP members typically save the lives of 75 to 100 people a year. CAP also has formal operating agreements with many of the nation's leading disaster relief and humanitarian agencies, including the FAA, National Transportation Safety Board, U.S. Coast Guard, Federal Emergency Management Agency and the American Red Cross. Since 1986, CAP aircrews have also flown counter-drug missions under the operational control of the Air Force and the U.S. Customs Service.

Cadet membership today is open to youths between the ages of 12 and 18. The Cadet Program is considered a parallel program to the high school Air Force Junior ROTC. CAP cadets who earn the Mitchell Award and achieve the rank of cadet 2nd lieutenant are eligible to enlist in the Air Force as airmen first class (E-3). Many cadets go on to either the U.S. Air Force Academy or to Senior ROTC in college.

On May 30, 2014, Congress awarded the Congressional Gold Medal, its highest civilian honor, to the World War II members of the Civil Air Patrol. According to Public Law 113-108: "The CAP's wartime service was highly unusual and extraordinary, due to the unpaid civilian status of its members, the use of privately owned aircraft



ASSESSING DAMAGE

An aerial photo taken by members of CAP's Texas Wing shows flooding in Wharton from the Colorado River in the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey.

and personal funds by many of its members, the myriad humanitarian and national missions flown for the Nation, and the fact that for 18 months, during a time of great need for the United States, the CAP flew combat-related missions in support of military operations off the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico coasts." †

Retired U.S. Army Maj. Gen. David T. Zabecki is History.Net's chief military historian. From 1962 to 1965, he was a CAP cadet at Westover Air Force Base in Massachusetts. Further reading: Minutemen of the Air, by Carroll V. Glines and Gene Gurney; and America's Homefront Air War, by Roger Thiel.

OPPOSITE: (TOP) COURTESY OF DAVID T. ZABECKI; (BOTTOM) JACK FLETCHER/NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC GETTY IMAGES; ABOVE & RIGHT: CAP NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS