

Civil Air Patrol

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Gold Medal Rush

Salute To World War II-Era

Volunteers Begins On Capitol Hill

The "Battle" for the Congressional Gold Medal

By Col. John Swain



Photo courtesy of CAP Historical Foundation

The dark, stormy days of March 1942 described not only the weather but also the dire situation facing the nation. America was at war, and its first major battle was raging within sight of thousands on shore as German submarines attacked U.S. shipping close in along the East Coast. There were too few military aircraft and ships available to effectively respond, as cargo ships were being sunk at an alarming rate. It was so bad

The Coastal Patrol began in 1942 as a 90-day experiment. This year, Civil Air Patrol celebrates its 70th year of service to America.

Gen. George Marshall, U.S. Army chief of staff, noted the shipping losses off the Atlantic Coast and in the Caribbean “now threaten our entire war effort.”

It was at this moment when Civil Air Patrol first came to the aid of its country. Urged on by oil companies, whose tankers were routinely being sunk, the military approved assistance from CAP as a 90-day experiment, beginning in March. Volunteer civilian pilots, using their own aircraft, equipment and often money, began

patrolling the coastal waters to help stop the carnage. Their job was to report submarines to the military authorities and to drive them underwater, where they would be forced to slow down and use their limited battery power to operate. CAP aircrews and support personnel did their job very well.

From the beginning, so many vulnerable submarines were spotted operating on the surface that the decision was soon

made to arm CAP’s light aircraft with small bombs and its larger aircraft with 325-pound depth charges. These hazardous combat missions were highly unusual because they involved civilians flying 100 miles or more from shore in all kinds of weather, but they continued for a year and a half until the military took over all patrol duties over water. In the end, CAP sank two submarines and attacked another 57. Twenty-six lives and 90 aircraft were lost by CAP, known then as the Coastal Patrol, which helped force the German Navy further offshore to avoid detection — a significant result from a brand-new civilian organization.

During this time, CAP also began youth and

aviation education programs and established nationwide operations in support of state and federal home-front war efforts. These included border patrol, target towing, forest fire spotting, search and rescue, disaster relief and the emergency transport of people and parts. Many of these missions were dangerous, sometimes flown in weather that grounded the military. As an example, seven pilots died and 23 aircraft were lost towing targets to train military anti-



Restored World War II CAP Stinson 10 on display at the Reading World War II Weekend air show.

Photo by Col. John Swain, CAP National Headquarters

aircraft gunners and fighter pilots. One CAP pilot found shell fragments in his parachute pack. Behind all of these missions were radio operators, mechanics and administrators who worked diligently to ensure operations were well-organized and as safe as possible.

Records do not completely reflect all of the flight hours and efforts, but, by war’s end, CAP had flown more than 750,000 hours with a loss of only 64 personnel and 150 aircraft. But that is not the full story, as the youth and aviation education programs that were started helped recruit young men and women for military service. CAP’s wartime organization, missions and programs had set the stage for the modern Civil Air

Patrol that would emerge as the auxiliary of the new U.S. Air Force.

Fast-forward to the winter of 2011, when a more peaceful “battle” is under way to award CAP’s World War II members the Congressional Gold Medal for their outstanding and unusual public service. It is the highest honor the U.S. Congress can bestow on an individual or group. Stephen Stathis, in a study for the Congressional Research Service, explained that “through this venerable tradition — the occasional commissioning of individually struck gold medals in its name — Congress has expressed public gratitude on behalf of the nation for distinguished contributions for more than two centuries.” It is also how Congress has “dramatized the virtues of patriotism and perpetuated the remembrance of great events.” The service of CAP’s World War II members clearly embodies all of these attributes. CAP made a distinguished contribution to the nation during World War II, its members truly showed great patriotism and it is important America knows about and remembers this.

The gold medal dates to March 1776, before the nation had declared its independence, when the Continental Congress awarded Gen. George Washington the first gold medal for his leadership in driving British troops out of Boston. Since then the medal has been awarded more than 300 times to individuals such as Lt. Gen. Ira Eaker, Winston Churchill, Robert Frost and the Wright brothers, as well as to such groups as the American Red Cross, the Tuskegee Airmen and the Women Airforce Service Pilots.

If awarded to CAP, a special gold medal would be designed honoring those who served. One medal would be struck and presented formally in the U.S. Capitol to CAP with a ceremony involving the leadership of the U.S. House of Representatives, U.S. Senate, executive branch and Department of Defense, as well as CAP’s leadership and those World War II members and families who could attend. The medal would be given to the Smithsonian Institution for safekeeping, though it could be loaned to CAP for display purposes and special

events. Duplicate bronze medals would be struck and purchased for members (or their families) who can be identified. CAP members and the public also would be able to buy replica medals.

Your help is essential to make this happen and now is the time, before it is too late. Maj. Jim Shaw, CAP’s national curator and head of the CAP Historical Foundation, knows well how important this is to recognize the outstanding contributions made by CAP members. “Our veterans served America with a high sense of duty, honor and courage to protect our



Lt. Col. Sean Neal of the New York Wing poses with his restored Fairchild 24R World War II Coastal Patrol aircraft.

Photo by Col. John Swain, CAP National Headquarters



Photo courtesy of CAP Historical Foundation

Civil Air Patrol flew 24 million miles over water during World War II, spotted 173 subs, attacked 57, damaged 17 and sank two. CAP also located survivors of 363 ships, reported 91 vessels in distress and found 17 floating mines.

freedoms. They displayed true volunteer spirit and heroic effort throughout the American heartland when their country needed them the most.”

Present-day CAP members, in addition to World War II CAP members, their families and friends, all need to contact their senators and representatives to request they co-sponsor legislation that would make this quest a reality. It is important that as many CAP members as possible do this to get the attention of every senator and representative in Congress.

One person who has joined the “battle” for co-sponsors is Jean McLaughlin, wife of 1st Lt. Francis “Mac” McLaughlin. Her husband joined CAP in April 1942 and was quickly stationed at Coastal Patrol Base 5 in Daytona Beach, Fla. While there, he and another member, Albert Crabtree, were forced to ditch their

aircraft in the rough waters of the Atlantic Ocean, where they floated for two hours until the Coast Guard rescued them. After the Coastal Patrol ended, Mac McLaughlin finished out the war flying with the 22nd Tow Target Squadron in Massachusetts. Both missions were highly dangerous, and he is a true CAP hero for his service.

Jean McLaughlin, who is now caring for her ailing husband, is asking family and friends to help find co-sponsors for the gold medal legislation. She recently wrote, “I’m really on a mission — I have spent the past week or so writing, e-mailing and phoning relatives, friends and acquaintances all over the good old USA. I found it best to use our Christmas card list along with other means to contact each and everyone I know to help with getting the bill through the Senate and House.

Needless to say, I'm excited about this!"

We all need to be excited about this, too. Just as in 1942, everyone's help is needed to win this battle. CAP's World War II members have never received the recognition or thanks that they truly deserve. While some were awarded medals, most were not recognized for their service. Veterans' benefits were promised but never materialized. CAP hopes to rectify this by ensuring the gold medal is awarded in time for CAP's 70th anniversary celebration in December.



President Franklin D. Roosevelt presents the first two Air Medals ever awarded by the U.S. to CAP subchasers Maj. Hugh R. Sharp, center, and 1st Lt. Edmund "Eddie" Edwards, right. Looking on is James M. Landis, wartime chief of the Office of Civilian Defense. By the end of World War II, CAP members had received 800 Air Medals.

Here is what you can do:

- First, write, e-mail, visit or call your congressional delegation (go to www.senate.gov and www.house.gov to find contact information for your two senators and one representative). Ask them to sign on as co-sponsors to the two bills that will be introduced in the new 112th Congress sometime in January 2011. These bills are identical to S. 3237 and H.R. 5859, which were introduced in 2010 but did not gain enough co-sponsors before the session ended; new bill numbers will be assigned for 2011. You will need to know the new bill numbers when asking your congressional delegates to be co-sponsors, so in early January go to www.capmembers.com/goldmedal for up-to-date information that includes the bill numbers plus progress to date in gaining co-sponsors, important tips and suggestions, sample letters and support

materials. Continue to maintain contact with your legislators until you get a firm answer they are, indeed, co-sponsors.

- Second, if possible, help identify any World War II CAP members in your local area or wing who are still alive or the families of those who are deceased. Wing historians and others are asked to help search CAP and public records to identify CAP members who were at least 18 years old who served between Dec. 7, 1941, and Aug. 15, 1945. If you or someone you know is eligible, you can upload their information into the World War II Congressional Gold Medal form at www.capmembers.com/goldmedal, or send it to Holley Dunigan at HDunigan@capnhq.gov. ▲

Tips and Guidance on Contacting Federal Legislators

- Two new bills for the Congressional Gold Medal will be introduced sometime in January. Since this is a new Congress (the 112th), each will have a new bill number assigned. The bills introduced last year (Senate S. 3237 and House H.R. 5859) did not gain enough co-sponsors before the end of the 111th Congress. The co-sponsors of the previous bills will be asked by CAP to co-sponsor the new legislation.
- Obtaining co-sponsors is critical to CAP's success. Before the relevant committees will take action on either bill, two-thirds of the House (290 representatives) and Senate (67 senators) must co-sponsor their respective bills. *Nothing will happen without the necessary number of co-sponsors signing onto the bills!*
- There are several ways to contact your congressional representatives. You can write a letter to them or visit their office in Washington, D.C., or in their state. You can also send an e-mail to their official websites or telephone to make your views known. Go to www.senate.gov and www.house.gov to find contact information for your senators and representative.
- When contacting your congressional delegates, remember to ask for the name and telephone number of anyone you talk to or communicate with. You need to be prepared to follow up with them until you get a direct answer as to whether your representative will co-sponsor the legislation. Follow-up is critical, given the high volume of letters and e-mails congressional offices receive — a million e-mails annually are not unusual for a typical senator. *Don't let your request get lost or ignored!*
- If the answer you receive is they are waiting for a committee to take action or the bill to come to the floor of the House or Senate before considering how they will vote on the bill, this is not helpful. This kind of response is often hidden in a sentence such as "I will monitor the situation with your views in mind" or "I will consider voting for the legislation after it reaches the floor." This means either they did not understand your request, or they do not plan to co-sponsor the legislation but won't tell you directly. If you receive such a reply, contact the congressional office again to explain how important it is the representative or senator actually co-sponsors the legislation.
- Go to www.capmembers.com/goldmedal to get the bill numbers plus progress to date in gaining co-sponsors. Sample letters and other support materials are also provided.



Photos by Col. John Swain, CAP National Headquarters

Mid-Atlantic Air Museum's World War II Fairchild F-24G, on left, and on right, a restored World War II CAP Stinson 10 on display at the Reading World War II Weekend air show.

World War II CAP Facts

- Civil Air Patrol, then known as the Coastal Patrol, was established just six days before the start of the war under the Office of Civil Defense.
- During the war, CAP was transferred to the Army, flying missions for both the U.S. Army and U.S. Navy.
- Volunteer members of CAP, civilian men and women, ranged in age from 18 to 81.
- Coastal Patrol operations were generally conducted with two aircraft typically outfitted with minimal equipment, often only a compass for navigation and a single radio.
 - o Personal emergency equipment was lacking, particularly in the beginning, when inner tubes and duck hunters' kapok vests were used as flotation devices.
 - o CAP operations were conducted in bad weather when the military was often unable to fly and in all seasons, including winter, when ditching an aircraft would likely mean certain death.
 - o The Coastal Patrol's "Duck Club," an unofficial organization consisting of members who had made a forced water landing and survived, numbered 111 by war's end.
 - o The very first Air Medals of World War II were presented personally by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to two CAP pilots who, under extraordinary conditions, rescued a CAP member who had ditched in the ocean on a bitterly cold winter day.
 - o In addition to the two submarines sunk and 57 attacked, CAP flew 24 million miles to patrol the coast, reporting 173 submarines and 17 floating mines, summoning help for 91 ships in distress and finding 325 attack survivors. CAP also flew 5,684 escort protection missions.
- CAP established itself as a vital wartime home front service by conducting a wide range of other missions. While records are limited, its scope can be seen in the following examples:
 - o Southern border patrol operations along 1,000 miles of border involved more than 30,000 flying hours, 7,000 reports, discovery of an enemy radio station and apprehension of two enemy agents.
 - o Target towing missions using a cloth target towed behind the aircraft totaled 46,000 hours over a three-year period.
 - o Colorado-based courier pilots made 100 scheduled flights a day over 50 routes, carrying 3.5 million pounds of cargo to military bases in 17 states.
 - o CAP pilots in one state flew 790 hours on forest fire patrol missions and reported 576 fires to authorities during a single year.
 - o During one week CAP units found seven missing Army and Navy pilots. Overall, search and rescue units flew more than 24,000 hours, using, in addition to aircraft, horse-mounted teams, ski teams, parachute units and airboats in the Florida swamps to aid in rescue operations.
 - o Using loaned military L-4 Piper Cubs, CAP flew 78,000 potential aviation cadets on orientation flights totaling 41,000 hours in 1944 alone.