BACKGROUNDER
2024

CIVIL AIR PATROL
U.S. AIR FORCE AUXILIARY



Civil Air Patrol's 5,615 aircrew members are deployed after natural disasters to capture high-definition imagery and video from CAP's fleet of aircraft and small Unmanned Aircraft Systems. The digital visual assets are used by FEMA and other agencies to assess the damage, as pictured here in North Carolina after the landfall of Hurricane Helene.

Who We Are and What We Do

Civil Air Patrol is a unique public service organization chartered by Congress that functions both as a nonprofit and as an auxiliary of the U.S. Air Force. Under its charter and public laws, CAP performs a variety of emergency and operational missions on demand for the federal government.

Additionally, CAP offers youth programs and provides support to schools and students in thousands of communities. Every state, along with Puerto Rico and Washington, D.C., has a CAP wing with multiple local units, known as squadrons. These squadrons respond to state and local emergencies throughout the year and are an integral part of their communities.

More than 69,000 volunteers nationwide lend their expertise and time to help serve communities, save lives, and shape futures through leadership development, aerospace education, and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) curricula developed for and by CAP.

Why Civil Air Patrol?

In 1942, CAP began tracking enemy submarines along the coastline from Maine to Texas to support the war effort at home. For 18 months civilian volunteers flew their own aircraft, reporting German submarine locations to the military, escorting convoys, and helping locate survivors of enemy attacks on shipping. CAP's efforts helped push the submarine threat far away from coastal shipping.

At the same time CAP started to fly search and rescue missions and train pilots, including women and African Americans. After the war, CAP continued its national and state efforts in a noncombatant capacity.

Helping the Nation and States

Civil Air Patrol volunteers conduct a wide range of aviation missions with a fleet of 544 aircraft (the world's largest single-engine fleet), 1,114 vehicles, 3,417 small Unmanned Aircraft Systems, and a nationwide network of more than 15,000 radios. CAP has also developed unique lifesaving software technology to make search and rescue operations faster and more efficient for both air and ground searches. Last year, CAP flew 102,642 hours and was credited with saving 34 lives.

During 2024, Civil Air Patrol's membership continued to increase, topping 69,000 youth and adult members by year's end. Operation Pulse Lift, a humanitarian mission that intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic, reached its goal of 42,000 total units of blood collected over a five-year period in support of the American Red Cross. This lifesaving mission includes hosting blood collection centers around the country and, in emergency cases, flying lifesaving blood to areas where demand exceeds local supply.

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Civil Air Patrol offers programs that take interested and qualified cadets from orientation flights to flight academies through private pilot training. This diverse corps of cadets attended the New Jersey Wing Falcon Flight Academy, where they earned their pre-solo and solo badges.

CAP's flight operations, particularly those assigned by First Air Force and the Federal Emergency Management Agency, include search and rescue, air intercept training, disaster imagery and video, low-level route surveys, U.S. Navy vessel escorts, national communications, and other missions. At the state level, CAP tracks wildlife, patrols rivers and bays for people in distress, identifies threatening ice conditions in winter, and more. These missions typically cost about $180 an hour, while military aircraft can cost thousands of dollars hourly.

Shaping Young Lives

CAP's youth program impacts more than 32,000 cadets in local communities nationwide.

CAP provides youth an opportunity to become responsible and confident leaders and to explore aerospace and other careers through weekly meetings, summer encampments, special activities such as worldwide youth exchanges, flight training, and internships across the nation.

In more rural communities and states CAP youth programs are particularly valued because of the absence of other quality opportunities.

Strengthening Education

Civil Air Patrol's aerospace education program supports community schools, teachers, students, homeschooled youth, and CAP cadets through a variety of programs, including curricula for K-12 classes and study guides, textbooks, and special project kits that address aviation, space, cyber, and STEM.

Special programs range from recognizing outstanding educators to providing teachers an opportunity to see how scientific principles work while riding in a CAP aircraft.

What We Need

Civil Air Patrol is an organization of national interest to Congress that serves nearly all districts in every state as well as Puerto Rico and Washington, D.C. It is important for members of Congress to be knowledgeable about its operations and programs and connection with the Air Force as a Total Force partner. Our volunteer professionals and exceptional youth reflect a cross-section of communities and states.

CAP annually reports to Congress, as required by law. This is our opportunity to inform and educate through in-person meetings and delivery of our Report to Congress. This year, we are conducting a hybrid campaign with in-person meetings Feb. 13 on Capitol Hill and virtual meetings from Feb. 10-March 14.

CAP is funded in the annual Defense Appropriations bill and returns nearly $4 for every dollar spent. Last year, CAP programs saved the nation $281 million.

CAP depends on members of Congress who want to help by informing the defense committees of their support for CAP's budget. Typically, this is done through either an appropriations request or a letter of support to the defense appropriations and authorization committees.