

# **THE BIRTH AND GROWTH OF SOUTH DAKOTA WING OF THE CIVIL AIR PATROL**

By Col. Lester W. Snyder, Jr., CAP

In order to explain the origin of the Civil Air Patrol and how it developed in South Dakota, we need to think back to 1941 and the months just prior to the United States involvement in World War II. The international situation was getting extremely tense. The German "war machine" seemed unstoppable. Under that perceived threat many Americans were considering what should be done to minimize any danger to the United States. Many in the aviation community were convinced that the nation's 25,000 civilian aircraft could in some way, be of help to the hopelessly undermanned Army Air Forces. Thus it was that the Civil Air Patrol was born of the desire of patriotic civilians who believed that a civil air organization was needed to support the United States.

One of those patriotic civilians was a man named Gill Robb Wilson, an aviation writer for the New York Herald Tribune, who vividly remembered an experience he had in Bavaria in 1936. He had been researching a story on German civil aviation, and was attending an official party. In a conversation with a Nazi officer, the officer made the remark, "Your East Coast is the best submarine hunting ground in the world". Supposedly he was only reminiscing about World War I, but Wilson realized that what the Nazi had said was still true, and they both knew it.

## **THE BEGINNING**

Coincidentally Gill Robb Wilson also had been designated the State Director of Aviation in New Jersey. In that capacity he was able to convince the Governor to authorize the organization of the New Jersey Air Defense Services. Mr. Wilson was not completely satisfied with that, however. He felt strongly that a state organization really was not adequate, so he enlisted the help of two newspaper publishers (Guy P. Gannet and Thomas H. Beck) in order to acquire more influence. Through them he was able to gain the confidence of Gen. Henry "Hap" Arnold, Chief of the Army Air Forces, and a man named Fiorello Laguardia. The latter was the Head of the recently formed Office of Civil Defense. Mr. Laguardia was sufficiently convinced of

the need for a civil air organization to support the United States, and he issued a formal Order on December 1, 1941, creating the Civil Air Patrol (CAP), under the Office of Civil Defense. Thus we acquired the insignia containing a white circle with an inscribed triangle.

Of course, leaders were needed for the new organization. For that reason, the first order of business was to assign Wing (State) Commanders. That act was accomplished in all 48 states on December 1, 1941, with the issue of the Order. South Dakota was no exception, and the first commander of Wing 77 was a newspaperman by the name of Thomas B. Roberts, Jr., who lived in Pierre, S.D. (On May 30, 1955, the Wing 77 designation was changed to Wing 40000, and in 1999 it again was changed, to Wing SDOOO.), Subsequently eight Area Group Commanders also were assigned. They were Clyde Ice, Spearfish; Floyd Barlow, Rapid City; Franklin Hyde, Pierre; Ken Neville, Huron; Dwight Campbell, Aberdeen; Ralph Hubbard, Watertown; Cecil Shuoe, Brookings; and Knapp Brown, Sioux Falls. The Area Group Commanders immediately began the task of trying to sign up new members. Verne Kraemer, Nemo, S.D., was one of the first, joining on December 3, 1941. Fortuitously, this activity was occurring just prior to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, on December 7, 1941, which precipitated the United States entry into World War II.

The January 7, 1942, issue of the Rapid City Journal carried the following description of the new organization. "The Civil Air Patrol is a branch of the Office of Civil Defense, organized on a nationwide basis for cooperation with the Army, Navy, and Civil Aeronautics Authority in mobilizing small planes for war work, and in South Dakota to handle other Civilian Defense activity." The earliest physical evidence of CAP in South Dakota that has been found, is a letter dated January 12, 1942. That letter has a Spearfish letterhead and was signed by Clyde W. Ice, Group Commander, Civil Air Patrol for South Dakota. Clyde Ice was a well-known aviation pioneer in the area.

## THE COASTAL PATROL

Gill Robb Wilson's fears had become reality, for at the beginning of 1942 the U.S. Navy was stretched extremely thin. Soon German submarines were sinking 50 large ships per month along our East Coast alone. Of course, to avoid panic that fact was not publicized. Determined to make a difference, members of the CAP activated Coastal Patrol Base #1 at Atlantic City, N.J., on February 28, 1942. The operation was strictly volunteer; it was completely funded from the members' own resources with no assistance from the government. The value of the operation was immediately evident, and consequently, the CAP was allowed to establish a Coastal Patrol, which they did officially on March 5, 1942. The operation grew from Base #1 to 21 bases along the East and Gulf Coasts. The Coastal Patrol was a very successful activity. It operated for 18 months, during which time its members flew cover for almost 6,000 convoys for the U.S. Navy, aided 91 ships in distress and 865 shipwreck survivors. The members also located 17 floating mines, sighted and reported 173 submarines, hit 10 with bombs, and is even credited with sinking at

least one.

You may wonder what South Dakota had to do with the Coastal Patrol, if anything? Well, some members from South Dakota went to the East Coast to take part in the operation. As of 2010, one of those members, Verne Kraemer, is living in Oeadwood, here in South Dakota. There were many members who took part in other CAP activities, or took an active part in other on-going wartime projects. One CAP project in the Black Hills area was rather unique. Members organized coyote hunts. They sold the pelts, and the money was used to help finance the Coastal Patrol, because its members were experiencing many delays in receiving government assistance.

## THE BORDER PATROL

It should be mentioned that there was a Border Patrol as well as a Coastal Patrol, but apparently there was not any South Dakota involvement in that activity. The Border Patrol, also was operated by the CAP, from July 1942 to April 1944. The members operating in that activity were able to detect a few saboteurs, and also managed to discover a spy radio station. Other activities which were performed by the CAP for the military included Target Towing and Searchlight Tracking, both of which could be hazardous to one's health. Target sleeves were towed by CAP aircraft to provide gunnery practice for the artillery. For the CAP pilots, the tow cables on the sleeves never seemed to be long enough. Also, CAP pilots flew missions to give practice to searchlight crews. The pilots of those planes learned quickly that a searchlight, viewed inadvertently, could blind a pilot for a considerable length of time.

## THE COURIER SERVICE IN SOUTH DAKOTA

There was still a different wartime activity for CAP pilots. In those early days of the War, the Army Air Corps was having difficulty performing just its basic functions. It was critically short of both military pilots and aircraft, and found itself desperately in need of a means to rapidly transport critical items between Bases. To fill that need, a CAP Courier Service was organized under the Second Air Force. One of the several locations that units operated from, was in South Dakota. CAP pilots started flying courier routes out of the Rapid City Army Air Base on November 2, 1942. The routes that were flown were triangular, and the first was to subordinate Bases in Pierre, SO, and Ainsworth, NE. With their low horsepower aircraft, the total route could not easily be completed in one day. A pilot might fly to Pierre, deliver his cargo, then go on to Ainsworth and stay the night. He then would return to Rapid City the following day. Another pilot might start at the same time as the first one, and fly the route in reverse order, spending the night in Pierre. One of the pilots met his future wife during a stopover at Pierre. When they remained overnight at satellite Bases, the pilots stayed at the BOQ's, ate at the mess halls, and were welcomed at Officers Clubs. They had high praise for the way they were treated by military personnel.

Later other routes were added for the Rapid City unit. One was to Alliance, NE, and Scottsbluff, NE. Another was to Cheyenne, WY, and Casper, WY. When the pilots returned to Rapid City, most often they picked up another load, passably the next day, and continued to the next destination. The cargo that the Courier Service transported was quite varied, and might include: rifles, parachutes, high priority mail, emergency parts, instruments and even Base payrolls. Most likely because of the latter, all the pilots were issued 45 caliber pistols and had to qualify on the firing range. In some cases, a part of the cargo might be picked up at the delivery point by courier pilots from other Wings, in a relay. There evidently were two other satellite Bases in South Dakota. There is evidence that one was located at Watertown and another at Mitchell, but they evidently were serviced by pilots from another unit, probably one at the Sioux City Army Air Field, in Iowa, or possibly one in Omaha.

## THE COURIER SERVICE PERSONNEL

Most of those who joined the CAP were pilots who had been greatly disappointed when, six days after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, all small aircraft were grounded. Most of those pilots were too old for military service or were 4-F in the draft categories. However, they wanted to fly, and as with most civilians at that time, they especially wanted to do something for the war effort. In the South Dakota Courier unit there were only seven regular pilots, who had their personal airplanes. However, there were four other members in the unit: two "alternate" pilots, a mechanic, and a dispatcher. The regular pilots were John Moodie, Ed Anderson, Carl Baker, Jack Davis, Chuck Keown, Max Kuehn, and Martin Schroeder. The two alternate pilots, who actually flew a great deal, but did not have their own planes, were Cecil Urban and Ross Wiehe. Leo Weber was the mechanic and Roger L'Esperance was the dispatcher. Each individual received some pay for his services but the regular pilots received much better compensation for the use of their planes. To qualify for the Courier Service, the pilots were required to have at least 150 hours of cross-country flying time. None of them were instrument-rated, which makes it seem even more miraculous that they flew almost every day. They would even fly in weather when the Army Air Forces would not launch their B-17s. They would take off with ceilings as low as 150 feet. By 1943 they were on a schedule of seven routes per day, and their completion rate was phenomenal. In most months it was 100 percent, and they kept up that pace for about 14 months.

The Rapid City unit pilots flew out of what was the Rapid City Municipal Airport. At that time the airport was adjacent to the southwest side of the Rapid City Army Air Base, which eventually became Ellsworth Air Force Base. The Municipal Airport had a paved runway and the Inland Airline hanger, which the CAP was allowed to use. Inland Airline was absorbed later by Western Airlines. The hanger was made of stone, with a concrete floor. It was heated and also was occupied by the Weather Bureau office. The courier routine was to telephone the Air Base Tower for permission to land at the Base. Then the pilot would take off from the small Municipal runway and fly into the adjacent Base, to pick up his cargo for the day.

When the cargo had been loaded in his plane, he would take off from the Base, on the assigned courier route.

## THE COURIER SERVICE AIRCRAFT

The planes the courier pilots flew were small, with about 65 to 75 horsepower engines, and they had only very basic instruments. Only one had a radio transmitter, although some had receivers. Most of the aircraft had a range of about three hours, except for that of the commander. Captain Moodie had installed an extra tank, in place of the passenger seat, with a wobble pump to aid in the transfer of fuel. Periodically the planes would have to be grounded for service, and when they did, they would get out of sequence. However, about every ten days to two weeks a pilot would catch up with his own airplane. Even with their limited range, the low airspeeds and the constant and repetitive nature of the routes created another danger. That danger was from lack of sleep and from monotony and boredom. To counter that while flying their routes, some pilots read books, others buzzed farmhouses, dropped notes, shot at coyotes, or did flight maneuvers to entertain kids along the way.

There were instances when the courier pilots encountered winds with not much less velocity than the airspeed of the aircraft. At least once a plane ran out of fuel, but fortunately, the pilot was able to land and get a small quantity of fuel from a farmer. In another case the wind at the landing site was so strong that the pilot had to set his brakes on landing and "rev" up the engine with the tail off the ground, until "wing walkers" could come out and help secure the aircraft. John Moodie flew into Casper in a snowstorm so bad that he could not tell that the ground to which he was keeping wings parallel, was actually the side of a hill. Fortunately, he soon glanced at the needle-ball instrument and was able to reorient himself in time. Shortly thereafter he was lucky enough to locate a railroad track that led him to the airport. Captain Moodie also was the first person to land an airplane on the airport at Ainsworth, NE. He was able to land his small plane safely even though only a short portion of one, of the eventual three runways, was completed.

## COURIER SERVICE MISHAPS

With the many hours and all the dangers to which the courier pilots were subjected, there were only three incidents in which an aircraft was damaged, and none in which the pilot was seriously injured. One happened when Lt. Martin Schroeder landed in a high wind back in Rapid City. When he tried to taxi, the wind tipped the Supercub up on its nose. A second incident happened when the aircraft that Lt. Ed Anderson was flying caught on fire in the air, near Newcastle, WY. He was able to land in a pasture and get out with his cargo, although he did burn the sheepskin collar of his jacket getting the mail bags out. The third incident involved Lt. Cecil Urban who flipped a Luscombe over on a taxiway at Ainsworth. In that instance word had been received that the runway was being cleared of heavy snow. When Lt. Urban arrived, only a taxiway had been cleared because the plow broke down at the end. The

banks on each side of the taxiway were up to four to five feet high. He set the plane down without any problem, but a snow bank collapsed part way down the taxiway and it turned the plane into the snow bank and upside down.

## THE END OF MILITARY SERVICE

As the Army Air Corps was able to develop its own resources, the commanders understandably tended to rely on their own. That meant that they requested fewer services from CAP. However, the CAP had furnished a needed service and had earned a good reputation in doing it. In fact, they had achieved so much success that by April 1943 the CAP already had been transferred to the War Department. By the end of the War members of the CAP had earned 825 Air Medals and 25 other military decorations. Unfortunately, 64 members had given their lives, serving their country in the CAP. Another fact that is not generally known is, that during War, the CAP owned or operated 215 airports. It also was able to keep 403 other airfields operating despite the reduced traffic, due to restrictions on flying. When the War ended, the military missions of the CAP ended with it.. However, within a year, in July 1946, the U.S. Congress passed Public Law 476, which incorporated the Civil Air Patrol as a benevolent, non-profit organization to promote aviation. Then, on September 26, 1947, the Army Air Forces became the U.S. Air Force, a separate service. Eight months following that, Public Law 557 was enacted, making the Civil Air Patrol the Auxiliary of the U.S. Air Force.

## THE CADET PROGRAM

The CAP started recruiting young people for a Cadet Program back on October 1, 1942. The program actually was intended to be a early training of pilots, who were very scarce. The progra[TI was seen as a preliminary training for military service. [Youth was not seen as a deterrent in aviation. The pilot on my B-29 crew was nineteen years old.] At the beginning of the Cadet Program the young person had to be 15, 16, or 17 years of age and was required to have an individual sponsor, who was a Senior of the same sex. The next year, in December 1943, the Army assigned a Taylorcraft L-2 to the South Dakota Wing. The plane was to be used for Cadet recruiting and training. In June 1945 that plane was sold to James Barnett of Sioux Falls, who became the second South Dakota Wing Commander, four months later. Then on March 1, 1950, the Wing Headquarters was relocated from Pierre to Sioux Falls where it remained until 2006, except for short periods, from 1975 to 1977 and from 1990 to 1995, when a large portion of the Headquarters was in Rapid City. Then on 26 June 2006, the first truckload of furnishings arrived in Rapid City as the Wing Headquarters was permanently relocated there on the corner of First and St. Joseph Streets.

## DISASTER AND A NETWORK

On 24 September 1950, a catastrophe struck the South Dakota Wing. Much of the

top Wing Staff, including the Commander, Col. Barnett, was killed, in the crash of the Wing C-45 near Evansville, IN. They were on the way to a meeting in Washington, DC. During the next two years, two members, Forrest Elliot and Frank Prather, filled the position of Wing Commander. LTC Elliot did not want to be the commander and only took the position temporarily. It was forced upon him because he was the only high-ranking Wing officer remaining. COL. Prather was commander for most of the time until Col. Joseph Floyd, the founder of KELO, became the fifth Wing Commander. [A complete list of South Dakota Wing commanders through 2010 is attached hereto.] It was under his guidance that the South Dakota Wing Radio Network was established. It had its beginning on November 4, 1954, when Governor Sigurd Anderson made the initial broadcast over the Wing Radio Network, with a message to all squadrons.

## SEARCH AND RESCUE

Over the years, especially since 1950, there have been many changes in CAP and in the way its members have served their neighbors and their country. The Search and Rescue operations, for which the CAP has become so well known, actually are extensions of the Coastal and Border Patrols. The activity in Search and Rescue spread throughout the country during the War and has continued to this day, although it is becoming a much smaller part of the CAP mission than it was in the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1970s the CAP filled a perceived need for Aerial Radiological Monitoring for Civil Defense, but that, too has since diminished in importance. Then the Emergency Locator Transmitter came on scene. The requirement to use that device on all aircraft allowed a mission pilot with a Direction Finder to home in directly on a downed aircraft, when he was close enough to pick up the signal. That decreased the amount of search time. However on the down side, much of the time the beacon was inadvertently triggered. Thus there have been many "false alarms". Later, in September 1982, the International Satellite System, COSPAS/SARSAT, became available. Then the time required for searches became even more drastically reduced, because the satellite could often locate the target within 10 to 12 miles. As search time was reduced, more time has been provided for CAP to become involved in other missions.

## RECENT ACTIVITIES

The CAP has continued to prove its flexibility by directing its available resources toward other places where help has been needed. The CAP also has improved its physical resources to be able to expand its activities. Late model vehicles have replaced the surplus ones of the early years, and the aircraft fleet has been updated. The aircraft, especially, now sport a distinctive CAP paint scheme. In more recent times the CAP fleet has seen many different uses. For a period in the 1970-1980 time frame the South Dakota Wing filled a need to transport human organs and blood in emergency situations. There were many lives saved through that program. Fairly recently the CAP flew missions for the Drug Enforcement Administration and the Customs Service. Searches were conducted for Marijuana

plants and to locate potential clandestine airstrips. Then, a program was developed in which a highly trained firefighter was flown over large fires, such as the Jasper Fire in the Black Hills, to provide information for Incident Commanders about the fire and those fighting it. In 2000 the South Dakota Wing started flying missions wherein Wing members are helping to track Mountain Lions in the Black Hills. That was extended to Elk and Antelope in 2002 and then later to other animals, such as Fox, Turkey, Grouse, and Pine Martens. Also, since 2002 the South Dakota Wing aircrews have been engaged in flying missions over the Black Hills during high fire danger times, to alert authorities of any fires in an effort to discover them early, while they are easier to extinguish.

## POST 2010?

In 2003 many wings, including South Dakota, became involved with missions for the Department of Homeland Security. Then, in May 2005, the Wing was assigned its first Cessna 182T, equipped with the G1000 "glass cockpit". That system integrates the primary flight, engine and sensor data and displays them on two full-color LCD screens in front of the pilot. Even more recently, the South Dakota Wing was able to install a satellite-transmitted digital-imaging system in its aircraft. That provides the capability to transmit video images directly from an aircraft to a base station for immediate viewing by an incident commander. The system has already been used extensively in flood and fire disaster situations with very positive appraisals. With excellent equipment and highly trained personnel, the South Dakota Wing eagerly awaits the next area of application of Civil Air Patrol resources. They are ever ready, even if unforeseen training is required. That new mission most certainly will be where there is the greatest need for those resources, whether they are used to support the community, the state, or the nation.



# **SOUTH DAKOTA WING COMMANDERS**

LTC Thomas B. Roberts, Jr.	01 Dec 1941 to 15 Oct 1945
COL James R. Barnett	15 Oct 1945 to 24 Dec 1950
LTC Forrest E. Elliott	24 Sep 1950 to 16 Jan 1951
COL Frank A. Prather	16 Jan 1951 to 06 Nov 1952
COL Joseph L. Floyd	06 Nov 1952 to 09 Feb 1955
COL Robert E. Trager	09 Feb 1955 to 14 Sep 1955
COL Rupert P. Brzica	14 Sep 1955 to 15 Jul1960
COL John E. Page	15 Jul1960 to 07 Oct 1964
COL O. Duane Hansen, Jr.	08 Oct 1964 to 10 Jul1965
COL Charles C. Doughty	10 Jul1965 to 31 Dec 1968
COL John H O'Gara	01 Jan 1969 to 13 Jul1970
COL Palmer M. Kickland	13 Jul1970 to 01 Jun 1973
COL Eugene U. Pluth	01 Jun 1973 to 17 May 1974
COL Lester W. Snyder, Jr.	17 May 1973 to 15 Jun 1977
COL Harold K. Lindseth	15 Jun 1977 to 15 Apr 1982
COL Merlin R. VanderMaten	15 Apr 1982 to 31 Oct 1985
COL Jerry A Hayden	31 Oct 1985 to 10 Mar 1990
COL Alden L. House	10 Mar 1990 to 21 May 1994
COL Rob E. Moore	21 May 1994 to 22 Jul1995
COL Richard A. Buechler	22 Jul1995 to 20 Mar 1999
COL George L. Colombe	20 Mar 1999 to 20 Apr 2001
COL Mary F. Donley	20 Apr 2001 to 09 Apr 2005
LTC Bradley T. Marking	09 Apr 2005 to 30 Oct 2005
COL Michael A. Beason	30 Oct 2005 to 23 Jan 2010
COL Teresa Schimelfenig	23 Jan 2010 to the Present