

WW II Parachutists of the Civil Air Patrol

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One of the more unusual and least known United States parachutist wings was first authorized during WWII and had a relatively short history.

On 1 December 1941, six days before the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Civil Air Patrol (CAP) was officially created by the Office of Civilian Defense when the Director, Fiorello H. LaGuardia, signed an Executive Order. The fledgling CAP was given a number of important missions:

Coastal Patrol—anti-submarine patrols in light aircraft equipped with bombs and depth charges.

Forest Patrol—early reporting of fires.

Border Patrol—patrolling the US-Mexican border.

Courier Service—airlifting personnel and vital defense light cargo, ferrying aircraft, flying emergency relief to flood and disaster areas.

Tow-target Tracking—training antiaircraft artillery gunners and searchlight crews.

Search and Rescue—locating downed aircraft and rescuing the crews.

Because some of the CAP missions were military in scope, the organization was transferred to the War Department on 29 April 1943 and attached to the Army Air Corps. The CAP became a permanent peacetime organization on 1 July 1946 when President Harry Truman signed Public Law 476 of the 79th Congress. It became a permanent civilian auxiliary of the United States Air Force in May 1948 with the signing of Public Law 557 of the 80th Congress.

In 1939, a number of barnstorming parachutists started getting together at Burns Airport (west of Telegraph Road and north of Plymouth Road, about 5 miles west of Detroit) to jump out of perfectly good airplanes. In June 1941, these adventurous souls decided to form a parachute club which they called the Chappel Parachute Club (CPC) with Anthony Renne, a Clarkston, Michigan attorney as the club's instructor. Ronald Chappel operated a flying service at the airport with 3 hangers and several aircraft which were also used for jumps. The club adopted a special patch with a jumper descending under an open canopy and a wing with "CPC" across the lines. The members also made some jumps away from Burns Airport. Their standardized khaki pants, shirts and overseas caps looked like a military uniform and caused many people to ask what CPC stood for. To avoid confusion, the members started calling themselves the Civilian Parachute Corps and the name stuck.

In December 1941, when the newly formed Michigan CAP Wing 63 was author-

ized to base and train a unit to better assist and rescue downed pilots, a number of these CPC civilian parachutists joined the CAP where they were put into Group 633. Some of them were assigned to Squadron 633-3 which met in Cass Technical High School in Detroit. During the early part of 1942, all parachutists were reassigned to Squadron 632-5 with Lt. Robert G. Lunceford taking command from Captain Hartung in the summer of 1942. This unit was the first parachute squadron in Civil Air Patrol history. An article in Michigan Wing 63's official journal, Contact, Issue Number 10 from the July 1944 era, has an interesting profile of Robert Lunceford. "What manner of man is Lunceford? He is a composite of many personalities. Some will tell you he is tough—a hard taskmaster. But he is tough when it comes to battling for things he believes to be right, such as giving a wayward kid a chance to go straight. He was tough when he joined the French Foreign Legion and served in Africa and the Near East. He was tough when he served in the United States Army Air Corps during World War I. He is a man of letters, as a graduate of the Sorbonne, Paris and as holder of an M.D. degree from Ecole de Medicine de Lyons, France; a man of science who studied textile engineering in Europe and aeronautical engineering in the United States and abroad. He is a sportsman who has hunted big game in Africa, Mexico, Canada and Wyoming; who pilots his own Stinson plane to his hunting and fishing lodge near Grayling, Mich; a business man who is part owner of the Luka Engineering Company—and aeronautical consultant for Hawk Tool Engineering Co, Detroit; the Watts Electrical Company; Hubbard Engineering; and Wayne Foundry, Aircraft Division. As a family man, he lives quietly at his home on Hollywood Road, Grosse Pointe Woods. Lunceford's motto for himself, for his officers and enlisted personnel, including all Cadets is: 'When you stop being better, you stop being good.'"

Parachute Squadron 632-5 headquarters was originally in an approximate 20' x 80' store building at 11257 Gratiot Avenue near East Outer Drive, about 4 blocks from Detroit City Airport, and in 1943 moved to larger quarters above a paint store at 8623 Linwood on Detroit's west side. Late in 1943, Group 639 was formed with Captain Bob Lunceford in command. By June 1944, the Group had 4 squadrons and a glider flight: Parachute Squadron 639-1, Lt. James Allen, Commander; Parachute Squadron 639-2, Lt. Dorr Walker, Commander; Squadron 639-3 (Hamtramck Squadron—girls' unit with girls and boys cadet units), Lt. Lillian Scrimgeour,

Commander; Squadron 639-4 (Henry Ford Trade School squadron formed on 24 March 1944 in Dearborn, which had 12-15 parachutists assigned), Lt. John Dobrei, Commander; and Glider Flight 639-5, WO Earsley Taylor, Commander. The squadrons with a large number of parachutists assigned were called parachute squadrons rather than airborne squadrons because the CAP parachutists had a totally civilian mission as compared with the Army's airborne units containing paratroopers with military missions. Although only Squadrons 639-1 and 639-2 were called parachute squadrons, there were qualified parachutists in each of the other squadrons.

Group 639 Headquarters and Parachute Squadrons 639-1 and 639-2 were located at 8623 Linwood in Detroit; Squadron 639-3, at Hamtramck, a suburb of Detroit; Squadron 639-4 met in Northern High School at Woodward and Claremont in Detroit, and in 1947 moved to Southfield Road and Michigan Avenue, now the world headquarters complex of the Ford Motor Company; and Flight 639-5 met at 642 Hastings in Detroit. By October 1944, the glider flight had been enlarged to Glider Squadron 639-5, and shortly afterward had several members who also completed parachute training and received their parachutist wings.

To be assigned to a parachute squadron, a prospective cadet jumper, boy or girl, had to be physically fit, be at least 16 years of age and have parental consent. To become a qualified parachutist during the early years required ground training plus 5 free fall jumps. Ground training included running to strengthen leg muscles, tumbling and jumping from an 8-foot platform into sand to practice parachute landing falls. Training lasted from 1.3 months, depending on the ability of the student. Beginning in 1943, the Squadron Jumpmaster determined when a member was qualified as a parachutist. Some members were considered to be proficient after one jump and others required as many as four. Anyone who had made jumps prior to the formation of Group 639 in 1944 was also considered to be a qualified parachutist regardless of the number of jumps if a panel consisting of the Squadron Jumpmaster and three experienced jumpers felt that the parachutist's expertise entitled him/her to that award. As the number of parachutists and mission requirements increased, training subjects expanded to include survival, communications, navigation, advanced first aid, meteorology, map reading, parachute packing and simulated missions.

There were no static line jumps made as is the case in military jump training. All jumps—including the first-made by the CAP parachutists were made using the manually deployed/free fall method. The main parachute was a standard backpack (actually closer to a "neck" pack) with a triangular canopy or a T7 canopy, and the reserve parachute was a seatpack.

Training jumps were usually made from an altitude of 1800-2000 feet above the ground with 35 second delayed openings using whatever aircraft were available: Piper Cub and Cruiser, Porterfield, Taylor craft, Waco (various models), Stinson (various models), Aeronaca, Verville, Luscombe 8A, Arrow Sport, Ford Trimotor, PT-17, L-4, Fairchild 24, etc. Drop altitudes for demonstration jumps varied from 1800-12,000 feet with delayed openings up to 60 seconds.

Michigan Wing 63 Order 17 dated 8 June 1943 designated Wings Airport on 18 Mile Road between Mound Road and Ryan Road (Macomb County) about 10 miles north of Detroit as the Civil Air Patrol Training Base for CAP personnel and equipment only (not a designated U.S. airport). The airport had been started by a Polish flying club. When Parachute Squadron 632-5 was looking for a field that would be suitable for a drop zone, the Polish group gave them the area in July 1942 to use for their training. The airport was officially dedicated on 4 October 1942, but there was still a lot to be done. During 1942-1943, the field was converted into a training base by a tremendous amount of hard work on the part of Wing 63 personnel. An estimated \$115,000 in volunteer labor was provided to develop the facility. At the time it was dedicated, it was the only airport in the United States conceived by, constructed by and for the exclusive use of the Civil Air Patrol.

As part of the 1st birthday celebration of Wings Airport on 9 July 1943, wing personnel moved former CCC barracks at Camp Kingston to the airport for use as barracks and offices. The airport area was used extensively for maneuvers, bombing practice, parachute training and jumps, signaling, rescue training and many of the other important duties for which Michigan Wing 63 was responsible during the WWII years.

The members of Michigan Wing 63 during the 1940's wore the standard Civil Air Patrol insignia of that period. A circular shoulder patch with the red 3-bladed propeller in a white triangle on a blue background was worn on the upper left sleeve from February 1942. July 1942. A miniature version of this patch was worn on the left side of the cloth overseas cap. In July 1942, a "US" was added to the base of the shoulder patch. This was used officially until November 1944, but was actually worn until well into 1945. A red tab with "CIVIL AIR PATROL" in white letters was added to the top of a smaller replace-



Worn on the left upper arm from July 1942—November 1944.



A cloth cap badge worn on the left side of the cloth overseas cap. This badge was also issued in metal.



Worn on the left upper arm from November 1944—1955. Replaced by distinctive state CAP wing patches.

ment patch in November 1944 because so many people kept asking what branch of service the old patch represented. This patch was adopted officially in November 1944, but it was 1945 before supplies were available. The shoulder patch with propeller was replaced in 1955 by state wing patches. It was once again authorized on 1 December 1978 for use only by cadet squadrons on U.S. military installations overseas (Guam, Germany, etc.).

When the small group of Chappel Parachute Club/Civilian Parachute Corps jumpers joined the CAP in December 1941, there were no CAP badges to identify parachutists. The CPC jumpers voted to allow all members of the parachute squadron to wear the old



Chappel Parachute Club patch designed in 1941 for wear by members of the Detroit-area civilian club. Authorized for temporary wear on the right upper arm of the CAP uniform by members of the newly-formed Parachute Squadron 632-5

CPC patch on the right upper sleeve of the CAP uniform until the CAP designed and adopted a distinctive parachute emblem of its own. In effect, it was the first CAP non-parachutist/qualified parachutist badge. In July 1943, a distinctive emblem was adopted for wear by all prospective CAP parachutists and the CPC patch was discontinued. The new emblem consisted of a small white cloth parachute with the standard CAP device (blue disc containing a red 3-bladed propeller in the center of a white triangle) superimposed on the lines and the entire patch on



The cloth Non-Jumper emblem was first issued in July 1943 to prospective CAP parachutists and was worn on the right upper arm of the uniform.

a red background. This badge, called the Non-Jumper emblem, was worn on the upper right arm.

At the same time (July 1943), the same badge with white wings added was authorized for wear by qualified parachutists. This badge was called the Jumper emblem and was also worn on the upper right arm. The first Jumper emblems were awarded to Lts. James Allen, Ralph Berkhausen, Ted Gasparski and Dorr Walker on 18 July 1943 during maneuvers in Muskegon, Michigan. Allen and Walker had been members of the Chappel Parachute Club. This was the only authorized parachutist wing awarded to CAP jumpers during the entire period of their existence.



The cloth Jumper emblem was first awarded on 18 July 1943 and was worn by qualified CAP parachutists. It was also worn on the right upper arm of the uniform as a replacement for the discontinued CPC patch.

An unofficial metal parachutist wing was also made by an enterprising CAP jumper in the early 1950's. This wing consisted of a silver metal winged parachute worn by some Marine paratroop units during WWII on which a 1/2" diameter metal/enamel CAP emblem (3-bladed prop and triangle) was superimposed. Very few of these wings were made.

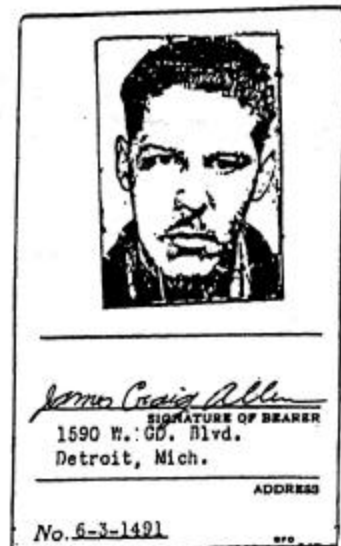
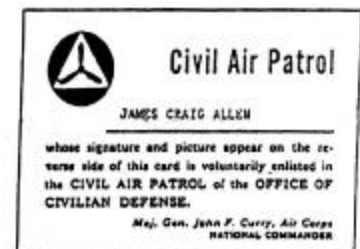


A metal version of the Jumper emblem was made in the early 1950's by an imaginative CAP parachutist. There were only a few copies made and they were never officially recognized by the CAP.

The CAP jumpers performed at airshows, War Bond rallies, cadet recruiting campaigns, maneuvers, and other events in Michigan and Ohio. These were historical, happy and hard-working times that also had their bad moments. With more than 1000 jumps made during the WWII years by CAP jumpers, there was one death and three serious injuries. Lt. Dorr Walker, the 36-year-old Commander of Parachute Squadron 639-2, was gravely injured during a parachuting exhibition in support of the Fifth War Loan Drive on 16 July 1944 at Adrian, Michigan. He died four days later from his injuries complicated by pneumonia. Walker had been the President of the old Chappel Parachute Club and the Jumpmaster for the first

Rescue Service. The members of these parachute units can be proud of the fact that they served their country at a critical time in an unusual way. There is a history unmatched by any other CAP unit.

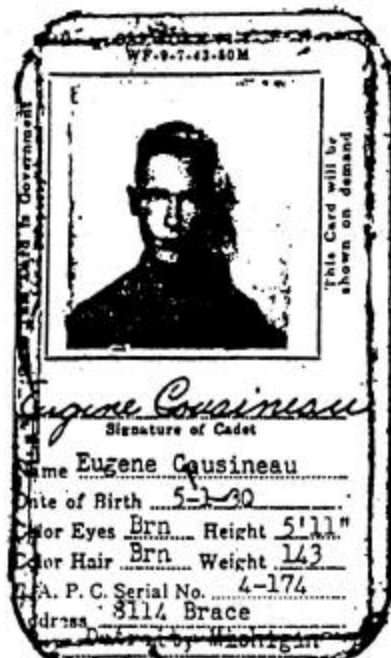
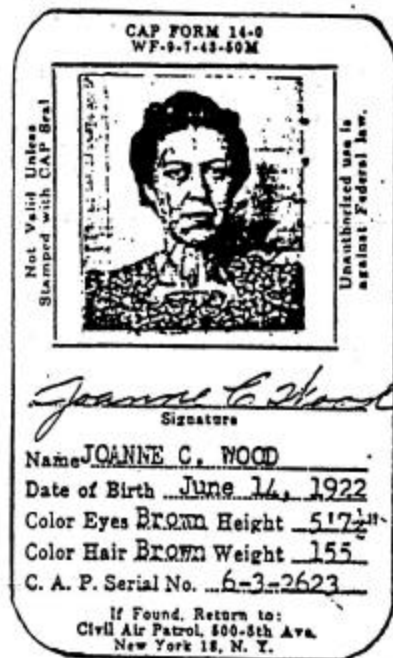
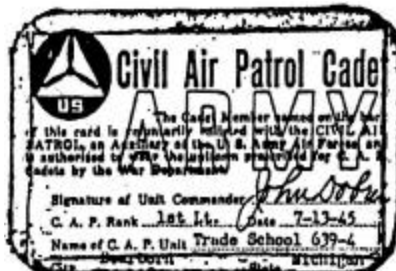
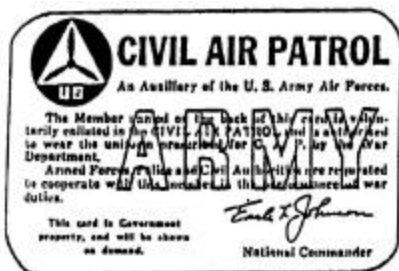
My special thanks to a small group of special people whose invaluable help made this article possible: Army Sergeant Major Eugene Cousineau (Ret), a jumping member of Squadron 639-4 from 1945-1950, whose stories first got me started on the research for these WWII units; Joanne and Jim Allen, pioneers in the formation of these units, who filled key CAP positions during the entire war, and who spent a considerable amount of time rehashing memories, researching old documents and providing names and addresses of former jumpers who could provide the answers to the hundreds of questions that I had; James Connolly and Dennis Carlson Sr., jumpers during the early 1940's, for the history of that period; John Dobrei, CAP Colonel, the first commander of Squadron 639-4 and veteran of more than 20 years in the CAP, for the good recollections about the period from 1944; and to CAP Lt Col Juanita Marventino and CAP Major SueAnn F'Gepert, Michigan Wing 63, for excellent information and referrals.



ID card issued from 1942 to 1943 when the CAP was under the operational control of the Office of Civil Defense.

CAP parachute Squadron, 632-5. One of the bad injuries happened to Lt. James Allen, Commander of Parachute Squadron 639-1 and one of the most experienced of the original CAP jumpers. On 6 February 1944, making his 75th jump, his parachute risers caught on the door of the plane throwing him against the landing gear strut, causing a smashed right kneecap. The door then swung shut, hitting him on the head and stunning him. He cleared the airplane and then had an unplanned opening delay with the new chute he was testing. That day ended his jumping career, but it didn't keep him from being Best Man at his brother's wedding 3 days later (held in the hospital library!) and on 3 June 1944, marrying Joanne Wood, a CAP Warrant Officer and parachutist in Squadron 639-1 with Jim.

These unique Civil Air Patrol parachute squadrons were discontinued beginning in the early 1950's after the United States Air Force (a separate branch of service since September 1947) established an Air and Sea



Joanne Wood ready to make her first jump on 22 October 1942. Note the very high position of the backpack and the seatpack reserve.



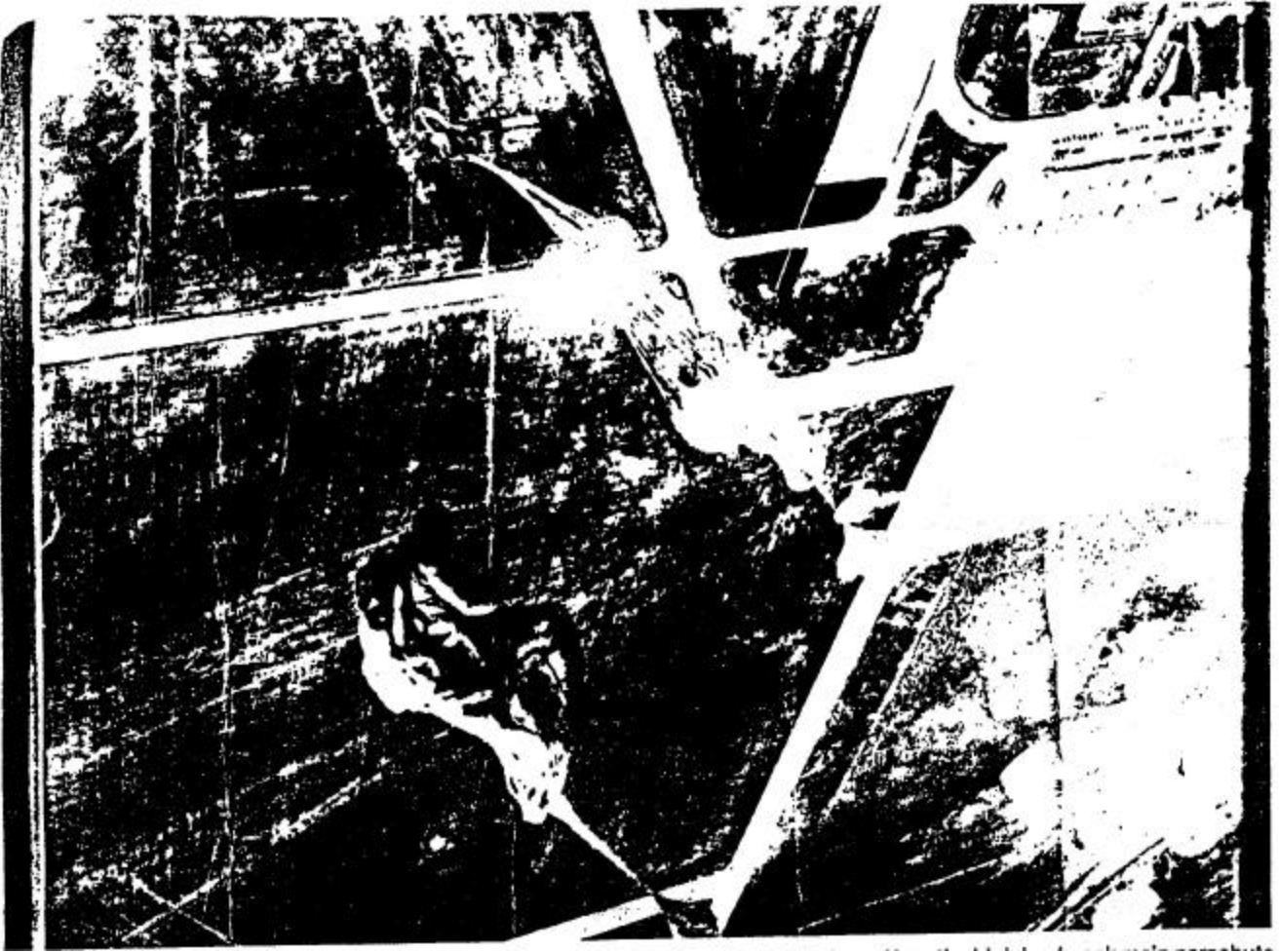
Jumper emblem presentation to members of Squadron 639-4 sometime in 1946. From left to right: Bob Dewar, later served in the Infantry in Korea 1950-51; H. Breezeale, served with the 82nd Airborne Division 1946-47; G. Goodman, Army Warrant Officer in Korea 1950-51; C. Merchant, Infantry lieutenant in the Philippines 1946-47; Capt John Dobrei, Commander Squadron 639-4, rose to the rank of CAP Colonel. Note the Non-Jumper emblems on the right upper arms.

The ID card issued to CAP members (over age 18) beginning April 1943 when the CAP became an auxiliary of the Army Air Corps

ID card issued to CAP cadets (age 16-18) from April 1943 to 1947 before the Army Air Corps became the United States Air Force



Dedication of Wings Airport on 4 October 1942. Members of Parachute Squadron 632-5: left to right, Norman Berg, James Allen, Walt Simila, Lee Morgan, Anthony Renne, Dorr Walker



A demonstration jump from a C-47 by CAP parachutists at Selfridge Field, Michigan. Note the high backpack main parachute deploying and the seatpack reserve.



CAP Major Robert Lunceford (right) congratulating CAP Lt Jim Allen following the Allen-Wood wedding on 3 June 1944. Note the Jumper emblem on Allen's right arm and the Non-Jumper emblem on the arm of the unidentified CAP officer to his left.



Standard L-4 aircraft used on CAP missions, including jumps. Note the Jumper emblem on the right upper arm of the work uniform.