

A Cadets Guide to Traveling to Civil Air Patrol Meetings

I decided to write this guide because I wished it was around when I was in this spot. This guide, as the title suggests is for cadets whose unit is small, and falling apart or cadets who are just unhappy with their unit and just found out the next closest unit is more than 50 miles away and don't know how to handle it but think they, themselves can drive it (as in, I'm assuming you have a car and insurance, everything else I'll try and cover).

Before starting I would like to suggest a few things as traveling to CAP isn't for the faint of heart. Assess if this is possible for you to even consider. When I proposed the idea, I had just come back from my second encampment and was a C/SMSgt, or more to the point have something under your belt CAP-wise. If you think you can start travelling as a 16 year old C/SrA with no encampment, and no driving experience I think your dreaming.

Part I: To go or not to go.

1. The parentals....

This is one of the bigger points, getting parental permission. This was a little easier for me because I live in the country and have to drive to hospitals in the city with my mother riding shotgun. So my mother knew exactly what I was capable of driving-wise. Not only this, my mother was involved in the local unit and understood that I should stay in even with it dwindling. If your parents veto the idea, no 2/3 majority can save the idea. It sometimes helps to have your facts straight before proposing the idea to the folks.

Remember your parents are your most powerful resource in traveling to CAP!

2. The Fundage

This is a simple question, where's the money coming from? This is essentially where the rubber meets the road. Gas isn't cheap and you'll need enough unless you have found a jet pack. This is really a personal issue, and what I mean by that is, DON'T even ask CAP to cover it. Seriously, it's a waste of breath (if you've been in as long as I, when you go to your new squadron you know this already). Suggestions are, getting a job or being adopted by Daddy Warbucks. This issue is important in other ways as well, because if you're like me, you love those wing activities. Yet when you take more money getting to meetings, you have less to do other things with. This point, as with the parents is a deal breaker, and you're going to learn a big lesson in personal sacrifice. I mean do you want that DVD or do you want to go to CAP. Below are some funding suggestions for travelling,

50 – 100 miles : \$40

100 – 150 miles: \$90

100- 200 miles: \$120

Personally I would say my limit is \$40 Because remember this is per meeting (including gas, food, and just-in-case funding)

3. Squadron Shopping

No cadet would be anything without a squadron, remember this when choosing a squadron. It is important to make sure the squadron you're thinking of traveling to be worth the drive. This is where wing level experience comes in handy, because if you're able to know other cadets from the wing, you may know if the squadrons you're looking at send cadets to wing events often. Here's a website that'll list all squadrons in your area, <http://cap.findlocation.com/>.

Of course you shouldn't base your squadron decision solely on location and the activity level of the squadron. You need to think of a few other things as well for instance, the day the squadron meets on, and the roads going to the town of the squadron.

It might help to make a pros and cons list.

Sqn A:

90 miles away
two lane roads – which I rarely if ever travel on
meets on Saturday 0900
Unit rarely sends cadets to wing/group activities

Sqn B:

100 miles away
four lane roads- which I know like the back of my hand
meets on Tuesday 1900
Unit's cadet are often at wing/group activities.

There are a number of elements as listed above. One squadron is slightly closer, meets on weekends but appears less active, and you have no idea where you going and the roads are two lane so you could get stuck behind a semi-truck doing 30 mph in a 70 and be late. The other squadron however is slightly further away, has four lane roads that you are familiar and seems to be a bustling little group of cadets.

When in doubt visit the squadrons and check them out.

4. Schoolyard blues

(Feel free to skip if Homeschooled OR your new squadron meets on weekends)

The squadron I ended up going with was squadron B, which met on school nights. This is important because school tends to be a game-changer. You will want to make sure your home at a decent hour so you can get plenty of rest for your day of learning then next day, or otherwise you're grades will slip and teachers will complain that you're falling asleep in class. Make sure you are tending very closely with your grades and on top of things. It would hurt to let your teachers know you're travelling for CAP because a lot of teachers support extracurricular activities and while they probably won't excuse you from assignments, they may be a little understanding if you're not bringing you're a-game the day after a meeting. You may find that often teachers can be more of an ally than an enemy as long as you take an interest in their class. Your body isn't built to spend long hours of time on the road, so consider asking a physician getting on a vitamin regimen, doing so may allow you to retain some energy and feel a little less dead after a day of traveling.

5. Conclusion of Part I

So now you have your ducks in a row and are ready to start travelling religiously to CAP meetings. This is not the end but this is just the beginning, you got quite literally a long road ahead of you. Buckle up and get ready for the ride.

Part II: How to go

1. The checklist

It is important to get your things ready before you leave town. I remember within the first three months of travelling to my new Civil Air Patrol unit I forgot a v-neck t-shirt, luckily it was only a v-neck and I had just-in-case money, so I could run through a Wal-Mart in one of the middle towns between the unit and home. It would've been bad had I forgotten a blues belt or my boots. So make a checklist, (it can be a mental checklist) I'm talking a specific checklist, every uniform item, or any other item that you will need such as your binder and your CAP ID, leave town as if there is no turning back, because there's not, going home is giving up, you might as well call and say 'I'm not coming tonight'.

2. Safety first

Travel under the assumption that if you crash your vehicle, you're walking to school from then on out because unless Daddy Warbucks did adopt you, you will probably not get another car. So if you forget your flight cap, don't even consider doing 90 mph home and getting it. That's just stupid, matter of fact, you should probably stop reading this guide now, and give

up on travelling to CAP if you would even consider doing above 75 on your way to CAP. Another element to safety one must consider when traveling as well, inclement weather can change even the best driver's plans. Whether its tornados, or snow and ice, weather is a big deal. If you don't think you can safely make it on the roads don't try. Your squadron will understand if you can't make it.

3. An investment to consider

A worthwhile investment for traveling the long distances is a cell phone. You're going to need a way for people on both sides of the fence (squadron, and home) to contact you. You can't go long distances with no way to be reached doubly so considering pay phones no longer exist. It's better to be safe and have the ability to communicate on the road then be stranded and flagging down motorists whom hopefully have a cell phone.

4. Your ride

Be good to your vehicle and she'll get you to CAP and home safely. While it may be easier to fix your vehicle after it breaks down, then if you crash it doing 90. It still is important to make sure that your vehicle is in good working order. I wouldn't go all Civil Air Patrol van logistics inspection with it. At the same time, check your fluid levels and tire pressure. Make sure you have enough fuel to not only get to CAP but preferably to last the rest of the week. At the first sign of trouble get your car checked out. If your school has a vocational program that works on cars see if they can work on your vehicle for the cost of materials or at a nominal fee rather than paying full price at a mechanic. If you don't trust your schools students with your ride, than take it to a mechanic but at the same time, be preparing to pay.

5. Ridin' Solo

When you start travelling to CAP it is important to keep yourself well entertained. I listen to the radio, so find some stations in the area with music you like and alternate so that you hear more music and less advertisements/talk. You're going to have a lot of time to think about things, use this to your advantage. Think about situations/events you know are going to happen when you get to the meeting so you are better prepared to handle the situation. You'll seem a lot sharper sometimes just for thinking over a situation a few times. So the point is use this time to your advantage while keeping your eyes on the road.

6. The grand conclusion

Hopefully if this guide hasn't pointed out in great detail every aspect of travelling to CAP it has at least gotten you to consider some things about the process of it. Realize that you are in no way alone. Your new squadron's staff and your parents are going to be with you every step of the way. While there's no support group for us travelling cadets, I am always happy to help.

Thanks for reading, Daniel L, Daniel@lmail.us