

Civil Air Patrol and Civil Rights, 1941-1965



Cadets of the newly established National Capital Wing meet Air Force Chief of Staff Gen Carl A. Spaatz at the Pentagon, circa March-April 1948. Note the lack of black cadets. Source: Colonel Louisa S. Morse Center for Civil Air Patrol History (hereafter "Morse Center").

Frank A. Blazich, Jr.

On January 28, 1942, the Office of Civilian Defense (OCD) issued a press release on the eligibility for licensed female pilots to join the new Civil Air Patrol (CAP). The release emphasized a policy statement by CAP's National Commander, Maj Gen John F. Curry, who proclaimed, "There will be absolutely no discrimination as to race, creed, color or sex" and "each member is to be accepted and assigned to duties strictly upon the basis of his or her experience and record of performance."¹ This inclusive membership statement for CAP largely governed the composition of the all-volunteer civilian organization while under federal jurisdiction throughout World War II.

Postwar, however, CAP's incorporation in 1946 produced a noted shift in the racial composition of various units across the nation. Regulations and policies governing membership did not explicitly speak of race, creed, color, or sex, resulting in confusion and misunderstanding about policy concerning discrimination. Whereas the United States Air Force (USAF) began to desegregate itself beginning in 1949 and continuing into the early 1950s, several CAP units instead opted to segregate and counter the personnel actions of the USAF and Department of Defense. While the Air Force lacked legal influence or control over CAP's policies, its financial and material support to the civilian organization provided a means to direct soft influence on CAP's racial composition. CAP membership inclusivity and integration in the 1950s and into the early 1960s thereafter vary by wing and region due to three overarching factors: organizational culture, state or local laws or ordinances, and individual unit leadership.

Founding and Federalized Control

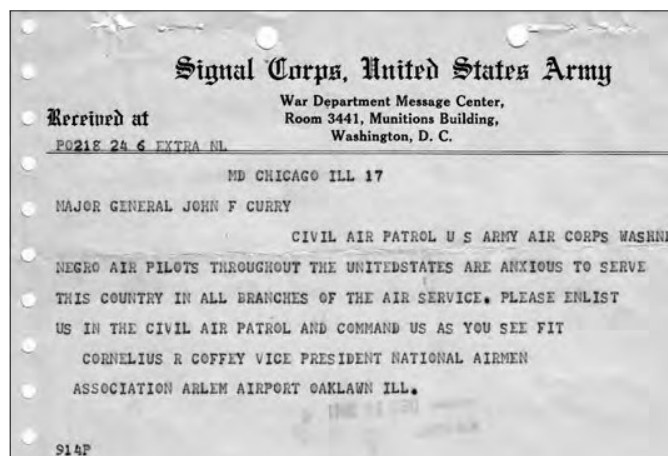
The initial policies governing CAP's membership policies are rooted in OCD itself. On May 20, 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order (EO) 8757, establishing the OCD under the directorship of New York City Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia. This order gave LaGuardia responsibility to study and plan measures for civilian defense programs which included civilian auxiliaries.² Weeks later on June 25, Roosevelt issued EO 8802 banning discrimination in the employment of workers in defense industries or government on the grounds of race, creed, color, or national origin.³ The order resulted primarily from a threat by A. Philip Randolph and other black leaders to organize a march on Washington to protest for fair opportunities for work and desegregation of the military. Roosevelt met with Randolph on June 18, and with LaGuardia present, Randolph requested either an executive order to prohibit discrimination in defense plants or else his march would take place on July 1. With neither side giving an inch, LaGuardia called for a solution and Randolph received his executive order.⁴

With the inclusion of “or government” in the executive order, the OCD, under LaGuardia instituted a non-discrimination membership policy for civilian defense volunteers.⁵ As planning for CAP unfolded in fall 1941 within OCD, membership would align with the parent organization. On December 3, two days after LaGuardia used the authority of EO 8757 to approve creation of a CAP division within OCD, Maj Reed Landis, LaGuardia’s aviation aide, removed a question about race from CAP’s enlistment form just prior to its publication and national distribution.⁶ Following the attack on American forces in Hawaii, LaGuardia initialed OCD Administrative Order No. 9 on December 8, formally establishing CAP. He announced the new organization that same evening in a national radio broadcast. An OCD press release thereafter defined CAP as “an organization of the civilian aviation resources of the nation for national defense service,” but neither the radio address nor press release provided specific mention about who was eligible to join.⁷

Clarification about CAP’s membership policy arrived ten days later via telegram. On December 17, Cornelius R. Coffey, vice president and founder of the National Airmen’s Association of America, wired Curry stating “Negro air pilots throughout the United States are anxious to serve this country in all branches of the air service. Please enlist us in the Civil Air Patrol and command us as you see fit.”⁸ In his reply to Coffey the next day, Curry noted no restrictions on CAP membership as to race, creed, color, or sex. In his words, “only the ability to do [the] job [is the] only consideration beyond patriotism.”⁹ Curry’s comments thereafter would be echoed in the OCD press release of January 28, 1942.

The outcome of Coffey’s telegram exchange with Curry resulted in a lesser-known civil rights milestone. On March 7, 1942, the *Chicago Defender* headlined an article with “Civil Air Patrol Does the ‘Impossible’ in Illinois” while discussing the establishment of the 111th Flight Squadron of

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Telegram from Cornelius R. Coffey to Maj Gen John F. Curry, December 17, 1941. Source: Morse Center.

“the Illinois Wing.¹⁰ Weeks later on March 20, Jack Vilas, commander of the Illinois Wing, swore in Coffey as the commander of the 111th Flight Squadron of the Illinois Wing. The squadron consisted of 25 black and white flyers, male and female; it is the first racial and gender integrated, uniformed operational flying unit in American history.¹¹

The integrated squadron proved a success. Re-designated as Squadron 613-6 in mid-1942, the unit had well over 100 members. In September 1942, several aviators flew a 2,000 mile, six-state cross country flight to gain experience for active-duty missions. Other members of this squadron would go on to participate in the CAP courier service during World War II. In October 1942, Squadron 613-6 launched a cadet program through which countless young African American men and women in the Illinois Wing gained their first experience with aviation. The legacy borne from those first cadets in 1942 and 1943 lives on today with the Cornelius R. Coffey Composite Squadron in Chicago.¹²

On April 29, 1943, President Roosevelt issued EO 9339, transferring CAP from OCD to the War Department.¹³ Days later, a War Department memorandum charged Gen Henry H. “Hap” Arnold, Commander, Army Air Forces (AAF), with supervising and directing the operations of CAP on behalf of the Secretary of War.¹⁴ AAF Regulation 20-18 published on May 25 established CAP as an exempted activity under the supervision of the Commanding General of the AAF, who would in turn delegate these responsibilities to Lt Col Earle L. Johnson as CAP’s national commander.¹⁵

Johnson, having led CAP since April 1, 1942, made no changes to the membership policies governing CAP in his new AAF capacity.¹⁶ The CAP cadet program, which began in October 1942 via a memorandum issued by Johnson, received official AAF recognition on May 23, 1944.¹⁷ This recognition allowed 9,000 male cadets between the ages of 15-17 years, selected on a merit basis, to attend a ten-day summer camps at AAF installations nationwide from mid-July through mid-September. Each group of 25 cadets experienced the same military living as AAF airmen. CAP



A student of the Coffey School of Aeronautics hand starting a Piper J-3 Cub while an instructor looks on at Harlem Airport, Oak Lawn, Illinois. The aircraft was also used by the 111th Flight Squadron, later Squadron 613-6. Source: National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution.

National Headquarters reported the encampments came together without incident.¹⁸

In Illinois, a total of 400 cadets were slated to attend a ten-day encampment at Chanute Field from August 20-30. The encampment, however, initially excluded cadets from 1st Lt Coffey's Squadron 613-6, the only squadron not represented at the encampment. In an article in the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, the squadron adjutant 2nd Lt Willa B. Brown, stated Coffey received oral instructions from CAP National Headquarters "that no provisions were available for Negro cadets and therefore they were not invited to the camp."¹⁹ Brown's press statement apparently worked, as 17 members of Squadron 613-6 did attend the encampment and trained alongside white cadets. Cadet MSgt Wardeen Mason received recognition as one of the nine outstanding cadets at the encampment, receiving an AAF identification bracelet.²⁰

For wartime CAP, African American participation remained limited and segregated. Cadet programs offered the greatest mechanism for involvement. In the Michigan Wing, 1st Lt Earsling Taylor and 2nd Lt Neal V. Loving co-founded the all-black Squadron 639-5 in Detroit in the summer of 1942. As CAP's only all-black glider squadron, the unit grew to include a cadet program and even parachutists who participated with white CAP parachutists in the wing's Group 639.²¹ In the Ohio Wing, Cleveland Squadron 3 launched a third, all-black male cadet detachment on April 15, 1945 under the command of 2nd Lt Paul C. Smith. Capt George Bennies, commanding the Cleveland Group, considered the policy of segregation ideal and the first two detachments of the squadron consisted of only white male cadets.²² In the Kansas Wing, Kansas City-based Squadron 751-9, commanded by 1st Lt Harry B. Thornton, featured over 25 male and female students-turned-cadets at the segregated Sumner High School.²³

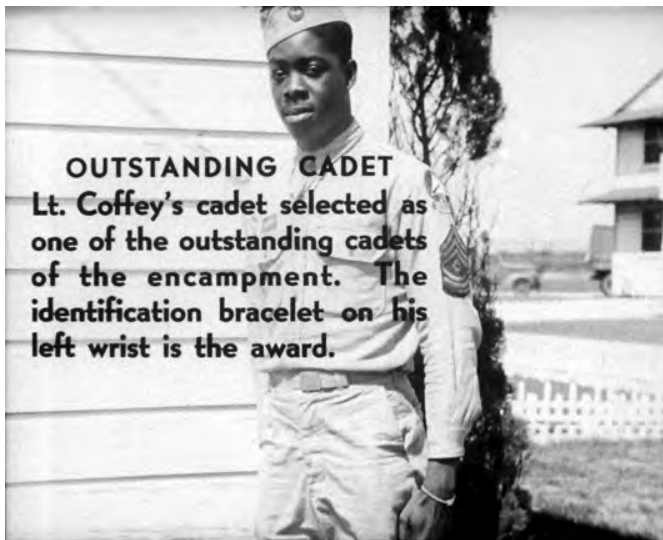
CAP in World War II had a diversity in race and gender. Nonetheless, social mores and laws governed the composition of wings and squadrons. Technically no policy

existed for segregation, although the racism prevalent in American civil society resulted in a wartime CAP with self-segregated units. CAP's active-duty operations which directly aided the war effort, notably its coastal patrol antisubmarine operation, remained white-only with blacks kept on the ground in positions of maintenance, cooking, or janitorial work.²⁴ Racial equality remained a future endeavor.

Postwar Incorporation

By January 1946, CAP's days were numbered. From January 10-11, Generals Arnold and Carl A. Spaatz informed CAP leadership of the forthcoming termination of the present national emergency and with it the legal authority for the financial support and continuation of CAP (slated to cease on March 31). The generals pledged, however, to assist the volunteer organization to obtain a federal charter. Following a flurry of meetings between wing commanders, members of Congress, and military leadership, on July 1, President Harry S. Truman signed Public Law (PL) 79-476, incorporating CAP.²⁵ The legislation authorized the incorporators – essentially all the wing commanders – to complete the organization of CAP by drafting and adopting a constitution and bylaws as well as regulations and policies, with eligibility for membership in the corporation as "determined according to the constitution and bylaws of the corporation."²⁶ As an independent corporation, CAP's existing wartime policies and procedures would in essence have to be reestablished or at the least, reevaluated.

The actual process to draft a constitution and bylaws would unfold slowly over the course of the next two years. Two CAP majors and Philadelphia attorneys, George Witney and Wallace D. Newcomb, were tasked to complete the draft constitution and bylaws by April 1948 for distribution to the wing commanders. As the two attorneys explained to the CAP Board, the proposed constitution and bylaws "will carry on the organization as it now exists and that



OUTSTANDING CADET
Lt. Coffey's cadet selected as
one of the outstanding cadets
of the encampment. The
identification bracelet on his
left wrist is the award.

Cadet MSgt Wardeen Mason, Squadron 613-6, seen in a slide show of the 1944 Illinois Wing Encampment. Source: Morse Center.

will further include every element and every community in the country.²⁷ That month, the House Committee on Armed Services held hearings on HR 5298 to establish CAP as a civilian auxiliary of the USAF.²⁸ On May 7, not long after the legislative action was introduced, Gen Hoyt S. Vandenberg, Air Force Chief of Staff, advised Maj Gen Lucas V. Beau, CAP National Commander, that it would be highly desirable if CAP completed its corporate organization in accordance with PL 79-476 to clarify its legal status with the Air Force.²⁹ Weeks later on May 26, President Truman signed PL 80-557 into law, establishing CAP as a volunteer civilian auxiliary of the USAF.³⁰ Only two days after this action, CAP formally adopted a constitution and bylaws.

The 1948 CAP Constitution and Bylaws offered little concrete information concerning membership. In Article 7 of the Constitution, the document stated that all those persons who were members of CAP as of July 1, 1946 would automatically become members of the newly incorporated Civil Air Patrol, and all those persons who joined between July 1, 1946 and May 28, 1948 would also become members of the Civil Air Patrol under the new constitution and bylaws. Regarding whom could become a member, within the Section 2 of the Bylaws notes that “Any United States citizen interested in promoting the objects and purposes of the Civil Air Patrol shall be eligible for membership in the Civil Air Patrol upon compliance with the requirements for membership.”³¹ The documents list nothing akin to an anti-discrimination policy, and those African American members presently in the corporation remained members, able to serve in their communities.

Air Force Integration, CAP Regression

Approximately two months after CAP unveiled its new constitution and bylaws, President Truman issued EO 9981, desegregating the Armed Forces of the United States.

The order declared the policy of the President to be that “there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion, or national origin.” The policy “shall be put into effect as rapidly as possible,” albeit with “due regard to the time required to effectuate any necessary changes without impairing efficiency or morale.”³² The order represented a recommendation articulated in the 1947 report of the President’s Committee on Civil Rights to be enacted by Congress, but Truman’s 1948 political campaign and pressure to secure the black vote pushed the executive order through.³³

Prior to issuance of EO 9981, the USAF was not the most progressive of the services in integrating its personnel. As noted by historian Alan L. Gropman, in 1941 the AAF leaders “were racist or bigoted and the institution they led was more than segregated, it was devoid of blacks.” By 1951, however, the USAF found itself the first service to truly integrate.³⁴ In May 1949, desegregation came to the USAF “largely because of military pragmatism,” argues Gropman.³⁵ As observed by Lt Gen Idwal H. Edwards, Air Force Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel, segregation adversely impacted Air Force effectiveness, limiting the movement of personnel while undermining operational readiness at added expense for maintaining segregated units and facilities. In April 1948, Spaatz, now Air Force Chief of Staff, agreed. In a letter to Lemuel E. Graves of the *Pittsburgh Courier*, Spaatz concluded how “the ultimate Air Force objective must be to eliminate segregation among its personnel by the unrestricted use of Negro personnel in free competition for any duty within the Air Force for which they may qualify.”³⁶

With the release of EO 9981, the USAF acted immediately. The service secretary, W. Stuart Symington, expected his generals to either support integration or resign. Edwards briefed the flag officers on the executive order, and noted how the order had created the Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services to monitor the progress of integration in the armed forces.³⁷ The USAF shared with the committee its proposal for integration which began on May 11, 1949. Within six months, 1,301 units had integrated; by June 1952, the last all-black USAF units disappeared.³⁸

Although bearing the added title of “United States Air Force Auxiliary,” CAP itself did not pursue a policy of integration. Mere months after the USAF began desegregating, CAP National Headquarters published *Civil Air Patrol Manual, Volume 1, Book 1* on August 1, 1949. It did not include any mention of EO 9981, mainly because the books were already at the printers when the executive order was published. The manual does, however, mention a slight variation on the membership requirements. It said eligibility was “open to citizens of the United States and its Territories, both men and women, who apply through local units,” although approval by the unit commander was required for membership.³⁹ The issue of commander approval would prove problematic, particularly for those black Americans desiring to join a local CAP unit where the concept of integration proved unwelcome.



Maj Gen Lucas V. Beau, CAP National Commander, 1947-1955. *Source: Morse Center.*

Later that month, Fabius Russell, a two-year member of the Ohio Wing, wrote to President Truman. A member of the Youngstown Squadron, Russell had attended encampment at Lockbourne Army Airfield the previous year with other Ohio Wing members without incident. The base, coincidentally, was home to the all-black 477th Composite Group (later 332d Fighter Wing) commanded by Col Benjamin O. Davis, Jr.⁴⁰ When Russell attempted to attend the 1948 encampment at Selfridge Air Base in Michigan, he was denied participation on grounds of his race and told he could not even visit the base on visitors' day. As he noted to President Truman, Russell wrote "I feel that this is more of an injustice than the segregation that I run into daily. I want to continue to prepare myself as a member of CAP and well as near as possible, but I do believe that I should be permitted to participate in all of the activities that aid this preparation."⁴¹ The White House responded to Russell's letter on September 14, stating "the president has a deep personal interest in seeing to it that persons like yourself are not denied an opportunity to join in activities that are shared by other citizens."⁴²

Russell left Civil Air Patrol. He would serve honorably in the USAF during the Korean War and then go on to earn his Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine, the nation's first recorded African American osteopathic radiologist.⁴³ Although EO 9981 moved the USAF to desegregation, its civilian auxiliary remained an organization of civilian volunteers, subject to the values and cultural norms of the communities where squadrons formed and met. Moving into the 1950s, CAP and the USAF would increasingly confront the nation's civil rights struggles, with the former's auxiliary status influencing the latter's attention to membership policies.

Denial of Volunteer Service

The vague nature and localized approval regarding CAP membership came to the attention of the CAP National Executive Board in March 1951. This body advised the national commander on policies affecting CAP and consisted of eight members with an elected chairman representing the 52 wings and eight regions (a subordinate body referred to as the National Board). During the meeting of the National Executive Board from March 28-30, 1951, which was chaired by Spaatz, assembly members laid down the first real CAP policy regarding the eligibility of African Americans to join the organization. During this meeting, Beau, CAP's national commander noted "an increasing number of letters are coming in from colored individuals requesting membership in the CAP," while acknowledging neither the National Executive Board nor the National Board had established a policy in writing. Beau recommended issuance of a policy statement about the membership eligibility of African Americans wanting to join CAP. His recommendation, however, recognized the fact that the two boards set the policies "for more than one Wing, whereas the individual Wing Commanders may set the policy within their Wings as long as they are in conformity with the general policies as promulgated by the boards." Without further explanation in the minutes of the National Executive Board, the senior leadership unanimously decided to not amend the constitution or bylaws but defer the issue of African American membership eligibility to the individual wing commanders – all white men.⁴⁴

The National Executive Board chose not to establish a policy concerning the membership eligibility of African Americans as they believed the issue—or political sensitivity—did not warrant a specific policy. Multiple CAP wings, from their inception in late 1941 had embraced and propagated diversity within their ranks. Although written records are often lacking, photographs of white and black CAP members serving together exist, notably of cadet members in the Illinois, National Capital, and New York Wings. Photographs of Illinois Wing cadets at encampments in the late 1940s are remarkable considering the racial climate in the nation, with male cadets of both ethnicities seen eating, training, and serving together. In Washington, DC, the National Capital Wing had an integrated cadet program from its inception in March 1943, when the future wing existed as only an oversized squadron.⁴⁵ By the 1950s, the wing's integrated cadet drill team proved extremely competitive at the Middle East Region competition and frequently represented the region at the National Drill Competition. In the New York Wing, those units in and around New York City featured African American, Puerto Rican, and immigrant children from across the world finding a home in CAP. While it is impossible to claim perfect racial harmony among the wing personnel, race did not prove to be the limiting factor for those who wished to volunteer and serve.

Since the National Executive Board left the issue of African American membership in the hands of wing com-



Illinois Wing cadets sharing a meal together at summer encampment, ca. 1948-1950. Source: Morse Center.

manders, a few wings decided to use the opportunity to deny black CAP membership. The issue of discrimination made no appearance in official CAP records throughout the majority of the 1950s, but the issue came to the front in April 1957. That month, reporters from the *Baltimore Afro-American* newspaper began investigating matters regarding segregation in the Maryland Wing. When CAP National Headquarters learned of the news investigation, they reached out to the then-Maryland Wing commander, Col A. Paul Fonda, who admitted on the record that the wing did not have any black members. But Fonda also stated that “we are making a study of establishment for an all-colored squadron. We do not plan to integrate into white groups.” Fonda further mentioned that he had surveyed Maryland Wing personnel. Cadets had no objection whatsoever to integration, but most of the senior members in the wing were opposed to it. As for the issue of integration, he admitted anticipating trouble on this score for many months and “we’ll have to find a way to deal with it.”⁴⁶

Frank Burnham, a public affairs officer at CAP National Headquarters, was interviewed by reporters from the *Baltimore Afro-American*. Burnham explained that, “as far as the Air Force is concerned, there is no segregation [in CAP]. But you know the situation as well as I do, particularly down South,” and added that CAP found it advantageous to have segregated units in the South. He further stated that racial discrimination in CAP is “against national policy and CAP is too important a program to become involved with the problems of segregation. Thus, there is a policy of non-discrimination for Civil Air Patrol.” The truth of the matter is there was no such policy. In Washington, Burnham pointed to the National Capitol Wing as having an integrated drill team and two “colored” squadrons, with the Syphax Squadron, commanded by Maj Charles E. Wren, being the largest overall squadron in the wing. Wren himself denied segregation in the wing but admitted there were “white” and “colored” squadrons, with integration purely voluntary and as a result of the geographic location of those units within the district.⁴⁷

Even before the *Baltimore Afro-American* published any of its findings, Donald J. Strait, Air Force Deputy Assistant Secretary for Reserve and ROTC Affairs, issued a memorandum of record on April 23 to explain the relationship between CAP and the USAF. Strait emphasized the USAF had no authority to exercise control or establish any policy over CAP, particularly regarding membership. The USAF acknowledged publicly that the CAP National Board “does not have a policy of discrimination so far as membership is concerned. However, local CAP commanders are permitted the latitude of determining who will be accepted as a member of CAP. In certain states where segregation is still an unsolved problem” – southern states or those states with Jim Crow laws – that “distinction in membership is possibly practiced.”⁴⁸ This was a diplomatic way to admit there was discrimination and segregation happening in CAP.

The May 4, 1957 issue of the *Baltimore Afro-American* had not one but two stories about how African Americans in Maryland had attempted to join the Civil Air Patrol but were denied membership. The first detailed how three high school freshmen attending Charles Hamilton Houston Junior High School 181, James A. Watson, Van C. Webb, and Victor Cole, had attempted to join the Maryland Wing at the Friendship International Airport but were told by CAP personnel that “we don’t accept colored cadets.”⁴⁹ Lt Col Albert W. Ward, Maryland Wing vice commander, and secretary of the Maryland State Tax Commission, denied having knowledge of the students applying.⁵⁰ Notably, Fonda previously told Capt H. Ross Miller, Deputy Chief of Information Services at CAP National Headquarters, that Ward had “fairly strong anti-negro feeling[s].”⁵¹

The second story detailed the denial of a transfer of a CAP member from the Alabama Wing to the Maryland Wing. From June to December 1956, Reverend Julius Carroll, an associate pastor of the Sharp Street Methodist Church in Baltimore, and a licensed pilot and aircraft owner with over 1,500 flight hours, had attempted to transfer into the Maryland Wing after serving in the Tuskegee Squadron of the Alabama Wing. The Maryland Wing, however, refused to transfer and process the reverend’s personnel file and they continued to give him a bureaucratic runaround. Carroll further reached out to the USAF liaison officer assigned to Maryland Wing and even had the Airplane Owners and Pilots Association ask for official attention in the matter. Perhaps because of the inquiries by the *Baltimore Afro-American* reporters, CAP National Headquarters said they would personally address the matter with Fonda and advise him to take “favorable action” on the request for membership.⁵² Herein too, Fonda had acknowledged in his telephone conversation with Miller on April 9 that he had heard from Carroll “relative to admission of colored personnel to Maryland CAP units.”⁵³

An editorial in the same issue of the *Baltimore Afro-American* titled “But we’re interested” referenced the three young men denied CAP membership. The editorialist observed that CAP received annual appropriations of federal tax dollars, “extracted from the pockets of all Americans,



National Capital Wing drill team at the 1956 National Drill Competition, Amarillo Air Force Base, Texas. Source: Morse Center

without regard to race or color,” and noted how the CAP cadet manual made no mention of race. As membership then listed only young men and women from the ages of 14 to 17, “it remained for Maryland to insert the qualification that all recruits must be white,” in “bitter defiance of not only the Air Force’s rules, but of national policy.” The CAP program, in the eyes of the editorial author, “is being deliberately sabotaged” in Maryland by prejudiced officials, and they called upon Secretary of Defense Charles Wilson and his USAF subordinates to act.⁵⁴

The articles about the Maryland Wing’s discriminatory membership practices reached the highest levels of the Air Force. Air Force Chief of Staff Gen Nathan Twining’s Air Staff swiftly prepared a position paper regarding the Air Force support of CAP, which was now starting to come into question because of its segregation practices. By this time, the USAF had been integrated for a decade. Within the findings of Air Staff’s paper of May 7, the authors noted “It is obvious that in some states the membership of CAP would be adversely affected if the Civil Air Patrol were forced into an integration policy. It is evident that members of the white race would abstain from joining colored units.” The paper’s authors also recognized that Civil Air Patrol was dependent on the USAF for logistical and financial support. If this support was removed over the issue of segregation, they believed CAP would potentially collapse as a result.

Several Air Staff recommendations observed that the USAF was not in favor of segregation, but it was not going to necessarily withdraw support for CAP. Although the USAF could not dictate policy, the Air Staff recommended that “CAP should be encouraged to initiate a program within each state that will tend to influence public opinion favoring integration of membership and CAP units.” As an auxiliary of the USAF, negative publicity from CAP’s racial discrimination invariably rubbed off on that of the uniformed service. Mentorship and an indirect, soft policy hand regarding integration offered the USAF a means to begin a shift to Department of Defense policy.⁵⁵

Within days after completion of the Air Staff’s position

paper, two more media accounts brought attention to the CAP segregation issue. On May 11, the *Baltimore Afro-American* published the story of how another potential adult senior member and licensed pilot, Howard Whims, was denied admission into the Maryland Wing and instead sought assistance from the National Capital Wing to establish a squadron in Adamstown, Maryland.⁵⁶ Four days later on May 15, Louis Lautier of the National Negro Press Association publicly asked President Dwight D. Eisenhower during his news conference at the White House the following question: “Would you comment on the extent to which the Civil Air Patrol program is open to all the people without discrimination and, as an auxiliary of the Air Force, do you think it should seek recruits from all segments of the population?”⁵⁷

President Eisenhower, previously reticent on civil rights matters, offered a fascinating reply. He reminisced that his first contact with CAP went back to its beginnings when he was an operations officer at the War Department. The president spoke well of CAP, and deemed it a “splendid organization.” But going deeper into the matter at hand, Eisenhower told Lautier “I believe that we hurt ourselves when, in military organizations, we try to discriminate among Americans in recruiting them. I believe that just as a matter of efficiency is it better to use those that are capable of doing things strictly on merit and without such things as you were talking about,” in this case, discrimination.⁵⁸ The president’s comments appeared lightly in the news media, summarizing that he did not approve of segregation in CAP. The media coverage did not produce any immediate shift in CAP’s lack of anti-discrimination policies.⁵⁹

The next few weeks proved quiet regarding media coverage of reported CAP discrimination. On June 5, Brig Gen Cecil Combs, Deputy Director, Personnel Procurement and Training, wrote to Maj Gen Walter Agee, CAP’s national commander, to share the Air Staff report of May 7. Combs commented that those Air Force personnel who participated as region or wing liaison officers must comply with



New York Wing Cadets at a recruiting display in Manhattan, ca. 1959. Source: Morse Center.

the Air Force's policy that there will be "no discrimination based on race, color, religion, or national origin," and he also mentioned that "if their [liaison officer] advice or consideration is requested in connection with CAP policies, the traditional Air Force policy in this respect should be clearly stated and every influence should be exerted to see to it that these principles are followed within units of the Civil Air Patrol."⁶⁰ Subsequently, Col James W. Brown, Jr. at CAP National Headquarters, distributed the Air Staff paper to all region and wing liaison officers with orders to effect compliance of the Air Force position "to the extent possible" within their respective area of responsibility.⁶¹

Prior to Combs' letter, reporter Ethel L. Payne of the *Chicago Defender* reached out to CAP National Headquarters as a follow-up to the Lautier-Eisenhower exchange. After receiving additional details from Miller and Lt Col Joseph H. Griffith, Jr., CAP's national executive officer, about CAP in general, Payne conducted a follow-up inquiry concerning the corporation's stated policy on membership, about the reported incidents in Baltimore, and the number of African Americans in CAP. Although no answer could be provided, Miller shared the names of Cadets Charles M. Banks of Lima, Ohio and Robert M. Bradshaw of New Rochelle, New York who had both risen above peers nationwide to participate in the International Air Cadet Exchange (IACE) in Great Britain. Miller further shared contact information for the two African American squadron commanders in the National Capital Wing, Majors William H. Rhodes and Wren.⁶² Payne's questions did not result in any notable article about CAP's segregation matters but rather only an unattributed small article noting Banks and Bradshaw's participation in IACE.⁶³

After a brief lull in coverage, perhaps due to the Little Rock Crisis, the issue of discrimination reemerged in August 1958 when the *Baltimore Afro-American* published an article about how an annual ball for foreign cadets of IACE staged by CAP at Bolling Air Force Base (AFB) sent invitations to only white girls while snubbing African American female cadets.⁶⁴ The *Cleveland Call and Post* reported an investigation would be launched into the matter, but no further stories addressed the subject.⁶⁵ Instead, another CAP race-related story hit newsstands beginning in October and November 1958. Readers learned about Cadet James E. Spruill of West Philadelphia who had joined the Franklin Institute Air Squadron of the Pennsylvania Wing, becoming the first completely blind cadet in Civil Air Patrol history. Spruill had become interested in aviation after reading Arthur C. Clarke's 1957 book, *Going into Space*, albeit in braille. CAP National Headquarters had all of Spruill's CAP manuals and materials translated into braille, and his fellow squadron mates even conducted close-order drill with Spruill, having developed a method to steer himself along. Spruill partook in an orientation flight and was able to handle the aircraft with relative ease and maintain and sense level flight. His story would be featured in *Jet* magazine, the *CAP Times*, as well as other national publications. When Pennsylvania Governor George M. Leader learned about Spruill's story, he penned the cadet a personal letter congratulating him on



Maj Gen Walter R. Agee, CAP National Commander, 1956-1959. Source: Morse Center.

joining CAP and wishing him well in his future endeavors.⁶⁶

Spruill's uplifting story aside, CAP membership policies did not change in the 1950s for the inclusion of African Americans. Squadrons and several wings remained segregated, while the nation's racial tensions reflected themselves in CAP. The USAF, hamstrung by the legal relationship between itself and CAP, could do little more than encourage its liaison officers to influence the policies of the civilian volunteers as opportunities allowed.

Changes in the 1960s

Newly elected President John F. Kennedy, in contrast to his predecessor's passive approach to civil rights, took greater action to support the cause of African American equality. On March 6, 1961, Kennedy issued EO 10925 which forbid the armed forces from encouraging segregation or any forms of discrimination. The order further prohibited organizations that practiced discrimination based on race, creed, color, or national origin from using military facilities. Lt Gen William H. Blanchard, Air Force Inspector General, subsequently declared that based upon the executive order, USAF facilities would not be made available to segregated organizations.⁶⁷

Two days after publication of EO 10925, Lt Col Shirley R. King, commander of the National Capital Wing's Potomac Group, wrote to Lt Col John T. Martin in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower. King's letter brought up a civil rights issue regarding the upcoming mid-April CAP Middle East Region conference, which



Cadet James E. Spruill with fellow members of the Franklin Institute Air Squadron, Pennsylvania Wing, ca. October 1958. Source: Morse Center.

was slated to be held in Columbia, South Carolina. King shared a letter from Col John R. Taylor, South Carolina Wing commander to the National Capitol Wing commander, Col F. Joseph Donohue asking for assistance “in a matter which possibly might require some diplomatic handling.” Acknowledging how South Carolina remained segregated, Taylor explained the hotel for the conference venue would not allow black CAP conference attendees to stay there, nor serve them in the public dining rooms. Taylor asked that should black members of National Capital Wing choose to attend the conference that either Donohue or another officer “would advise them of the necessity of separate hotel accommodations.”⁶⁸

King further explained to Martin the gravity of the matter. Recognizing CAP as an incorporated organization by Congress with a USAF general officer as national commander and a recipient of taxpayer dollars, “we feel that it is wrong and certainly bad publicity to condone segregation.” “We have felt for a long time that these meetings could be held on an Air Force Base or in some part of the region that does not have to be subjected to these unpleasant practices,” continued King. Adding further insult to injury, King wrote that the Potomac Group had selected Cadet Bruce T. Stewart to attend the conference but that now he “cannot be sent to the Conference due to his *race* as the cadet would have to stay with a cadet from the South Carolina Wing and there are no Negro cadets in the South Carolina Wing.” Speaking as a CAP officer, King concluded to Martin that “As a leader of the group I feel that it is important for me to attend this Conference but I cannot do so and keep my respect and dignity.”⁶⁹

Within a day, Martin forwarded King’s correspondence to Frank D. Reeves, Special Assistant to the President. Martin agreed with King that holding the conference on a military installation, perhaps Fort Jackson, would allow black CAP cadets to participate in all activities without fear of embarrassment.⁷⁰ Reeves prepared a memorandum for the President which included King’s correspondence. The CAP situation mirrored another recent event where the Civil War Centennial Commission planned to meet in Charleston, South Carolina on April 11-12. As black attendees would be discriminated against, Kennedy wrote to the commission chairman, Maj Gen Ulysses S. Grant III, that discrimination on grounds of color or race is contrary to public policy for agencies and officers of U.S. Government-sponsored meetings.⁷¹ In Reeves’s opinion, the same action would be preferable. He included a draft memorandum to the Secretary of Defense expressing this position and asking for officials with the Department of the Air Force and CAP to take action to ensure the conference arrangements “meet this standard set forth by our Constitution and by our national conscience.”⁷²

The White House via Col Godfrey T. McHugh, Kennedy’s military aide, routed the message to Col Robert N. Ginsburgh, Assistant Executive to Air Force Chief of Staff, requesting to know what actual authority the USAF had over CAP and could be done to avoid holding meetings in controversial cities.⁷³ Two days later, McHugh reached out to Maj Gen Robert E.L. Eaton, Assistant Chief of Staff for Reserve Forces, and alerted him that a memorandum was being prepared “to slap the Air Force in the face’ for letting this happen.”⁷⁴ On March 26, CAP National Commander Brig Gen Stephen D. McElroy, became informed of the situation and received word that the Air Force Chief of Staff Gen Thomas D. White had requested a memorandum on Civil Air Patrol – Air Force relationships on March 24, as well as CAP’s policy on segregation within a day. Eaton acknowledged to McElroy that he was sure White “wants to keep CAP from being the pawn to try and solve this issue” of integration.⁷⁵

In conversations over the ensuing two days, McElroy and the Air Force worked out a potential solution. McElroy emphasized in his telephone conversations with the Air Staff how CAP “cannot in any way be segregated and Civil Air Patrol is not segregated,” but that “no one must have the opportunity to use Civil Air Patrol as an argument to settle integration or segregation.”⁷⁶ A memorandum from McHugh, however, arrived at the desk of Lt Col M.R. Walsh, Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff for Reserve Forces, stating the White House wanted the Air Force to take action about “getting away from this controversial situation.”⁷⁷

On March 28, Eaton sent White the requested memorandum. The document explained the conference situation, the USAF – CAP relationship on legal and financial grounds, and the 1957 Air Force policy position regarding CAP and segregation. Eaton found that the Secretary of the Air Force did have the legal authority to host the conference at nearby Shaw AFB where all black CAP conference attendees could be quartered on base. He added that the base commander was fully authorized and even re-



Letter from Lt Col M.R. Walsh to Brig Gen Stephen D. McElroy, April 12, 1961. Source: Morse Center.

quested by the Secretary to provide maximum accommodations and facility support to the Middle East Region conference while convened on his base.⁷⁸

Additional factors, however, muddled the use of Shaw AFB as a conference destination. The buildings to be used consisted of 1942-vintage communal open bays, deemed inadequate to house VIPs or conference meetings.⁷⁹ General of the Army Omar Bradley would be the keynote speaker at the conference and neither the USAF nor CAP wished to embarrass him. As Eaton understood the situation, the fact remained that the USAF furnished the federally chartered CAP taxpayer money, and while the uniformed service could not control CAP policy, they could work to keep the Air Force auxiliary out of the nation's newspapers.⁸⁰

The following day, South Carolina Wing commander Taylor turned down the offer to host the conference. He explained to Col David S. Harter, CAP National Executive Committee representative from the Middle East Region, that while the distance from Columbia was not vast, the wing had invited 40 to 50 very important persons, and in Taylor's words, these were "mostly politicians and if word got out that it was moved for this reason, they would not come..." Taylor thought best to cancel the conference. McElroy, in conversation with Harter, recommended the conference be postponed rather than canceled.⁸¹ Later that afternoon, Taylor, Harter, and Middle East Region commander Col Stanhope Lineberry concurred to postpone the conference.⁸² Ultimately, the 1961 conference was can-

celled. Ironically, the following year the Middle East Region Conference convened in Baltimore, a city with considerable racial problems not to mention its segregated all-white wing.⁸³

Approximately two weeks later, Walsh sent a candid letter to McElroy. Referencing President Kennedy's position on segregation within government agencies and firms with federal contracts, Walsh acknowledged new inquiries into CAP. On the issue of segregation, Walsh wrote

I was most forcibly informed by some people in quite high positions that if CAP wants to continue to receive support from the Air Force as it does now, the CAP leaders had better do some thorough soul searching and align their sights with the Air Force concerning segregation. The thinking is that it will be contrary to the President's policy for [the] Air Force to continue supporting CAP if that organization now is and continues to be segregated.

He recommended that this subject be entered on the agenda for the 1961 CAP National Board meeting at Ellington AFB from May 5-6.⁸⁴ With Walsh present as a representative of Headquarters USAF, McElroy ended his commander's report by reading a letter stating the Air Force's personnel policy of no discrimination based on race, color, religion or national origin. The letter noted the policy "must be strictly enforced in connection with the administration of any military or civilian program of the Air Force" and all Air Force personnel participating in liaison work with CAP were enjoined to comply with the policy and exert the policy on CAP matters.⁸⁵ Nothing more on the matter appears in the minutes of the board meeting.

From September 7-8, 1962, the CAP National Board met in Houston, Texas and engaged in extensive revisions to the Constitution and the Bylaws. Language concerning membership, however, did not change nor did the assem-



President John F. Kennedy visits with a group of Civil Air Patrol cadets in the Rose Garden of the White House, Washington, DC, May 7, 1962. Left to right: President Kennedy, Cadet 1st Lt Sandra K. Christiansen from Utah, unidentified (in back), Cadet James Ronald Aaron from California, Cadet Maj Marilynne Sue Van Velzor from Wyoming, Cadet 1st Lt Cheryle Eguchi from Hawaii, Cadet 2nd Lt Robert P. Alms from Illinois (behind Cadet Eguchi), Cadet Capt Burton C. Andrus III from Montana, and Cadet 1st Lt Thomas E. Bryan from Indiana. Source: John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.



President Lyndon B. Johnson signing the Civil Rights Act of 1964 in the East Room of the White House, July 2, 1964. Source: Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library and Museum.

bled leaders hold any discussion regarding any discrimination policy or segregation.⁸⁶ A week after that board meeting, Col William Patterson, Maryland Wing commander, admitted to reporters from the *Baltimore Afro-American* that the wing remained all white, although he reported working with the Baltimore Board of Education to establish squadrons in the city schools.⁸⁷

Two weeks following the assassination of President Kennedy in Dallas, Texas, the CAP National Executive Board met at Ellington AFB on December 6, 1963. During the conference, the chairman, Col Paul Turner, remarked that people asked him about CAP's policy concerning discrimination and he thought the policy was unchanged from December 1941. To his surprise, he learned CAP had no policy. After a brief discussion, the board unanimously passed a resolution reading:⁸⁸

WHEREAS it has been a standing personnel policy of the Air Force that there will be no discrimination based on race, color, religion or national origin

BE IT REAFFIRMED by the National Executive Committee of Civil Air Patrol that it is the continuing policy of Civil Air Patrol that there will be no discrimination in any activity of Civil Air Patrol based on race, color, religion, or national origin.

Over a decade since the Air Force became integrated and almost 15 years since the passage of EO 9981, CAP finally had a stated policy on discrimination.

Civil Rights Act of 1964

Months later and after considerable political maneuvering, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964 into law on July 2. The act outlawed discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin nationwide, and required equal access to public places and employment. The act enforced desegregation of schools and the right to vote. Although it would not end discrimination nationwide, the law definitively opened the door to further progress on true national equal-

ity. Of considerable importance to the defense establishment and notably CAP, is a section of the act known as Title VI, "Nondiscrimination in Federally Assisted Programs." Section 601 of Title VI reads "no person in the United States shall on the ground of race, color, or national origin be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance."⁸⁹ As a current and long-time recipient of federal funding, CAP was accountable under Title VI.

Later in 1964, Johnson approved Department of Defense Directive 5500.11, "Non-Discrimination in Federally Assisted Programs," which would be promulgated throughout the defense establishment. This directive effectuated the provisions of Title VI. Civil Air Patrol is included among the programs listed in Appendix A to which the directive applied.⁹⁰ In mid-1965, both the General Services Administration and the Defense Supply Agency contacted CAP and informed the corporation that since it received federal property from the Defense Department for educational purposes, it must provide assurance that the corporation did and would comply with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. On July 15, 1965, Col Turner signed forms stating CAP would comply with Title VI, including that the corporation would promptly take and continue to act to effectuate the agreement and letter of the law.⁹¹

That fall on October 20, CAP National Headquarters issued CAP Regulation 39-1, "Non-Discrimination in Federally Assisted Programs." The regulation implemented and supplemented DOD Directive 5500.11 and thereby placed CAP in compliance with Title VI.⁹² Presently, the CAP constitution of February 20, 2018 as amended, Article 7, governing membership declares:⁹³

Membership in Civil Air Patrol is a privilege and not a right. Qualifications and conditions for membership shall be established in the Bylaws and regulations. Discrimination based on age, disability, or the provisions of Title VI as well as Title VII [which references employment] of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was and remains prohibited.

Conclusion

By late 1965, almost two decades after becoming a nonprofit corporation and nearly 15 years since the USAF integrated, CAP had an established membership antidiscrimination policy. The impetus for this policy did not come internally from the civilian volunteers, but rather from federal legislative changes with degrees of influence from the USAF. Although the Air Force had no legal influence over CAP's policies, their financial and material resources provided to CAP proved to be catalysts for the auxiliary's policy shift.

As a civilian auxiliary of the USAF, CAP's association and uniformed similarity proved troublesome in the Civil Rights actions of the 1950s and early 1960s. From a position of limited knowledge, members of the public could easily confuse CAP members as the uniformed Air Force. When issues of segregation and discrimination reared their



Maj Shawna R. Kimbrell, 555th Fighter Squadron, first female African American fighter pilot in USAF history and former member of the Parker Composite Squadron, Colorado Wing, CAP. Source: *United States Air Force*.

head in the media, the USAF suffered undesirable guilt by association. The CAP cadet program and search and rescue operations, however, benefited Air Force efforts and necessitated finding a working solution.

CAP's early solution to the issue of antidiscrimination empowered wing commanders to address African American membership on a case-by-case, community basis. As a civilian volunteer organization, CAP squadrons and wings directly represented local and state society and culture before mimicking the culture of the USAF. For those states where Jim Crow policies dominated racial interactions, CAP organizations toed the line of segregation and/or the "separate but equal" doctrine laid out by the United States Supreme Court during its 1896 landmark decision of *Plessy v. Ferguson*.⁹⁴

When actual change finally came to CAP, the organization had to choose to either accept federal policy or risk losing its taxpayer support. Actual viable integration of African American members in CAP units came through either the continuation of a culture of integrated operations dating back to CAP's origins, or through the actions of young cadets and adult senior members who supported and implemented integration in squadrons and wings – both of which paved the way for the diverse civilian USAF auxiliary of today. ■

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