

By Jay Hopkins

Training

Staying Current With the CAP



GETTING A PILOT'S LICENSE IS AN INTERESTING and challenging process. Once a person actually gets their private pilot license things change. For those who go on to advanced ratings and actually find employment as a pilot, the excitement of flying can quickly fade in the daily grind of dealing with passengers and weather. As a pilot friend said to me many years ago when I was working as a commuter airline pilot, "If you think about the last flight you really enjoyed, it was the last flight you paid for!" In reality, I really did enjoy many of my commercial flights, but it wasn't the same as when I was just out there flying for fun.

For those who continue to fly on their own, life as a pilot can also be difficult. Typically people get married and have children, which changes priorities and strains the flying budget. For those who can afford to fly regularly, the question becomes where to fly. The \$100 hamburgers can get old after a while, and even for pilots with a love of flying, a long cross-country flight still entails hours of just sitting there doing nothing. With the financial constraints and the lack of a reason to fly, many pilots realize they are flying so seldom that they are no longer safe, even if they are legally current. The result is that many people give

up flying because it just isn't interesting or challenging anymore.

The Civil Air Patrol offers free flying on interesting and often challenging missions that help save lives and protect our country. Most pilots are aware that the CAP is responsible for searching for missing aircraft and finding transmitting ELTs. However, since 9/11 the CAP's mission has greatly expanded in an effort to support Homeland Security.

Do you think your flying might be a little more interesting if you were simulating a small airplane trying to sneak into the country? Can you imagine the thrill of seeing F-15s or F-16s streaking by your aircraft when they "find" you? One of the CAP's missions is to provide realistic training for fighter pilots on how to intercept slow targets at low altitude. Many of these missions are complicated affairs that involve numerous aircraft across the country and provide training to the radar operators along with the command, control and communications system and of course the fighter intercept squadrons.

A recent mission to assess air defense readiness involved three "target aircraft" at various locations across the West. Our squadron received over 12 pages of mission planning instructions that described the overall mission as well as detailed in-

structions on the part we would play. The scenario involved two corporate jets identified as hijacked aircraft plus a third slow-moving aircraft reported to have a suicidal pilot onboard bent on killing his wife. A recent event in the news shows how realistic this scenario was.

The scenario is like a play, with scripts for all those involved that specify a time to be at the initial point, where to go from there, what to do and what to say on the radio. Each target crew is also told how to respond when intercepted. Sometimes we are supposed to comply, sometimes we don't. Only the intercept controllers and fighter pilots are kept in the dark, although they are clearly told that shoot down solutions are not acceptable and to keep weapons on safe!

In this scenario, a Learjet that departed Regina, Saskatchewan, bound for Vancouver departs from its flight plan, indicates it has been hijacked and heads towards the United States. Shortly after the Seattle Center controller has alerted the Air Force intercept headquarters, a Salt Lake controller calls to say they have a similar Learjet that departed Albuquerque for Denver, but has apparently been hijacked and is off course.

As the intercept controllers are dealing with those two threats, an Albuquerque controller calls to report a pilot at Deming, New Mexico, had been observed loading 10 to 15 five-gallon cans of gasoline into his Cessna 182. Shortly after he took off, the pilot radioed that he wanted to die and he was going to take his ex-wife with him. She reportedly lives in Phoenix, and that is the direction the airplane is heading. The intercept pilots are given the current location, speed and direction of the Cessna.

Our CAP squadron Cessna 182 crew was carefully briefed on the mission. With so many people involved across the country, it was critical to get everything right. They arrived at their specified initial point (Deming) at the indicated time and turned on the route specified. The CAP crew was instructed to maintain

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level flight and follow the fighters when intercepted, but to not return any communications from them. Once it was determined the Cessna was following the interceptors and a landing field had been selected, the exercise director terminated the exercise. There were similar instructions for both the Learjets.

This is just one example of the many missions CAP pilots are now flying. Recently I was assigned a mission to fly with a crew to Buckeye, Arizona, which is near the Palo Verde Nuclear Power Plant. We landed, checked in with the FEMA personnel there and were issued radiation detectors. Soon an alert came over the loudspeaker that there was a simulated emergency at the plant, and ground crews dispersed throughout the area to monitor radiation levels and alert the local population. We were assigned to fly down a dry river bed popular with all terrain vehicles and alert the disaster headquarters of the location of anyone needing to be evacuated. Later we searched along the interstate for anyone else in a remote location.

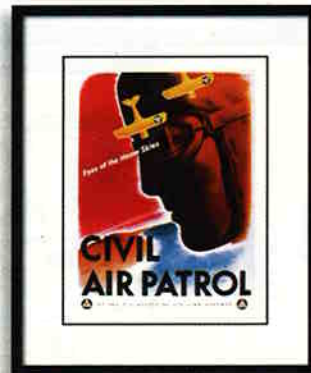
Some CAP aircraft are being equipped with a Satellite Digital Imaging System (SDIS), which includes a digital Nikon D70 camera, a laptop computer and a satellite antenna. In an emergency, we would fly over the disaster area, take photographs of the area and immediately download them to the laptop and send them as an e-mail message to the incident commander (IC) on the ground so the IC can assess the situation and respond appropriately.

The Civil Air Patrol also flies counter-narcotics missions. As an auxiliary to the U.S. military, we cannot be used to enforce civil laws. We *can* do passive reconnaissance and report what we see. There is a bill before Congress to utilize the CAP for border surveillance. We already fly missions along the border looking for people and alert the Border Patrol if we find anyone in distress.

Even the traditional mission of searching for missing aircraft or people can be exciting, particularly here in the western United States. I was recently demonstrating the contour search method we use in mountainous areas to Bill Barcus, a pilot I am training. We stay 1,000 feet above the ground but operate within 500 feet horizontally of a mountain or ridge when searching for a missing airplane or person. As we flew along the ridge, gradually descending to search the entire slope on both sides of the ridge, he remarked,

"This is pretty exciting!"

When searching a canyon, the winds have to be fairly calm. You always check the area first and ensure there is an exit from the canyon. Then you start from the top of the canyon, staying 1,000 feet above the bottom of the canyon and 500 feet from the sides, and actually fly down the canyon from top to bottom. A deep canyon may take several passes before all levels have been searched, and even then



the IC uses Probability of Detection charts to assess the likelihood that the crash site would be located based on terrain, visibility and foliage. In some cases it can take five or six separate searches of an area before the probability of detection approaches 100 percent.

All the CAP wings, as a state is called, are now receiving brand-new Cessna 182s with the Garmin G1000 glass cockpit. All of the government missions we fly are fully reimbursed, including expenses. Instruction is also free from volunteers like myself. If you want to fly the airplane for your own proficiency, which can include cross-country flights, you pay \$40 per hour plus gas. You can't beat that! If you like to encourage kids to get involved with aviation, you can help with a cadet squadron. If you are not a pilot, you can fly as a scanner or observer, with full training on all the aircraft radios, navigation and specialized communications equipment. The CAP also needs many other skills such as ground communications personnel, incident commanders and even chaplains.

If you have quit flying because you can't afford to, or if you aren't flying as much as you would like, or if you want a way to not only stay current but learn new flying skills and at the same time help others, I strongly recommend you contact the Civil Air Patrol at cap.gov. You will be a better pilot for it and I'm sure you will find the effort as a volunteer very gratifying. ✈