

# Patches Provide Identity, Pride

By Lenore Vickrey

**T**hroughout Civil Air Patrol's history, patches worn on uniforms have been a source of pride for CAP members, from cadets to generals. The small pieces of identifying fabric or leather have been created for wings, as well as units and squadrons. They have also been crafted for special activities, such as for recovery of the Space Shuttle Columbia in Texas and special counter drug missions.

"It's the esprit de corps that patches provide that makes them so important," said Lt. Col. William Schell, CAP's national curator. "It brings out the spirit of competition. You're proud of your unit, and you want to show it off."

More than 1,200 patches have been created since 1942, when the first CAP patch was made, according to Schell. "No one knows how many patches have been made, but certainly many more than the approximately 1,200 we are presently aware of," he said.

The first CAP patch featured the generic Civil Defense blue circle with a white triangle and a red propeller. Later,

the initials "U.S." were added. "This was in case any of our Coastal Patrol fliers were captured, they would be treated as belligerents instead of civilians," Schell said.

Very early, patches were made with a cut edge, Schell said.

"They embroidered on it, then cut around the

patch." Now, patches have what is called a merrowed edge or a "rolled edge," with a protective molding of thread around them to prevent raveling.

The cut edge is one way collectors can tell the age of a patch and the other is the type of fabric used.

"Earlier patches were made entirely of cotton, which, when held under ultraviolet light, does not glow. The man-made fibers glow," said Schell.

Older patches were also made with a

looser weave, and some were even made with chenille, a loop stitch formed on the top side of fabric using heavy yarn. In addition, some early patches

were created from cut pieces of leather and designs were painted on them.

As wings were formed, patches were designed for each wing.

"Starting in 1948, various wings

submitted designs for wing

patches for national recognition and official

approval," said CAP National Historian Col.

Lenny Blascovich. It was stipulated that officially

sanctioned patches were to be worn on the right shoulder,

with the left shoulder bearing the CAP officer or cadet patch. Later, unit

patches were allowed to be

worn on the breast, with activity patches on the shoulder.

Patches from some wings contain items associated with those states, such

as the geographic outline of the state or some animal

or national monument located in the state. The

patch of the Arizona Wing, for example, was designed in 1953 by a

Navajo as a way to thank the wing for flying his

young daughter to Phoenix so she could

be treated for polio.

This 5-inch chenille patch, designed by cartoonist Zack Mosley, was worn by CAP Coastal Patrol crews at Base 17, Suffolk, Long Island.



CAP's first shoulder patch featured a generic Civil Defense blue circle and a white triangle with a red propeller.



A Navajo designed the Arizona Wing patch as a gesture of appreciation

Wing Public Affairs Officer Capt. Joyce Kienitz said the patch has a thunderbird, a symbol of good luck, as the primary design. Its gray and blue body represents the color of CAP aircraft, and its wings are shaped to look like a building or hospital while the tail represents the wings and stabilizers of an aircraft. The "V" in the middle represents the many landing fields of the Navajo reservation. The black to the north represents an evil spirit; the white to the east represents the rising sun; the blue to the south represents the heavens; and the yellow to the west the setting sun.

Other wings have similarly distinctive patches. Hawaii's wing patch contains a pineapple, a horse adorns the Kentucky patch, while an eagle grabs an ear of corn on Iowa's patch. On the South Dakota patch, the familiar presidential faces of Mount Rushmore are seen.

Connecticut was the first wing to adopt a wing patch, according to Schell. "They designed their 'flying pup' patch during the early part of World War II," he said. The large, well-worn painted-on leather patch that is part of

Some CAP patches take a humorous

approach, as does this Nevada Wing Sahara Hotel Squadron patch from the 1960s. The desert theme is evident in the font and in the French Foreign Legion uniform on Pluto, the cartoon canine.



Schell's collection was once worn on a proud pilot's leather flight jacket.

In 1980, the North Central Region decided to replace its wing patches with a plain arc patch like those being worn by the

regions themselves, Schell said, but this was disapproved by CAP National Headquarters. At least two wings, Minnesota and Missouri, had some patches created before the disapproval.

Other patches have humorous components, such as the Nevada Wing's Sahara Hotel Squadron from the 1960s. "As they were sponsored by the Sahara Hotel, they used arabesque-style lettering and placed Pluto (the cartoon dog) in a French For-

eign Legion uniform complete with a French kepi," said Schell.

When CAP members perform a special service, patches have often been designed to commemorate the event, such as the work done by CAP during the disastrous Mississippi River floods of 1993, and recovery

work in Texas following the tragic disintegration of the Space Shuttle Columbia.

For some CAP members, like Schell and Maj. Ace Browning of the Minnesota Wing, collecting patches has become a major hobby and a way to preserve an important

The Connecticut Wing designed this "flying pup" patch during the early part of World War II. This large, well-worn painted-on-leather patch once adorned a proud pilot's leather flight jacket.



The Puerto Rico Wing shoulder patch, authorized Dec. 1, 1950, captures the island's flavor.



part of CAP history. Schell is compiling a catalog of all other CAP insignia and another of just unit and special activity patches.

He requests anyone with unit patches to e-mail him at [awmschell@verizon.net](mailto:awmschell@verizon.net) to ensure theirs is included.

Browning maintains a Web site dedicated to CAP patches at [www.incountry.us/cappatches/index.html](http://www.incountry.us/cappatches/index.html) and says he knows of at least 10 active patch collectors.

"My collecting started as a cadet when a neighboring unit got a new patch and I wanted to get one for my unit!" said Browning. "In the process of developing my unit's patch, I bought one of the other unit's patches I think were being sold as a fundraiser. I liked the idea of having unique patches to identify a member of a particular unit to bring unity and esprit de corps to

The Task Force Columbia mission patch solemnly commemorates the Texas Wing's recovery of Space Shuttle Columbia debris. The shuttle was lost over the skies of Texas on Feb. 1, 2003, killing all seven astronauts on board.



members who proudly wore them. "It wasn't until years later, after I started collecting CAP patches, that I realized

I wasn't just enjoying a hobby by myself," he said. "I was also providing a different kind of service to CAP and its members — preserving a part of our organization's history that might have otherwise been lost and forgotten." ▲