

Johnson Flight Academy Recognized as National Cadet Special Activity

By Mitzi Palmer

For 48 years, Civil Air Patrol's Lt. Col. Raymond J. Johnson Flight Academy has annually offered cadets an opportunity for ground school and flight training in southeastern Illinois. Founded by a longtime commander who is still a member of the Arizona Wing, the academy is now one of more than 30 CAP National Cadet Special Activities that allow cadets to fine-tune their skills in various areas, including search and rescue, flight, emergency services, science, leadership fundamentals, citizenship, military customs and courtesies and aerospace technology.

The pace at the Johnson academy can be intense, given how often cadets take flight.

“In a typical environment, participants would only be flying two or three

Cadet Staff Sgt. Jose Rocha of the California Wing reviews his notes from a day of training at Johnson Flight Academy. Students use the Federal Aviation Administration Pilot's Handbook of Aeronautical Knowledge for ground school. Photos by Capt. Robert

Bowden, Michigan Wing



times a week,” said Steven J. Trupp, CAP’s program manager for cadet programs. “We have them up almost every day, and sometimes multiple flights in a day.”

This year, the Johnson academy drew 64 participants to Mattoon, Ill., for a total of two sessions from June 6-June 20. Along with daily flight instruction conducted out of Coles County Memorial Airport, cadets received thorough ground instruction in their respective programs.

Col. Rick Oeth, Illinois Wing commander, said the academy has a mission of “providing a safe, low-cost, high-quality flight experience that will help shape tomorrow’s aerospace leaders.”

As one of the longest-running, if not the longest-running, flight academy in CAP, Johnson academy was one of the earliest templates the organization drew on to create future NCSA flight academies throughout the country.

“The academy is also distinctive in that it gives instruction in balloon, gliders and powered aircraft,” Oeth said. “This year, two cadets participated in the G1000 course, 36 in the power course, 20 in the glider course and six in the balloon course.”

Depending on age and skill level, the academy also provides many participants the opportunity to complete a solo flight and earn their wings.

“Nowhere else in CAP can you go to one activity and

learn how to fly three different categories of aircraft, along with the opportunity to earn wings,” said Capt. Robert Bowden, the academy commander. “There is a reason we have a 25-30 percent return rate year to year among cadets.”

Most of the cadets who participate in the academy have a vision for a career in some form of aviation. Some will move on to pursue careers in the military, some will become pilots and some will take the aerospace education path.

“It has been a true honor to serve as the 2014 Johnson Flight Academy commander,” said Bowden, who soloed at the academy when he was a 16-year-old cadet and is now a certified flight instructor and public affairs officer for CAP’s Michigan Wing. “I know exactly how these cadets feel as they are progressing through their training.

“The opportunity to give back and help train future aviators is why I keep coming back every year. It gave me the start in aviation, and I am proud to help give others that same start.”

Now that the academy is considered a CAP National Cadet Special Activity, cadets who attend receive the NCSA ribbon.

“It levels the playing field and allows us to reward our members who attend,” Bowden said. ▲



Cadet participants preflight their aircraft at the Johnson Flight Academy.