

## Civil Air Patrol World War II Cadets

# Answering the Call to Serve



*By Markeshia  
Ricks*

**W**hen the Civil Air Patrol was created in December 1941, just a week before the U.S. became officially involved in World War II, adults were not the only ones who stood ready to serve. Young people also answered the call to do what they could to help win the war.

CAP's World War II cadets learned everything from close-order drill and Morse code to meteorology and aircraft recognition and systems. Whether it was participating in drills and marching, or teaching and leading other cadets, young Americans proudly joined and served in CAP.

CAP cadets in Grenier, Massachusetts, are briefed by a senior officer circa 1942-1943. Photo courtesy of CAP National Headquarters





### Luck of the Draw

Like so many young people who joined CAP during its early years, Richard “Jerry” Snyder had a passion for flying. At age 8 he’d gone up in a Ford Trimotor airplane in Hartford, Connecticut, and by the time he came down he was hooked.

When he joined the Northampton/Holyoke squadron in 1947, Snyder, then 15, already had served as one of the first Air Scouts in Massachusetts and had worked with the U.S. Army Air Forces as a volunteer spotter looking for enemy aircraft.

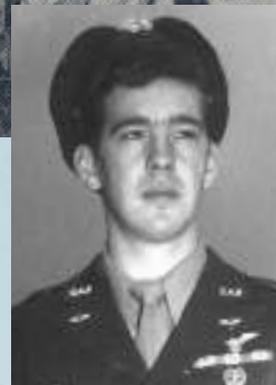
“I had a little bit of experience already, but my high school teacher in aeronautics and physics got me started in Civil Air Patrol,” Snyder said. “He said that’s what I ought to do, and I followed through.”

In 1945, an unknown benefactor bought a raffle ticket in his honor. The prize? A \$100 Civil Air Patrol scholarship for flight instruction.

“Apparently someone put a quarter in the pot for me in my name,” he said. “I knew nothing about it and I was simply astounded when I won it. I still don’t know who did it. I wish I did.”

Snyder stayed in CAP until 1948 while completing two years at Amherst College, but in 1949 he joined the U.S. Air Force and went through advanced fighter pilot training at Las Vegas Air Force Base. Though he trained

Richard “Jerry” Snyder and other CAP cadets headed for encampment at Westover Field, Massachusetts, are featured in this August 1944 newspaper photo. Inset, Snyder is pictured in his CAP uniform after he joined the Massachusetts Wing’s Northampton/Holyoke squadron.



in P-51s and graduated from fighter pilot training, he was immediately sent to fly multi-engine aircraft. He amassed about 1,300 hours flying the B-25. Now at age 86 he has more than 50 years of flight experience in 70 models of aircraft.

Snyder traces much of his long career in aviation back to his decision to heed his teacher’s recommendation to join CAP. He said it’s great that CAP has finally received the Congressional Gold Medal.

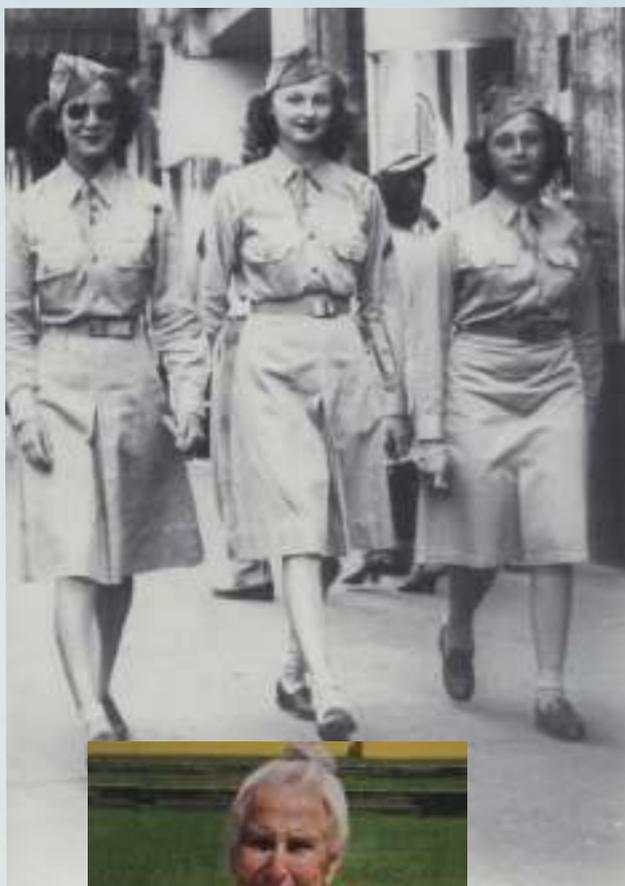
“I’m very proud to have had the opportunity to be a small part of this,” he said. “It’s where I learned to fly and serve, and I think that people don’t really realize the stress and difficult flying some of the CAP crews were under trying to locate submarines. They deserve the highest recognition, and I’m proud to have been able to serve with people like that.”

### A Shining Example

So is Jane Soeten.

When World War II started she was 14 and eager to serve. She did so first as a messenger for the Civilian

*"As a citizen of the United States, I was eager to help my country. I did everything that I was capable of doing and wanted to do more. I performed the best I could with never a thought of ever being rewarded." — Lt. Col. Carolyn Guertin*



Defense Office in her hometown of Tulsa, Oklahoma, and then as a cadet in Civil Air Patrol.

Soeten, 86, said unlike today, when the U.S. has a standing military and robust defense industries that exist to support it, the nation was not prepared to go to war in 1941.

"We didn't have factories making this and making that," she said. "All these little housewives, including my mother, quit doing what they were doing — mopping the floor or running the sweeper — and became Rosie the Riveter (a fictional character created by the U.S. government to encourage women to work outside the home)."

With the example of her mother and other local women trading their spatulas for welding tools, Soeten joined CAP at 16. "Even though I was barely a teenager at the outbreak of World War II, I wanted to contribute to the fight," she said.

"I was the first girl cadet to join," she added. "I recruited a lot of my friends to get involved, too. Eventually, we had about 30 cadets, and I became a cadet lieutenant. We met weekly at Central High School and studied meteorology, navigation, the theory of flight and Morse code."

Jane Soeten, left, was the first female cadet in the Tulsa, Oklahoma, squadron in the 1940s. Soon there were others, like Darlene Downing, center, and Ruth Kratz. Inspired by the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs), Soeten took up flying and soloed at the age of 16, the same year she joined CAP.

At the age of 65, Soeten began competing in the Senior Olympics, inset, winning several track and field medals in the National Senior Games. Her accomplishments were showcased by Wheaties. Photos by 1st Lt. Paris Morthorpe, Alaska Wing

Getting to the meetings was no small feat in those days. Gas was being rationed, and people just didn't drive, she said.

Inspired by the Women Airforce Service Pilots, she also took up flying and soloed the same year she joined Civil Air Patrol. Soeten loved flying so much that she took odd jobs at the local airport to earn flying time. She washed airplane parts and even served as a new engine test pilot.

"CAP helped foster my interest in flying, and I earned a private pilot license after soloing at age 16," she said. "I was hoping to join the WASPs when I was old enough, but the war ended before that and I became a registered nurse and then got a college degree in health, physical education and recreation.

"The interests I had in my youth spilled over into my later life," Soeten said. "I'd always loved physical activity and served for 25 years as the director at the YWCA. Even now I am heavily involved in Senior Olympics, playing basketball up until 2012. I also returned to aviation by joining Boeing after I left the Y. I worked as a logistics analyst for B-1 bombers until I retired."

## A Proud Legacy

Nobody understands CAP's value better than Lt. Col. Carolyn Guertin. She joined CAP on the day it was formed when she was only 13, and, at 86, she continues to serve as a member.

"I was very patriotic and I wanted to help with the war effort," she said. "They told me, 'Go sit down. You're too young.'"

Guertin was undeterred. After only 10 older women had signed up, she asked again to be allowed to join. The organizers relented, and she became the 11th person and the only teenager to join CAP that day, she said.

In a sense, Guertin grew up in CAP, and she has maintained her connection with the organization throughout her life, completing almost 73 years of active service. Over the years, her participation has included a number of search and rescue missions. Her most recent mission came in 2011 after Hurricane Irene.

She still attends squadron meetings, tries to attend conferences and accepts speaking engagements. She participates in squadron special projects such as Wreaths

At age 86, Lt. Col. Carolyn Guertin is now in her 73rd year of service to CAP and remains an active member. Here she rides aboard a CAP Cessna. She recently participated in search and rescue missions as well as the organization's 2011 response to Hurricane Irene.



Across America. She also helps at a local horse farm where veterans ride horses for therapy.

Guertin has received several awards for her service, including the Distinguished Service Award, the Meritorious Service Award with three clusters and the CAP Search and Rescue Award with three clusters. She also was the first recipient of the Lifesaving Award for CISM (Critical Incident Stress Management) intervention. As a founding member of CAP, she received a plaque for 50 years of service, and in 2011 she received a trophy and certificate for 60 years of service. Guertin said it's her hope to achieve 75 years of active service with CAP.

She said she knows receiving the Congressional Gold Medal is a great honor for CAP members, and she feels very honored and humbled.

"As a citizen of the United States, I was eager to help my country. I did everything that I was capable of doing and wanted to do more. I performed the best I could with never a thought of being rewarded," she said. ▲

*Kristi Carr contributed to this story.*