



Tapping Into the Energy of Youth with the Civil Air Patrol

by Fred LaSor

Regular readers of *Soaring Magazine* will have read letters and columns in the past year about the future of our sport, especially faced with an apparent decrease in SSA membership figures. Lots of good ideas have been proposed to build and retain our numbers, and I applaud these, but in the long run we need new people taking up soaring if we are to remain strong as a sport.

Photo above: Staff and cadets of the National Glider Academy's 2004 Summer Camp, Mazon, Illinois. Photo by Becky Rhoads.



Cadet Rich Wilkrecht strapped into "Blissie." The author and two cadets wait for the tow plane to pull the glider onto the active runway. Photo by Becky Skowalski.

This past summer I participated in a glider training program that has been around for a long time, but which was new for me: the Civil Air Patrol's National Glider Academy. I came away from that experience energized by the enthusiasm of the teenage cadets and operators about soaring's future. This is a program I encourage you to look into.

Like many of us I had heard of the CAP. And John Campbell wrote about CAP/NSA cooperation in the August 1997 edition of *Soaring* magazine. But my involvement this year was my first direct contact with CAP, and it was almost accidental.

A student in the Skyline Soaring Club told me last spring of his plans to participate in the CAP summer academy - if they were able to come up with enough instructors. I contacted Camp Commandant Tom O'Brien to offer my services and was invited to join them.

So in mid June I drove to Maroon, Illinois. We were seven CAPs, four non-pilots, three ground instructors, six administrators and 21 cadets of varying experience levels. The administrative staff recorded flight times, monitored safety, coordinated with CAP headquarters at Maxwell AFB in Alabama, and ordered pizzas and fried chicken for lunch.

The folks who organized our glider camp also sponsor a hot air balloon camp (not in Washington, D.C., which would seem like a natural location). Other CAP groups sponsor powered flight camps. As the auxiliary of the U.S. Air Force, the Civil Air Patrol can use some USAF equipment for their activities - including tow planes and gliders for this camp.

Emphasis was on safety at all times on the flight line and around all equipment, and the cadets were conscientious in this regard. They also had plenty of opportunity to learn proper

Photo at right: They sure do put on those USAF glider up fancy! As the USAF auxiliary, the Civil Air Patrol has access to Air Force equipment for its programs. Photo by the author.

Photo below: Instructor Brian Collins, (left, USAF), took off from his Pentagon job to work with CAP cadets for the week. Now he prepares to launch Cadet Danny Timble on his first solo flight. Photo by the author.





Cadet Tyler MacDonald views left before turning downwind to land on January 29 at Maroon. Safety is emphasized throughout training, and clearing before turns is a "must-do." Photo by the author. Article continues on Page 36.

ground handling of the equipment, something any glider club will appreciate when they show up to continue flying at some future date.

We started the week with strong crosswinds and marginal

weather, but by the end of six long days all 21 cadets had logged at least 18 training flights. Several cadets were at their second glider camp and others had previous flight experience, so we ended up sending four of the 21 off on their own. All the cadets



Lots of willing hands make ground handling of the gliders safe and easy. Photo by Andy Almeida.

had extensive ground instruction and most passed a written exam on theory of flight, standard signals, airspace, weather and regulations.

These camps only work because of the efforts of a lot of volunteers, and this is where readers can get involved and work to assure the future of soaring. A few of the adult volunteers were there as parents, but most were "CAP Seniors," participating for their love of flying and their interest in passing this on to the cadets. Camp Coconino's Tom O'Shea, for example, has been involved in organizing CAP flying programs for almost 40 years. No matter how long we had worked on similar programs, all of us were energized by the enthusiasm of the cadets.

The satisfaction for me personally was seeing young men and women ages 14 to 20 consumed by a passion I too feel. Most arrived at camp already conversant in theory of flight, as I learned when I heard two discussing high aspect ratio wings. And at this age they are veritable sponges, learning both intellectually and mechanically at an amazing rate.

The examiner who signed my CFI certificate long ago handed it to me with the words "you now have a license to learn." His exact words were spoken, as I have learned a lot about flying and teaching since I started instructing. But those words were doubly true this summer flying with cadets at the National Glider Academy in Illinois.

Finally, there is a postscript to my summer's activities: the student who tipped me off to the CAP academy made his first solo at Mason on my supervision. One month later he

had Flight of the Day at our club: 2 hours and 25 minutes in a Schweizer Spitz. The fuselage of his plane is looking up! And you can be a part of this growth. Check out the Civil Air Patrol near you.



Above the Author: Fred Luber retired from the American Foreign Service in 1987 to a farm in western Ohio. He started flying gliders in 1996, but frequent assignments to countries without soaring facilities limited his experience prior to retirement. He now soars, instructs and flies at the Central Ohio Soaring Association in

Marietta, Ohio, and for part of the year at the Skyline Soaring Club in Front Royal, Virginia. Photo by Dick Oels.