

Glide to fly

CAP's glider program expands flight opportunities for cadets

By Scott Lausman

What CAP activity is “very exciting” yet “really quiet?” Cadet Senior Airman Joshua Grant of the New Hampshire Wing knows, because that’s how he describes flying in a glider.

Once confined to the continental West, Civil Air Patrol’s glider program is on an upward trajectory and is now in more than 30 states coast-to-coast, plus Alaska and Hawaii.

From CAP and cadet perspectives, there’s a lot to love about gliders.

To begin with, glider flights cost significantly less than powered flights. Depending on the part of the country, the cost for obtaining a glider license can be roughly one-fourth to one-half that for powered flight.

Cadets like the minimum age requirement for glider pilots — 16 — compared with 17 for obtaining a private pilot’s license for powered flight.

Plus, gliding offers “a purer form of flying,” said Lt. Col. Phil Jones, glider flight instructor for the Pennsylvania Wing’s Hilltown Senior Squadron 251. “It’s the greatest way to teach ‘stick and rudder’ skills to young pilots. It’s you, nature and your ability to keep the plane in the air.”

Cadets interested in getting glider experience can choose from local or regional CAP encampments or the weeklong

National Glider Flight Academy, which offers both basic and advanced programs. Instruction includes ground activities, such as attaching the tow rope between the plane and glider, maneuvering the glider onto runways and taxiways, performing wing-runner duties, conducting preflight checks and retiring the aircraft for the night. In the air, cadets learn takeoff, landing and emergency maneuvers.

Lt. Col. William J. Crielly, national director for CAP’s glider program, sees gliders as an important part of CAP’s aerospace instruction. “Relative to power planes, gliders are much less expensive to operate but teach pilots to be far more meticulous in their flying skills and judgment. Gliders are a fantastic way to enter the world of aviation.” ▲

Kimberly Barnhart contributed to this story.



Photo courtesy of Dale Gerhard, Press of Atlantic City

In addition to the freedom of flight gliders provide, the view is spectacular! This glider soars over a section of Woodbine, N.J. As Capt. Paul Finestone of Hilltown Senior Squadron 251, coordinator for the Pennsylvania Wing’s glider program, says, “For those who earn their wings, glider flying instills responsibility and a sense of accomplishment like nothing else on earth.”

Photo by Maj. Douglas Lundgren, Maryland Wing



Cadet Master Sgt. Rachel Petra of the Maryland Wing enjoys the tow and waits for release above Frederick Municipal Airport on her first glider orientation flight.

Maryland Wing Cadet Senior Airman Arvind Srinivasan displays the card he will show the pilot of the towing plane. The '1' indicates to the pilot that this is the cadet's first glider orientation flight, which, in turn, tells the pilot which flight syllabus should be followed.



Photo by Cadet Senior Master Sgt. Aaron Hull, Maryland Wing

A New Jersey Wing cadet brings a glider in for a landing at Woodbine Municipal Airport. With gliders, there is only one chance to land. Novice flyers are always accompanied by a CAP volunteer who is a licensed glider pilot.



Photo courtesy of Dale Gerhard, Press of Atlantic City



Photo courtesy of Tony Landis, NASA

According to one of the founders of a glider encampment in the Tehachapi Mountains of southern California, Lt. Col. Mark Dickerson, "Everyone who wants to fly should have the opportunity." Never far from flight himself, the Air Force retiree is currently working for NASA's most prestigious research and development facility, Dryden Flight Research Center at Edwards Air Force Base.

Photo by 1st Lt. Stacey Bowen, Maryland Wing



It may not seem so from the air, but on the ground glider flying is a team sport. It takes several members to move an aircraft into position at this summer's Maryland Wing Aerospace Academy.