

## **Farewell to Bader Field—Home of Coastal Patrol Base 1**

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*With the imminent closing of Atlantic City Municipal Airport/Bader Field (KAIY) on Monday, September 18, 2006, an important historical site will cease operations. For those who might be unaware, Civil Air Patrol and New York Wing have an important link to Bader Field.*

In February 1942, as the United States tried to recover from the shock of Pearl Harbor, and vicious submarine attacks against ships up and down the Atlantic coast, a daring experiment was launched at Atlantic City Municipal Airport/Bader Field. A small group of amateur civilian pilots began arriving in Atlantic City with their collection of various single engine aircraft and quickly established the first Civil Air Patrol Coastal Patrol Base. They came from all walks of life—doctors and lawyers, truck drivers and store clerks—called by patriotism and a need to serve their country in time of war, to do their little bit to keep America safe.

Led initially by Gill Robb Wilson, the New York Herald Tribune's aviation writer and Civil Air Patrol's national executive officer, the patrol group quickly set up shop at Bader Field. On March 10, 1942, just fifteen minutes into the air on the very first patrol flown, crewed by Major Wynant Farr and Captain Al Muthig, the crew spotted the remains of a torpedoed ship, and some surviving crew members. The CAP airplane radioed in their discovery and a Coast Guard ship was dispatched to the scene to recover the crew. Farr, a New York City businessman and member of New York Wing, later became the base commander at Coastal Patrol Force One. His co-pilot, Muthig, was also a New York Wing member.

Besides Farr and Muthig, a number of other New York Wing members joined the Atlantic City base, including millionaire Tommy Eastman, NYC broker Isaac "Tubby" Burnham II, Jim Knox from Buffalo, Mason Ashford, Jack Bagon, Roloff Dewsnap, Joseph Dotterweich, Richard Fleck, F.A. Jones, Harold Meade, Francis Morgan, Walter Orton, Jr., John Perry, Jr., Clifford Poley, Fred Rosenberger, Frank Schweinfest, Howard Sterne, Robert Underwood and Edgar Woodhams. All of the above named individuals were recipients of the Air Medal, awarded for their many hours of risky patrol over the water. Burnham went on to become the base commander of Coastal Patrol Base 4 at Parksley, Virginia.



**(Hopper Collection, CAP Historical Foundation)**

For the next 18 months, until all of the coastal patrol bases (a total of 21 were established from Maine to southern Texas) were closed on 31 August 1943, flight crews supported by a small group of mechanics, radio operators, and administrative personnel flew thousands of hours of patrol duty, up to 100 miles offshore, often only a few hundred feet off the surface of the water, as they sought out enemy submarines, torpedoed ships, surviving sailors, as well as those who did not survive. They escorted convoys of ships along the Eastern Seaboard, trying to protect shipping from the predatory Nazi submarines.

Crews flew long sorties each day, with 3-4 hours being normal. When not flying, base personnel attended classes in meteorology, aircraft and ship recognition, Morse code, first aid, military drill and customs and courtesy. Additionally, aircrews received training on instrument flight from Edwin Link, inventor of the Link Trainer, and a Binghamton, NY icon.

Robert Neprud, in his excellent history of CAP's early years, *Flying Minute Men*, described Bader Field at the time. "The Atlantic City base took shape quickly. Starting with little more than a fair landing field, with gravel runways, and two hangars—one of which was progressively falling apart—Base 1 blossomed out with a roomy operations building, a superbly equipped control tower and communications office, intelligence and code rooms, an infirmary, and a fine cafeteria...The cafeteria, which served three hot meals a day, was run by Mrs. Dorothy Higbe. The Atlantic City woman, known to everyone as Dot, transferred from the Red Cross motor corps to start a base canteen a few days after the coastal patrol moved in. Under her expert direction, the canteen grew into a full-fledged cafeteria that was scarcely surpassed by the best resort hotels."

In Louis Keefer's book, containing interviews with numerous base members, Master Sergeant Marilou Crescenzo, one of the base admin personnel (and later married to one of the pilots), recalled that "Atlantic City Airport at that time was way past its prime.

The three hangars were three big tin buildings that had originally been put up for the annual new car shows...We always said that we had the only airport in existence where every time the wind blew we'd holler, "get the planes out of the hangar!"



(National Archives photo, circa WWII)(courtesy of Paul Freeman's great website: [http://www.airfields-freeman.com/NJ/Airfields\\_NJ\\_AtlanticCity.html](http://www.airfields-freeman.com/NJ/Airfields_NJ_AtlanticCity.html) )

In William Mellor's tale of early antisubmarine efforts, Sank Same, he describes the shape that Bader Field was in upon the flyers arrival. "Of the three big hangars on the field, one was occupied by the Army, another by private operators whom the Government didn't get around to dispossessing until six months later, and the third, a dilapidated, 17-year-old structure which had been unused for years and which had long since lost its roof, was turned over to the CAP. The building wasn't even safe to walk through, let alone to park planes in. Great chunks of iron roofing still teetered perilously from the gridded framework above, and occasionally a gust of wind would carry a piece of the rotting structure away and send it crashing to the floor."

According to Mellor, due to the lack of a decent hangar, the CAP planes had to be tied down in the lee of the two good hangars. "The pilots made "deadmen" by burying logs or gasoline tins to which were attached mooring cables with snaps at the free ends for quick attachment to wings and tails, to prevent the planes from blowing over in the high winds which constantly swept the field. Even so, three of them broke loose and were overturned during the first week. They were damaged beyond repair, but they provided a source of spare parts for the other planes."

Coastal Patrol Base 1 was the first antisubmarine base to have its aircraft armed with bombs. In July 1942, Farr, flying with Captain Johnny Haggin, were patrolling in a Grumman Widgeon when they found a submarine off the Jersey shore town of Absecon.

Stalking the sub for over four hours, they waited until the submarine rose to periscope depth before making two passes, dropping a 325-pound depth charge on each run, both of which hit their target, leaving behind a large oil slick and pieces of wood planking from the submarine's deck.

The base had a number of crews who joined the Duck Club, forced to ditch in the water, but all were rescued with only light injury. The base suffered only one fatality, on Easter Sunday, April 25, 1943, when Ben Berger, a pilot from Denver, was killed when he crashed into a bridge abutment while practicing landings.



(Hopper Collection, CAP Historical Foundation)



From L-R: Col Harry Blee, USAAC (CAP National Operations Officer); Maj Wynant Farr, Base Commander; Capt Allen Muthig; Capt Pete Johnson; and 1LT Randall Custer.  
(Hopper Collection, CAP Historical Foundation, originally from Frederick K. Creasey)

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