

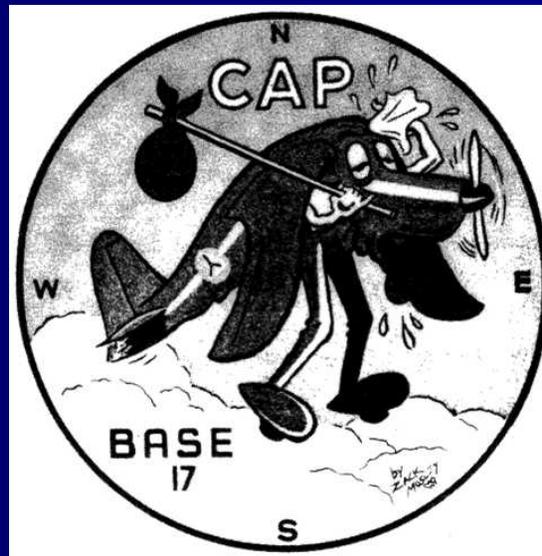


# New York Wing Office of the Wing Historian



## Coastal Patrol Base #17 Riverhead, NY

6 August 1942 – 31 August 1943





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7 December 1941, Pearl Harbor  
USS Arizona in flames after Japanese attack



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## Operation Paukenschlag (Drumbeat)

German Admiral Karl Doenitz, commander of the U-boat fleet, proposed to send 12 subs to the US East Coast—was only authorized to send 5 at first

- January 1942, German U-boats sank 36 ships off the East Coast
- Easy prey along shipping channels--city lights offering silhouettes of ships
- No convoys, no air cover, no ASW capabilities

*In first 6 months of 1942, 226 ships were sunk by U-boats on the East Coast*



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- In late June in 1942, in the Atlantic darkness, a Nazi submarine, U-202, surfaced off Amagansett, Long Island, NY. Four German saboteurs were put ashore with a large supply of explosives and \$174,000 in cash.
- A few nights later, a second U-boat surfaced to allow four more Nazi spies to crawl onto the beach at Jacksonville, FL.
- These eight German agents intended to bomb Penn Station, the New York City water system, railroads, and large Jewish department stores. They also planned other acts of sabotage.
- Fortunately, all eight were arrested fairly quickly, but only after the NY leader turned himself in to the FBI.



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- With US Army, Navy and Coast Guard unprepared for antisubmarine patrol, volunteers stepped into the breach—including Civil Air Patrol and Coast Guard Auxiliary
- Initial funding of \$18,000 from the Office of Civilian Defense and a \$40,000 “Tanker Protection Fund” collected from major oil companies, three CAP bases were authorized to be established along the Atlantic Coast:
  - Atlantic City, NJ
  - Rehoboth Beach, DE
  - Lantana, FL



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- In June 1942, CAP Coastal Patrol planes were armed with bombs or depth charges
- Smaller aircraft like the Stinson Voyager or the Piper L-4 would carry one 100 lb demolition bomb
- The medium aircraft, such as the Fairchild 24, carried two 100 lb demolition bombs
- The largest aircraft, including the 2-engine Grumman Widgeon, were fitted with two 300 lb depth charges



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- The immediate success of these bases quickly led to the creation of 18 more—from Maine to Mexico, including CP #17 at Riverhead, Long Island





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- The authorization to establish a Coastal Patrol Base on Long Island was granted on 1 July 1942.
- Captain (later Major) Ralph Earle, of Pennsylvania Wing, was selected as the base commander and arrived at Suffolk Airport on 4 July.
- Through July to early August, Earle, with the help of other PAWG officers, scouted locations on eastern Long Island, settling on Westhampton Airport



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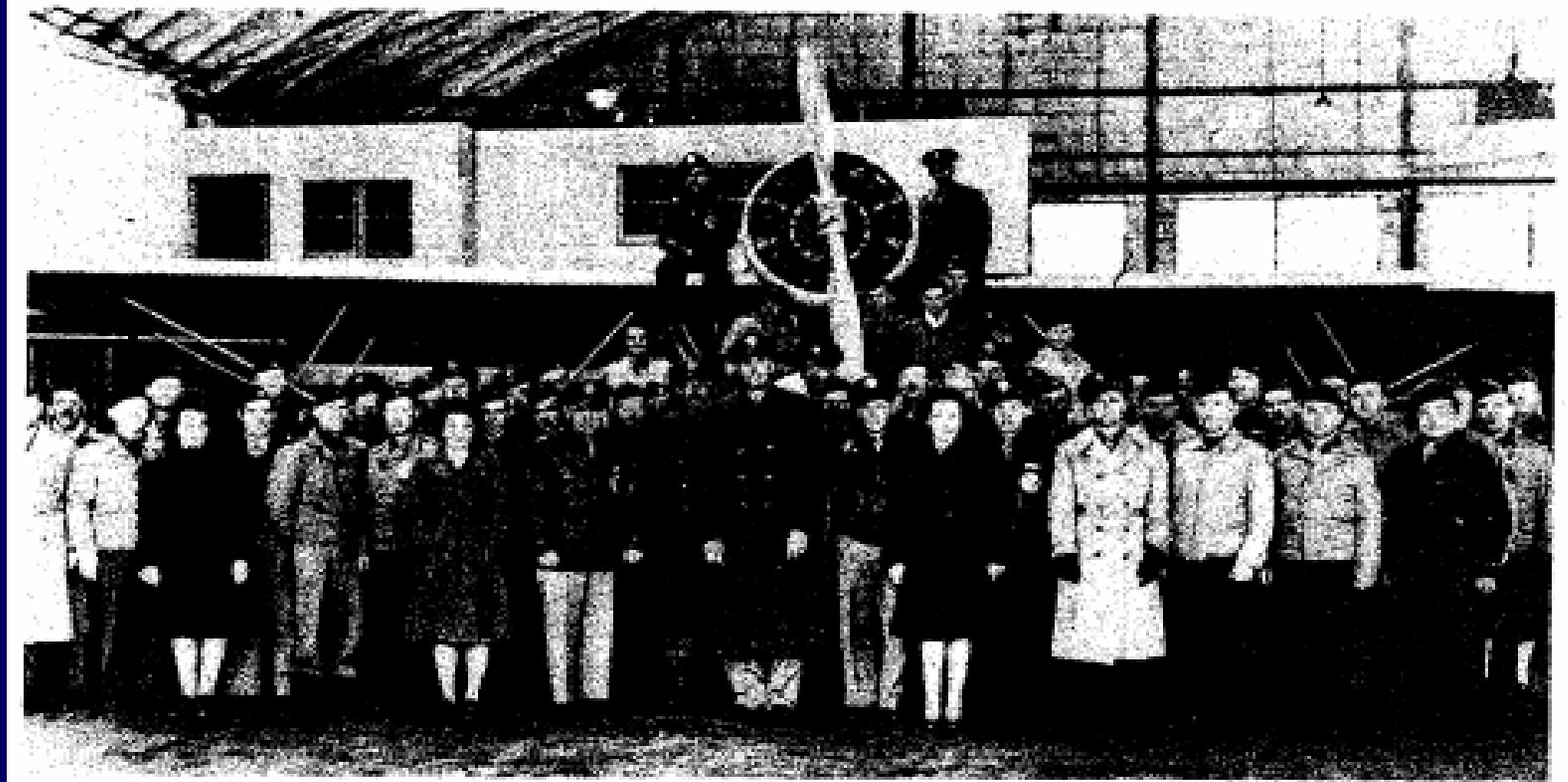
- In early August 1942, a Waco and a Stinson Reliant were sent to Mitchel Field to be outfitted with bomb racks, the first aircraft for CP #17
- Soon more staff and aircraft flowed into the base and the first official patrol was flown on 18 August
- On 21 August, the first full patrol was flown by:
  - DO 3 (Hoffmeister & Leas)
  - DO 6 (de la Rigaudiere & Hartung)
  - DO 4 (Hall & Reilly)
  - DO 5 (Walter & Moody)
- Until Mae West vests arrived, crews wore the lifebelts seized from the German spies who had landed at Amagansett



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L.T. COL. JOHNSON AND BASE PERSONNEL





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- Approximately 62 officers, 20 support staff (including 5 women) served at Coastal Patrol #17, commanded by Major Ralph Earle of PA Wing
- Base personnel were primarily from Pennsylvania and New York, with some from Massachusetts and other Wings
- Staff included James Boudreau, who would become one of the first New York City Group Commanders



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Photo of Coastal Patrol Base 17 Ramp



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Safety was a Number One Priority at the Base

- Aircrews wore "Mae Wests," carried knives, sea markers (aluminum powder or chemical dye), red rescue flashlight, Very pistol, first aid kit, food, rubber life rafts, and Barracuda bags
- Crews trained for crash landings continuously, practicing getting into their rescue equipment, including zoot suits
- Results—no fatalities at Base 17



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L-R, 1<sup>st</sup> Lt William Hall, unknown, Capt Wallace Newcomb, Maj George Miller  
(note the bomb in front of Lt Hall)



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### Engineering Kept Them in the Air

- Capt Warren E. Moody built a repair shop from scratch, scrounging tools, parts, machines and radios
- By early spring 1943, the Engineering Department was providing major overhauls of engines as well as rebuilding and recovering airplanes
- Only 3 airplanes were lost at sea despite thousands of hours of airtime



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Fairchild 24-C8F (Coastal Patrol 2)



Stinson V-77 Gullwing



Stinson 10-A (Coastal Patrol 20)



Piper L-4A



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### Typical Day at the Base

- Five patrols/day (dawn, morning, noon, afternoon, dusk); 2 aircraft each patrol
- Each patrol lasted at least 3 hours; everyone typically flew 2 flights/day
- After 1 Dec 42, only dawn and dusk patrols
- Other activities included School for Officers (daily classes in Morse code, instrument flying, meteorology, identification of surface ships, calisthenics)



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DATE	AIRCRAFT FLOWN			CROSS COUNTRY		REMARKS OR INSPECTOR'S SIGNATURE CERTIFICATION NUMBER AND RATING	AIRCRAFT WEIGHT AND ENGINE CLASS.				
	MAKE AND MODEL	CERTIFICATE NUMBER	ENGINE	FROM	TO		CLASS.	CLASS.	CLASS.	INSTRUMENT RADIO OR HOOD	AS INSTRUCTED
1942							0-80	0-3LS			
9/5	WACO	NC16594	LYC285	SUFFOLK, LI, NY		COASTAL PATROL OVER WATER		5	-		
9/7	"	"	"	"	"			5	-		
9/12	"	"	"	"	"			5	-		
9/14	"	"	"	"	"			5	-		
9/15	"	"	"	"	"		* SIGHTER NAZI SUB-BOMBED		5	-	VERY BAD WEATHER-D
9/16	"	"	"	"	"		SAME RESULTS		5	-	
9/17	"	"	"	"	"		NOT KNOWN, SUB		5	-	FOG RIGHT ON WATER
9/19	"	"	"	"	"		SIGHTED WHILE		5	-	
9/20	"	"	"	"	"		ON SURFACE		5	-	
9/21	"	"	"	"	"				5	-	
9/22	STINSON	NR 4127	LYC 215	"	"			5	-		
9/23	WACO	NC 16594	" 285	"	"			5	-		
HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THE FOREGOING ENTRIES ARE TRUE AND CORRECT.							PAGE TOTAL	60	-		
SIGNED							PILOT'S SIGNATURE	TOTAL TIME TO DATE	1614	48	268

9/15/42 entry from Joseph N. Hettel, Jr.'s log book regarding sub sighting and bomb drop



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- Duck Club
  - At CP 17, 7 members achieved this distinction
    - Lts Bob Ricksen & Dick Lancaster (10/28/42)
    - Lts Junior Grubb & Ed Allen (11/29/42)
    - Lts Don Leas & Ted Palmer (6/4/43)
    - Lt Theodore R. Prokopovits



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Sikorsky S-39, "The Duck" Base 17's Rescue Plane

(The Duck was purchased from Jake Rupert, owner of Rupert Brewery and the New York Yankees)



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A Base 17 crew preps in front of the Sikorsky S-39



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Link Trainer

- Developed by Edward Link in Binghamton, NY—the company is now known as L-3 Communications
- Allowed pilots to safely train on flying by instruments
- Full yaw, pitch and roll movements
- Several pilots at Base 17 completed their instrument rating



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IN REPLY REFER  
TO NO.  
Ser. 3966  
ESP-20/P15

ADDRESS REPLY TO  
COMMANDER  
EASTERN SEA FRONTIER

Headquarters  
COMMANDER EASTERN SEA FRONTIER  
90 Church Street  
New York, N. Y.

27 August, 1943.

To: Commanding Officer, CAP Coastal Patrol No. 17.

Via: Commander, 25th Wing, Army Air Forces Anti-submarine  
Command.

Subj: Services, Appreciation of.

1. Your unit has rendered invaluable services to this command in fulfillment of its war mission of protecting shipping and combatting the submarine menace.
2. The tasks performed by CAPCP have been many, including anti-submarine patrols, escort missions, searches for known or suspected submarines, and assisting in rescues after marine and aerial casualties.
3. In the performance of these tasks there has been displayed a skill, energy, resourcefulness, and disregard for danger which are in the highest tradition of the American armed forces.
4. Now on your departure from the Eastern Sea Frontier I extend to you and to your men my thanks for your cooperation and wish you all the greatest success in your next assignments. Well Done!

  
ADOLPHUS ANDREWS

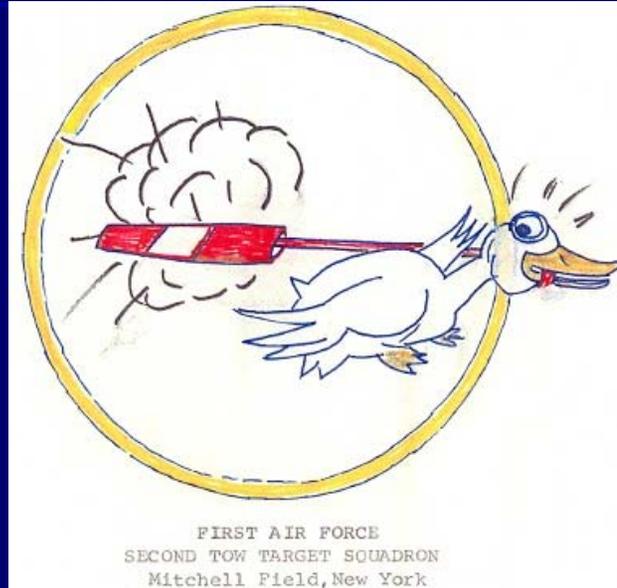


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- At conclusion of Coastal Patrol duties, most of CP 17's pilots and observers transferred to other wartime duties, including tow target and tracking operations with Tow Target Unit 1 (Hadley Field, NJ), Tow Target Unit 17 (Hyde Field, MD) and Tow Target Unit 2 at Flushing Airport
- Capt Gordon Pyle, former CP #17 Operations Officer, was killed during one of these tracking missions



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## **Capt GM Pyle Missing—Hunt for Plane Last Reported Sunday Night is in Vain**

October 23, 1943 New York Times

Capt Gordon McAlpin Pyle of the Civil Air Patrol, well-known as a yachtsman in civilian life, and Lieut. RA Hamner of Keysville, VA, his observer, were yesterday declared officially missing by the Eastern Defense Command. Their plane, with Captain Pyle at the controls, left an airport in the area on Sunday evening and failed to return on Monday as scheduled. A wide search was conducted for the plane, which was reported to have been flying over the ocean.

Captain Pyle was 42 years old and lived at 216 East Sixty-first Street, Manhattan, with his wife, the former Zene Montgomery, whom he married on October 14, 1926, and their 6-year-old daughter, Zene Adelia. He was a member of the class of 1923 at Princeton University. His parents were the late Mr. and Mrs. James Tolman Pyle.

In 1931 Mr. Pyle and his wife were missing for eight days in the Atlantic Ocean when a small schooner in which they sailed from the United States to Europe was unreported. The vessel eventually reached Spain.

Mr. Pyle was a brother of David H. McAlpin Pyle of Far Hills, NJ"



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## Air Medal Recipients from Coastal Patrol 17



FO Edgar T. Allen  
1LT Adolph M. Backstrom  
1LT James C. Boudreau  
2LT Eugene L. Brown  
2LT Paul V. Cline  
CAPT Guy de la Rigaudiere  
FO G.S. Driscoll  
MAJ Ralph Earle  
1LT Hibbard S. Evans  
1LT Kevin Fitzgerald  
2LT Frederic S. Gilley  
1LT John R. Grubb  
1LT William S. Hall

1LT Joseph N. Hettel, Jr.  
1LT Philip e. Hoffmeister  
2LT Lester S. Holden  
1LT Joseph Kapey  
1LT Paul H. Knepper  
2LT Peter Lafen  
2LT Richard T. Lancaster  
1LT Donald S. Leas, Jr.  
2LT Norman R. McCandless  
1LT Arnold L. Meneal  
1LT George Mercurio  
2LT John L. Milton, Jr.  
FO Frank H. Mitchell

CAPT Wallace D. Newcomb  
2LT Farwell W. Perry  
FO Theo. R. Prokopovits  
1LT Gordon Pyle  
2LT Enoch Raysor  
1LT Norman W. Rehrig  
1LT John J. Reilly, Jr.  
1LT Robert E. Ricksen  
1LT Albert J. Sidlow  
1LT August Thiede  
1LT Harold E. Wallen  
2LT Carl L. Walter  
1LT William M. Walter



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## ■ Sources

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- *From Maine to Mexico*, Louis Keefer
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- *Sank Same*, William Mellor
- Pilot Log book, Joseph N. Hettel, Jr.
- NYWG Memo 47-2, 19 Aug 1946
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- USAF Museum, Wright-Patterson AFB