

Civil Air Patrol

Oral History Interview

NHQ.5.2015-R.L. Bowling
Major General Richard L. Bowling, CAP
29 August 2015



NATIONAL HISTORY PROGRAM
Headquarters CAP

Civil Air Patrol Interview Release Form

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Date: _____

CIVIL AIR PATROL
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Interview
of
Major General Richard L. Bowling, CAP
by
Chaplain Major Marvin Owen, CAP

DATE: 29 August 2015

Edited by Capt Jessica Allen, CAP

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Access Agreement	i
Title Page	ii
Table of Contents.....	iii
Forward.....	1
Summary of Contents	2
Guide to Contents	3
Oral History Interview Transcript.....	4
Appendix.....	16

FOREWORD

The following is the transcript of an oral history interview. Since only minor emendations have been made, the reader should bear in mind that he is reading a transcript of the spoken rather than the written word. Additionally, no attempt to confirm the historical accuracy of the statements has been made. As a result, the transcript reflects the interviewee's personal recollections of a situation as he remembered it at the time of the interview.

Editorial notes and additions made by CAP historians are enclosed in brackets. If feasible, first names, ranks, or titles are also provided. Any additions, deletions, and changes subsequently made to the transcript by the interviewee are not indicated. Researchers may wish to listen to the actual interview recording prior to citing the transcript.

SUMMARY OF CONTENTS

In this oral history interview, Major General Richard L. Bowling, Civil Air Patrol's 18th National Commander, speaks candidly about his experiences in the organization.

The interview begins with Maj Gen Bowling describing his early life in eastern Tennessee and personal background. He goes on to explain his early introduction to Civil Air Patrol (CAP), comparing CAP to his time as a Boy Scout. Bowling describes his experiences as a CAP cadet and goes on to explain his roles in CAP as a senior member to include his term as Tennessee Wing Commander. He continues by sharing the path that led him to becoming CAP's first wartime National Commander since World War II. He describes his experiences in that role, to include his personal reaction and leadership response to the September 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade Center. Continually, he explains the transition to online services and the organization's first financial audit which also occurred during his tenure. Throughout the interview, Bowling offers his perspectives on leadership and volunteerism, and discusses the challenges and accomplishments from his time as National commander.

GUIDE TO CONTENTS

1. Introductions
2. Personal and Family Background
3. CAP Cadet Experience
4. CAP Senior Member Experience/ Time as Tennessee Wing Commander
5. Becoming National Commander
6. Response to September 11, 2001 Attack
7. Actions Taken and Accomplishments as National Commander
8. Challenges Faced as National Commander
9. Closing Remarks

CAP ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

Number: NHQ.5.2015-R.L. Bowling
Recording Interview With: Maj Gen Richard L. Bowling, CAP
Date of Interview: 29 August 2015
Conducted by: Ch Maj Marvin Owen, CAP

O: Marvin Owen

B: Richard Bowling

O: Well today, I have the privilege of interviewing Major General Richard Bowling, who served as national commander number 18. The date today is 29, August 2015. I'm Chaplain Major Marvin Owen, the director of Oral History for Civil Air Patrol. General, thank you for talking with me today.

B: Thank you, Major Owen. It's quite a pleasure to take this opportunity to sit down with you.

O: Yes sir. Well, I'd like to start and find out a little bit about your family background, where you grew up and some things that might've been early influences.

B: I was born and raised or reared, however you want to put that, in Knoxville, Tennessee, which is in Eastern Tennessee. I come from a strong country. And I'm talking about agrarian background. My family and most of the families around that area are very strong mountain agrarian farmers and people of faith. My grandfather on my dad's side was an ordained Baptist minister and my grandmother who was a saint among saints, set the tone for our upbringing, not only my dad and his brothers, but my family, and he's to carry on. I was raised in the public education system throughout my history grades one through 12. Then I went to the university where our earned a bachelor's and master's and doctoral degrees from the University of Tennessee. My wife and I, Ellie have been married come December the 22nd, 49 years.

O: Oh, congratulations.

B: Thank you. We have one son Dusty, isn't his real name. His given name is Richard Tansley, named after my father or some middle name and her father's middle name. We have three grandchildren and one great grandson. So we are a very close knit-tight family. It's to the point now

where the family, the older ones have dwindled away. And now we're the older ones, but throughout our married life, it has always been that after church, and that's the big word after church. If you go to church, the family all gets together for lunch, and it is nothing unusual to have four generations sitting around the lunch table on Sunday.

O: Oh, that's wonderful.

B: It's a great foundational process, and now we'll have five generations sitting around the lunch table. But nevertheless, I've been involved in business, in industry. My background, most recently, I had my own company, human resource consulting company since 1992. I shut that business down in 2012, simply because the economy couldn't stand it. But prior to that, I've held positions in industry, a senior vice president of human resources for Robert Shaw, a major automotive and environmental control manufacturer. And also in municipal government and in retailing. So I have a pretty well balanced background. I did four years active duty in the United States Army as a criminal investigator. So there's a military component. There's an industrial component. There's an education component.

As a matter of fact, my consulting business focused upon training outplacement, the writing of resumes, counseling, and dealing with folks that were in a pretty tough situation in their lifetime. I am and proud to say a Southern Baptist, very conservative in nature. I was ordained as a deacon in our own home Baptist church in the early '70s and have remained faithful to our Lord and savior since. And from that, I teach among Sunday school class of which I've been forgiven for tomorrow, but that particular endeavor has been a real blessing to me because I always got... Well, to simply stated I'm the youngest person in the class and these guys are all in their '80s, '70, '80s, and some in their '90s.

O: Wow!

B: And I feel like I'm there to learn from them, not them to learn from me, but it's a wonderful, wonderful situation where I've been blessed and put in that situation.

O: [...]

B: As far as the Civil Air Patrol career goes, I came into this organization October of 1961.

O: What led you to...

B: Well, it's strange because that's part of my explanation to when I go to conferences and different organizations. I have been involved with the Boy Scouts and had just gone into a junior high school. I was 13, and at that time it was 13 to 18, but I had just gone into junior high school. And one of my friends came in, in this khaki uniform, and I said, "What is that uniform?" Because I knew it wasn't a scout uniform, but I saw something different about it. And he said, "It's Civil Air Patrol." And I said, "What is Civil Air Patrol?" And he said, "We go out and find crashed airplanes."

And I thought, "Man, that's exactly what I want to do." So very shortly, within a couple of weeks, he took me to a squadron meeting. I joined and have been there except for my years of active duty there ever since. But the wealth of information, the training, the mentorship, the guidance spiritually, physically, mentally, from what I've derived from Civil Air Patrol cannot be measured in any form circumstance. I've been very well blessed. I've been very well surrounded by men and women who have guided me faithfully, directly or indirectly throughout my entire career.

O: Good. How far did you go in the cadet program?

B: I was cadet commander of Knoxville Composite squadron when I attained the rank of captain. At that time, there were no spots of cadets. The spots didn't exist until 1964. In 1964, I was already the cadet commander of the squadron, had other things on my mind that young men have on their mind. And I thought, well, I'm not going to pursue the certificate of proficiency, which was the spots of that era. So I didn't, but I remained a cadet captain until I came back in as a senior member.

And I was commissioned back in as a second lieutenant. I've been through just about every, well, not through every... I've been through every educational opportunity that Civil Air Patrol has afforded with the exception of very few. I've directed numerous corporate learning courses, squadron officers courses, I've directed five region staff colleges. So I've been the full gamut in commanders courses.

O: Okay. That is great. Well, what was your first command position? Were you a squadron commander?

B: No, strangely enough I was not. I was inducted by my mentor, Colonel Williams C. Turner as the deputy for cadets because he knew my strong cadet background. He had watched me grow up. He was my squadron commander as a cadet. So he knew me personally. I knew him personally, as a matter of fact, I considered him a second father. He was that father figure and we were very close and remained very close until his death. But that was my first duty assignment, it was that of a deputy for cadets. And then I moved over as the director of personnel for the wing and then from

there, plans and programs, and then just wherever Colonel Turner, who was then the Tennessee wing commander then owned to region. And when he went to region, I followed him to region and was the DCS for cadets and training there. But as we progressed through the ranks, I became Tennessee wing commander. He appointed me to be the wing commander in 1995, my memory starting to slip a little bit, but in the 1990s.

O: Okay, [...] '90s.

B: I was appointed as Tennessee wing commander. I served a three year commitment there. And then I was appointed Southeast region commander and served a full term there and then elected as national vice commander and served a term there. Then elected as national commander, served a full term there beginning in 2001 and ending in 2004, then on to the board of governors and was appointed to a term there, a four year term. And the last two years, 2006 through 2008, I was the chairman of the board of governors.

O: Okay, great. Well, you do have a varied experience, pretty broad. In each of these, it sounded like the position pretty much shocked you, had you ever felt about a national position or?

B: No, I had not thought... As a matter of fact, I tell young cadets as I've talked with them through the years, at no point did I envision myself ever becoming the national commander much less the region commander or even a wing commander. That was never on my screen, but I was just very blessed to be placed where I was placed.

O: Wow. That's great. Well, I'm so glad. Well, what are some of the things that you... I'd like to think with you for a minute. You've mentioned some people who influenced you and mentor along the way, what were some of the challenges that you faced and how did you deal with them? I'd like to really focus on some leadership things that you discovered through the years.

B: Anytime you have people in a mix, there's always going to be personality conflicts. There's going to be a certain points of disagreement. And I learned very early on to be... For lack of a better word, a healer. I focused my attention upon, "Okay, we have a problem here. How do we solve this problem? And what resources do we need?" And I've also have a knack for being a delegator. So there was an acronym called AODS and it was Analyze, Organized, Deputize and Supervise. And that's how I approached each of my command functions. I was to analyze the situation, organize the folks and the resources that were needed, deputized the people that needed to be placed because of their backgrounds or their interests, and then turn them loose. And that has been my mantra that I enjoy seeing

people doing and looking at them and seeing the potential that they have, that they never saw and allowing them to express that potential and allowing them to move forward and to grow themselves.

O: That is great. Well, I'd like to talk with you for just a minute, or have you highlights and accomplishments if you will. I know that you really had a passion for mentoring.

B: Absolutely. As a matter of fact, that goes back to the Analyze, Organize, Deputize and Supervisor, but I have a document that I'm going to allow you to include, or will permit you to include.

O: Thank you.

B: I became by virtue of, and there was no luck in it. It was by destiny. And I want to tell you that I feel it was divine intervention. That's purely my feeling, but I became the first wartime commander in Civil Air Patrol since World War II. I was the commander. I came in August of 2001. September the 11th, 2001, we all know what happened at the World Trade Center and at the Pentagon. So I became the first wartime commander since World War II. On my watch, I had already expressed as the vice commander who the folks began to know me. They knew me well, that I was all business, but I enjoyed having fun. And that when the rubber meets the road, that we have to be prepared. So within the first eight hours, once I received word, and I think we all know where we were, what we were doing when the attacks happened and we first heard about it.

I can recall being at a rental property that I own working. And I received the call from my National Communications Director, Major Moe Thomas is now Colonel Moe Thomas, who happened to be the one of the engineers at the ABC affiliate in Washington, DC. And he said, "Sir, I wanted to let you know that the World Trade Center and the Pentagon had been attacked." My first inclination was, this is an exercise. And then I could tell by the tone in his voice, this was real, there was no exercise to this. I said, "I appreciate the information." I immediately hung up, got on the cell phone called National Headquarters. And I gave the order to stand up every available aircraft and body that was mission ready in the organization.

With any eight hours, we had stood up 8,000 CAP members across the country, which was absolutely unheard of. As we began these missions, we launched the first aircraft to make the reconnaissance flights over the World Trade Center. We made those with air support from the Air Force. Our aircraft did all of the imagery and brought that to light. So that the powers that be the various agencies could see what was happening on the ground without actually being in place. The organization then began to

focus upon those things that were important to Homeland Security and Homeland defense. We adopted the mantra, eyes of the home skies, which would go back to our roots from World War II. There was a poster that was developed during World War II that we drew out of mouth bowls.

We reincorporated it and it still remains around today. From that point, I began to have meetings with the air force, the air staff, they knew our capabilities, the Homeland Security mission then began to happen. As a matter of fact, I spent more time in the Pentagon than I did at Maxwell or at home. I had unfettered access to the Pentagon. I was unescorted. I even had an office across the hall from the Vice Chief of Staff. But I was appointed by General Chuck Wall who was director of Air Force Operations as one of seven general officers to staff the Air Force Homeland defense initiative. Now there's a difference between the Homeland defense and Homeland Security. Security is the civilian component, defense is the military component.

How I wound up on that, I have not a clue other than the fact that they had great trust in my capabilities and the abilities plus the demonstration of our standup and stick-to-itiveness. During my tenure and leading as a spin off from that we developed a need, or we had a need for a different aircraft configuration. We bought the Gippsland GA-8 aircraft, which might remain in the fleet until today. We use those as airborne support centers or central points. We had the hyperspectral imaging technologies that came out of this. We began the [inaudible 00:17:24], the airborne realtime queuing hyperspectral enhanced reconnaissance system. And we also developed the SDIs, satellite digital imagery systems.

Another added benefit that we had through the years, we had always maintained our call sign is CAP flight, which Civil Air Patrol flight and the number for that particular aircraft, whatever mission that we were flying. And interestingly enough, the Air Force adopted the same thing except CAP flight to them was Combat Air Patrol instead of Civil Air Patrol. But the unique thing about it was that anytime that our people would queue up the microphone and announced to the towers that CAP flight such and such was ready for taxiing or ready for takeoff, they interpreted that as if we were an F-15 or an F-16.

So we had unfettered access to the airspace at any time we needed it. As a matter of fact, as a direct result of our stand up, our readiness, our preparedness, the Air Force Chief of Staff promoted me to two star. The history of the organization was that in the past, there had only been one star national commanders. And in some instances in the early days there were Colonels, but I was the first that was legitimately and own orders promoted by the Chief of Staff of the Air Force to a major general.

O: So your vice commander was a colonel.

B: He was, as a matter of fact, it was Colonel Dwight Wheless and then he became a brigadier. So interestingly enough, as well, I adopted the policy that each time one of my officers, including the vice commander was either promoted or elevated in rank of whatever, they were administered the same oath that an air force officer was administered with a caveat of the Civil Air Patrol instead of the United States Air Force.

O: Right.

B: But from that technology group, it was just amazing what could happen and what did happen. The air force opened their doors to us. They established an Air Force Auxiliary Board, which we called AFAB, but it was a monthly meeting with the air staff. And we had the air staff at our full disposal. They had our staff at their full disposal and a great deal of interaction camaraderie came from result of that. We participated in a number of Homeland Security exercises. We had a wonderful interaction with the secretary, the new secretary of Homeland Security, Tom Ridge, whom through a personal friend and CAP acquaintance, was a personal friend and very close acquaintance of Tom Ridge.

So we had earned unfettered access to the secretary of Homeland Security, numerous meetings. As a matter of fact, I was sitting in his office as they were moving into the new building and bringing in the office equipment and everything, but had an opportunity to meet with him. And we became very close in coordinating and had not only secretary Tom Ridge, we had Undersecretary Asa Hutchinson and Undersecretary Gordon England for Homeland Security. And both of these one came from the Senate. Asa Hutchinson came from the Senate, and I want to say, Secretary England either was the Navy Secretary or went on to be the Navy Secretary.

But nevertheless, we had a lot of exposure by virtue of the hyperspectral and the imaging component of the organization. We were involved in so many things. It was amazing to see the reception that we got from leadership of all of the services. As a matter of fact, the first organizational group that actually partnered with us was the Coast Guard. And it we built a number of friendships. But had a valuable, valuable contact. John Kirsten Stein, who was the chief scientist of the Naval Laboratories was a CAP member. And John opened doors that no one could have cracked for us.

We had meetings with a number of three-letter offices, FBI, CIA, NSA and the list goes on and on. And it was just amazing how the doors began to open for us. And it was all done. Believe it or not, all of this technology with the exception of hyperspectral was all done out of radio shack

components. The military was so impressed that we could go to radio shack and build an imaging device that would fit in a suitcase and they had components that would equal the length of this table. They would strap those on the bottom of an F-18 or F-16, and we miniaturized it so that it would fit in a briefcase. And they were just so enthralled with that.

We were on the front end, we being the command staff were invited to Fort Belvoir, Virginia down to the Army's training proving ground. And we're witness to the first UAV is that were being worked with. So there was a number of pieces of interaction there. As we began this, as we spun up, there was a recognizable need for more command and control coordination. So I stood up the National Operations Center at Maxwell Air Force base, and it coordinated over 1200 missions in 2003. Under my direction, of course, any good organization looks forward and we codified at least 13 long-term objectives. And those are...

Well, I'll spell that for you to let you have those so that you can inculcate those later. We approved the closure of many outdated resources that were money drains on the organization, saving the corporation money, reallocating the members monies. And of course, the federal monies that were awarded to us. During my tenure, we were recognized by the Air Force Associations of Vandenberg Award.

Air force Association of Vandenberg Award, National Aeronautical Associations Frank G. Brewer Trophy, the Frontiers of Flight, the [inaudible 00:24:29] Award for achieving excellence in aviation, the American Society of Association of Executives, the Summit Award, the National Aeronautics Association Champion of Public Benefit Flying. We also had a number of exposures in National magazines, the Air Force magazine, Flying magazine, VFW magazine, Today's Officer magazine, Homeland defense journal, Aviation Week, multiple public service announcements on TV, radio. During my direction, or at my direction, we instituted a number of corporate sponsorships and grant acquisitions.

And this was all done through a new position that I asked that be added to the National Headquarter staff. It was a grants' employee position. And even to us today, these continue to make significant inroads and looking at untapped resources for the organization. I also made improvements at top level through the auxiliary all the way to the board of governors. And of course, as I stated earlier, I became the chair of that in 2006 and '07. On my tenure or during my tenure, I oversaw significant growth of membership, which was greater than 10%. For the first time in more than 12 years, we exceeded 61,000 members and retention peaked that similar high records.

O: That is impressive.

B: So we led the transition to online services that we now enjoy today. We had folks that had experience from all sorts of backgrounds and venues, and I just turned them loose and said, "This is what we want to do. How do we do it?" The initial responses were what we now see online were the initial CAP news, the CAP news online, which included the use of streaming video, CAP Mart online, which is now Vanguard, online training and testing. Instead of the old paper methods, we used e-business across the nation becoming the standard and moving information that at the speed of responsiveness.

We had the first qualified audit ever in the history of the organization as far as finances. Also in looking out for the members of the organization, I made it a priority that we give our members affordable life insurance. We had credit card rebates that were coming to help support CAP programs. We had discounts on computers and software, and we penetrated the marketplace very effectively from the aerospace education revamp. I asked Jim Molet and his staff to revamp the textbook for aerospace education. And it was a brand new, The Flight of Discovery and has been, or had been praised or was praised across the country for its excellence in communication and education.

O: I would echo that progress. It's very good.

B: Also, on my watch, I had been a product of mentoring and I proposed and directed that the organization come up with a program for building future mentors and it was done. And there is a pamphlet and a program to this day that was developed by the folks on my staff. As a matter of fact, that the 2000 National Board, as I was exiting, I presented those to the National Board and left them in their hands for their execution. So some of the objectives, as a matter of fact, as I went through these yesterday in gave and take or a question and answer session with former national commanders, there were a number of things that we talked about. What did I do and how did I do it? And what were my actions?

I provided a select group of highly motivated, highly trained, well led volunteers to perform missions for America. I established through that CAP and attitude of zero tolerance for substandard practices regarding the safety, health, and welfare of our members. I wanted to make and we did make CAP the resource of choice for public agencies requiring Homeland Security search rescue, disaster relief, and civil defense, and other LEA, law enforcement agency missions. We developed a leadership, management skills and ethical principles in American youth that were cadet program. We provided world class aviation and space education to our members and the general public on that end.

We instilled in our members a devotion to professionalism in matters of personal appearance to conduct and all other dimensions of CAP life. As a matter of fact, at each National Board gathering, each gathering that we were at one of my standard policies was that each member of the National Board or any say or wherever we were, would turn around and look at the uniform of the person behind them, or next to them to critique, correct, whatever, to make sure that their uniform was as it should be. I even had the cadet program that cadets to address senior members. If they found a senior member with a uniform infraction, have no hesitation to tell them about it.

If there were questions, tell them to come and see me. But we established an unmistakable line of authority, responsibility, and communications that were clear, efficient, and completely fair across CAP. We secured multiple sources of additional funding support and sustain the growth of CAP beyond the normal funding constraints. We established strategic partnerships with other organizations and agencies to broaden public service and the services that we provide to America. We developed and conducted marketing, advertising campaigns targeted to specific audiences that we might attract them, bring the best of the best into the organization.

We maximized the use of our advanced technologies in a way that our business was unbelievable. So many agencies were so attracted to what we did. It was amazing to me, the briefings and the interaction that we had from the other services. It was my goal to implement a quality of life that provided our members with opportunities for meaningful and rewarding services to the nation. And one of the aspects which was finally achieved this year to fully integrate CAP into the total force, as a value and respected partner and a mix of active guard reserve and auxiliary components at this national board, it was codified.

That means it was put to paper on my watch and in previous watches. We had talked about it. We'd had the oral guarantee that this was going to happen. There were numerous slides that were developed with all of the seals of the active guard reserve and auxiliary forces, but it was never put to paper. Now we have it on paper and we're able to exercise as a fully functioning group of airmen, volunteer airmen.

O: That is great. What a thorough discussion. I wonder the people that you gathered around you, what did you look for? I know that they were a talented group, but what particularly stood out as you selected people?

B: Well, there are a number of things. I looked for temperament, I looked for intelligence, I looked for a number of qualities that were naturally attracted to me and me to them. And I wanted to make sure that if I had a highly motivated staff, that they were there, they were kept highly

motivated. I would give them a tasking and they go do it. I was not and I'm not a micromanager. I allowed them to run with it. And along the way, I'd check in and say, "How's it going? Do you need my resources?" I looked at myself as being the one that went out and developed the resources to bring it back to the organization. I was the guy that went out and talked to groups or went to pinpoint specific agencies saying, "This is what we can do for you." Really, I was their advisor. I was their advocate.

- O: Okay. Good. Well, certainly the war time, which stand out is paramount, but were there other challenges that you faced along the way that...
- B: Anytime that you have a diverse organization, like Civil Air Patrol, there are all sorts of things, challenges. There are a number that come to mind, but two that stick out most in my mind are the loss of seven pilots on my watch. And it was because of, I won't say ineffective training. It was inattentive to management, cockpit management, but seven pilots on my watch lost their lives. And there were numerous safety stand downs and consequences of that. But training and safety were first. First above all else was safety and training to make sure that we kept our pilots safe, that we kept them trained. We kept them attended and safe aircraft and safe vehicles. So that among that tops the list of everything as some of the obstacles.
- The other obstacles were personally personnel matters where you had differences of opinion. You had folks within the organization that thought it should go this way. Others thought it would go this way. And I'm not in my way kind of person, but I said, "This is the direction that we're heading. This is my vision." And just a matter of fact, I invited a few people to leave and they did. But the point was is that I understand in working with people, there are going to be differences. So you take the differences, you look at the commonalities and then you move forward.
- O: Okay. Thank you. Well, that really helps to see how you did handle some of those particularly personnel issues and the safety manner. Well, I appreciate so much. I wonder, are there any thoughts, additionally? I mean, you're very thorough. I don't know if there's anything that you would like to add. I always give an opportunity.
- B: The only thing and a matter of fact, it came up earlier in the NAC and my philosophy early on, and I've taught this in not only corporate learning courses, in the civilian community, but in the Civil Air Patrol courses, there are two things that upfront I state, if you're aspiring to a command position. Number one, it's not about you. Number two, don't let it go.
- O: Okay. Thank you. Well, that's a good word because hopefully some of these things will be beneficial to younger or less senior commanders as

they grow in the organization. So thank you very much, sir. And that will conclude our interview today.

APPENDIX



Major General Richard L. Bowling, via CAP National Headquarters.