

# *The art of the hunt* **CAP prepares fighters to intercept airspace intruders**

*By Kristi Carr*



F-16C Fighting Falcons from the 115th Fighter Wing in Madison, Wis., are housed inside a newly remodeled aircraft hangar. The \$2 million facelift completed at the end of 2008 included installation of upgraded fire suppression and ceiling systems, flooring and new hangar doors.

Photo courtesy of Master Sgt. Paul Gorman, U.S. Air Force

**T**he cat-and-mouse game is played monthly with a Wisconsin Wing Civil Air Patrol Cessna as the mouse and a Wisconsin Air National Guard F-16 fighter jet as the cat. It is actually a training exercise to teach the fighter pilots how to track and intercept “low-and-slow” aircraft that fly illegally into U.S. airspace. The importance of such exercises — or “keynotes” — was validated in early April when a real intruder, unannounced and without permission, intentionally crossed the Canadian border and headed south over the American heartland.

## A SUICIDE ATTEMPT

The intruder flew erratically, entering U.S. airspace in mid-afternoon on April 6. The Cessna 172 had been reported stolen from Confederation College in Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada, which piqued the interest of U.S. officials. It was first picked up by F-16s with the Minnesota Air National Guard out of Duluth. They handed off the intercept to their Wisconsin counterparts, who followed the plane for several hours until it landed on a dirt road in Ellsinore, Mo.

As it turned out, the pilot was a flight school student who may or may not have had legitimate access to the plane, but his motive that day was to die by being shot down by American F-16s. Adam Dylan Leon, 31, originally from Turkey but now a citizen of Canada, had left a suicide note for his girlfriend. When the fighter pilots did not shoot him down, he flew the Cessna until it was

low on fuel, landed it and was found shortly afterward sipping a Gatorade in a nearby grocery store.

Jailed in St. Louis, Leon was charged with violating U.S. immigration law, a federal misdemeanor punishable by up to one year in jail, and may yet be subject to Canadian prosecution for breaches in air traffic regulations. If it is decided he stole the plane, additional charges and jail time could apply.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF TRAINING

“This is a wake-up call to would-be intruders that our training to contain them is ongoing and we are ever vigilant,” said Lt. Col. Jeff Wiswell, the Wisconsin Wing’s public affairs officer. Wiswell noted his wing’s pilots and crews have served as practice intercept targets for Wisconsin Air National Guard fighter pilots since the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11.

Wisconsin Wing Commander Col. Donald Haffner noted, “We take pride in the fact that our CAP flight crews have helped Wisconsin ANG pilots hone their skills in protecting our country.”

“We had a successful conclusion to April’s unfortunate incident. We want our country safe and we want positive endings for all parties, if possible,” added Wiswell.

It is a credit to the fighter pilots’ training that they did not shoot down the intruding Cessna. Their keynote missions with CAP planes prepared them to handle the situation.

First, they tried to contact the pilot of the intruding plane. Options included dispensing flares, flying close to the intruder, dipping their wings or contacting the pilot by radio. “Certainly flying against a Cessna at Cessna airspeed is a challenge for our pilots,” Lt. Col. Bruce Fischer, commander of air sovereignty alert with the 115th Fighter Wing in Madison, Wis., was quoted as saying. “That’s exactly why we train for that. We do regular exercises using Civil Air Patrol Cessnas pretending to be guys like this gentleman.”

In the case of this intrusion, the pilot certainly saw the fighters buzzing around him but was never in communication with them or Air Traffic Control. “I

### Who’s On Board?

Civil Air Patrol wings currently flying keynote exercises include:

Alaska, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, National Capital, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, Washington and Wisconsin.

understand that he waved at the Minnesota pilots when they were flying past him and he flashed his landing lights at our pilots,” said Fischer. “We knew he saw our guys, but he didn’t answer the radio and he didn’t follow any of the instructions we passed.”

The F-16s could have attempted to force the plane down through maneuvers or fire. According to an ABC News report, Michael Kucharek, a spokesman for the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD), noted, “NORAD pilots, once authorized by higher authority, are authorized to use everything within their power to protect U.S. citizens, up to and including lethal force.”

This incident was not, however, deemed to be a threat to national security. An FBI check did not turn up any past terrorist activity by the pilot. And, though the Wisconsin state capital building was evacuated as a precaution, generally the plane did not appear to target large population areas or critical infrastructure.

## IN THE EYE OF THE TIGER

What does it feel like to “play” with the F-16s?

1st Lt. Gary Bergin, with the 10th Senior Support Squadron in Milwaukee, knows. As a CAP pilot for keynote exercises, Bergin said, “We don’t have a lot of time to sit back and enjoy the excitement of the approaching fighters. Instead, we’re concentrating

on maintaining the mission-assigned altitude, speed and heading.”

Haffner, described a definite “intimidation factor when two F-16s appear to escort you to the ground.”

Col. Clair Jowett, a former Wisconsin Wing commander, often serves as incident commander for the wing’s keynote exercises. “The real deal in April was a very close match to our training scenarios,” he said. “Though we’ve never practiced having an invader from outside the country, we often train for lost or nonresponsive aircraft. Plus, CAP flies Cessna 182s and 172s — same as the intruding plane.”

Jowett works closely with the Wisconsin ANG’s Fischer to organize the exercises, usually using CAP’s Wausau headquarters as the base of operations. On the CAP side, Jowett ordinarily arranges for three CAP aircraft to participate. Two serve as targets in different parts of the state. A third serves as the high-bird communications aircraft. The high-bird pilot advises the target aircraft when the fighter jets are taking off and when they are closing in on one of the CAP planes. “Once the fighters intercept the first target, they typically break off in search of the second one,” explained Jowett.

Flying time for a typical keynote exercise is three hours, with mission staff working about five hours.

## CAP PLAYS ITS PART

A request to hold an exercise or training event is initiated by the Air Force regional Air Defense Sector, ANG or active duty unit being evaluated. Once reviewed by both the CAP National Operations Center and the regional Air Defense Sector, the mission is assigned to a CAP wing and approved by 1st Air Force. At least one day before the exercise, it is reviewed in a teleconference

Above, aircraft 87-278, one of two F-16C Fighting Falcons from the 115th Fighter Wing of the Wisconsin Air National Guard, displays a unique tail flash that celebrates the unit’s 60th anniversary.



Photo courtesy of Paul Davis/Daily American Republic

This stop sign on a country road outside Ellsimore, Mo., doesn’t usually apply to planes, but it nevertheless notes the end of an ill-fated, unauthorized flight over American airspace.

Photo courtesy of Joe Oliva, U.S. Air Force

among those participating; following the exercise, participants are debriefed.

Scenarios for the intercepts differ. The CAP plane may be asked to take on the role of drug smuggler, terrorist or disgruntled citizen. Sometimes the fighter jets know in advance the nature of their mock CAP adversary; sometimes they don't. Drugs are a common theme in border states and terrorism a common theme over the nation's capital. The frequency of actual intercept sorties and mock ones with CAP varies as well. It's typical for members of the 113th Fighter Wing at Andrews Air

Force Base, Md., to scramble one or two sorties every day in defense of U.S. airspace — including enforcing the no-fly zone over Washington, D.C. — in addition to their training with CAP volunteers. Last year the Air Force marked its millionth sortie in support of the campaign against terrorism. Twenty-five of CAP's 52



Photo by Lt. Col. Donald Winkler, Wisconsin Wing

Capt. Douglas M. Osborn of the Wisconsin Wing's 153rd Composite Squadron, at the controls, has been in the high-bird seat on intercept training missions communicating with CAP target planes. With a map in hand, fellow squadron member 1st Lt. Michael J. Linsley helps him prepare.

wings currently participate in keynote exercises. All concur with the sentiments of the Wisconsin Wing's commander: "CAP's service in intercept training is invaluable to homeland security," Haffner said.

As evidenced by the incursion in April, practice makes perfect. ▲

## Homeland Security Legislation

This could be the year Civil Air Patrol's volunteer efforts and cost-saving missions are recognized by legislation expanding members' responsibilities for homeland security. A U.S. House bill has passed and a similar bill is pending in the U.S. Senate.

Rep. Charles Dent, R-Pa., initially introduced a bill on this subject in 2007; while it passed the House, it bogged down in the Senate, effectively killing it. With the convening of the 111th Congress, Dent reintroduced the bill as H.R. 1178 in late February and it was passed in May. A similar bill, sponsored by Sens. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, and Richard Burr, R-N.C., was introduced in the Senate in March and is still pending.

Both the House and Senate versions call on the Government Accountability Office to conduct a study to determine how CAP can help support homeland security missions. Once the legislation is passed by both houses and the GAO has conducted its study, the secretaries of defense and homeland security will make recommendations on CAP's homeland security role.

"CAP stands ready to assume a greater role in defense of our country," said Maj. Gen. Amy S. Courter, CAP's national commander. "In fact, it would bring us full circle, back to our roots of civil defense during World War II."

Since its beginning days patrolling the Atlantic Coast for enemy aircraft and chasing foreign submarines, CAP has evolved into the foremost search-and-rescue organization in the nation. It already has in place a fleet of 550 aircraft, as well as numerous ground assets, and a force 56,400 strong. The official auxiliary of the U.S. Air Force, CAP is considered a force multiplier at a very attractive cost. CAP's homeland security missions include participation in practice intercepts of small aircraft, aerial reconnaissance of damage on the ground, search-and-rescue operations and relief services.

As Harkin was quoted as saying, "The Civil Air Patrol plays an important role in cities and towns across the country, and this all-volunteer force should be utilized as a cost saving for government reconnaissance missions."