

Presidential Inauguration

National Capital Wing adds its expertise to D.C. response

By Kristi Carr

The presidential inauguration on Jan. 20 was also an inauguration of sorts for Civil Air Patrol's National Capital Wing in the Washington, D.C., metro area. It marked the official debut of the wing as part of the Emergency Operations Center, a hub established by the District of Columbia Homeland Security and Emergency Management

Agency to coordinate security and communications in times of actual or potential danger. The inauguration — with its unprecedented crowds, its political nature and its nationally historic setting — was declared a national security event by the U.S. Secret Service, thereby automatically activating the EOC and now CAP.

Putting it in writing

In the works for more than two years, a memorandum of understanding between HSEMA and the National Capital Wing was signed last December, giving CAP a seat at the table — including Internet and incident software access, phones and VHF radios set to CAP frequencies — in the EOC. CAP joins numerous federal, state and district-level organizations in helping to coordinate emergency responses and provide operational support, whenever requested, in the Washington, D.C., and national capital area. The inauguration was

the first official request under the new agreement.

CAP may be asked in the future to provide aerial support to the district; collect data for damage assessments or conduct environmental surveys using visual, photographic, real-time digital and video; offer airborne communications support; and provide airlifts. Other support could include ground transportation, radio communications and search and rescue or manual labor, such as filling sandbags.

National Capital Wing Commander Col. Jane Davies explained, "Historically, the wing has had a good relationship with the city's emergency management agency. With the signing of this memorandum, we have entered into a partnership that will facilitate our support of the city and the national capital region as we confront the new challenges that have emerged since 9/11."

Take a trial run

CAP took its place in the EOC on Jan. 11 to prepare for the inauguration. This dress rehearsal tested communication nodes, equipment positioning, shift change procedures and staging areas.

Representatives of the 56 participating agencies were briefed by HSEMA on how they were expected to interact with one another and what was required of each. Agencies were required, for example, to submit periodic situation reports, beginning with one due each day. The frequency of the reports escalated to every three hours

on inauguration day.

“It was amazing to see the scope of the agencies involved,” said Lt. Col. Mark Bailey, National Capital Wing director of operations and incident commander.

CAP’s desk at the EOC was flanked by the D.C. National Guard and Joint Forces Headquarters-National Capital Region, which is responsible for all active duty military activity in the area.

Communicate and coordinate

For the inauguration, the National Capital Wing was on duty 24/7 from Jan. 15-22, with a three-pronged approach that included the EOC desk, ground support and the wing’s own mobile communications command center.

At the EOC, Civil Air Patrol’s presence was duly noted when Paul Schneider, deputy secretary of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, made a point to stop at the CAP desk.

Meanwhile, the National Capital Wing was kept busy on the ground, providing van transportation for FEMA personnel from the Pentagon to Federal Emergency Management Agency headquarters downtown, as well as the EOC and Metro stations. Authorized ground transportation was crucial, since all bridges between Virginia and the district were closed to traffic, as were major roads leading into the nation’s capital from Maryland.

Beyond the EOC desk and ground duties, the wing assigned CAP volunteers to its mobile communications command center at wing headquarters on Bolling Air Force Base to provide the incident commander and EOC with a link to all CAP personnel on the ground or in the air. The center’s equipment includes HF and VHF radios as well as a rented satellite phone with data capability.

The National Capital Wing called on more than 20 of its members during the inauguration.

“I think our biggest successes,” said National Capital Wing Director of Public Affairs Maj. Paul Cianciolo, “were having constant and reliable communications with all our personnel using the wing’s new mobile communications command post at Bolling and having a professional presence at the EOC. As CAP likes to say, we are ‘Citizens Serving Communities: Above and Beyond.’” ▲



Photo courtesy of National Capital Wing

One of the National Capital Wing’s inauguration day duties was providing van transportation for federal emergency management personnel through restricted areas. 1st Lt. Rhoda Wharton of Andrews Composite Squadron was one of the CAP drivers.

Photo by Maj. Paul Cianciolo, National Capital Wing



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Col. Jane Davies, commander of the National Capital Wing, signed the memorandum of understanding with the District of Columbia in December, giving CAP a seat in the district’s Homeland Security Emergency Operations Center.

Background: The map cites road closings, no-parking zones and resident vehicle parking during the inauguration.



Cadets in the National Capital Wing — here, Cadet Airman 1st Class Darin Davis of Andrews Composite Squadron — routinely monitor several radio frequencies in the wing’s new mobile communications center strategically located within the district. “I feel honored to have been able to help out with the inauguration,” said Davis. “Such work is what CAP is all about — emergency and volunteer services.”