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CAP Squadron 23 History Report for the Year 2003

By

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The previous year, 2002, had witnessed the beginning of a serious renewal of CAP activity in Marin County following several quiescent years. Flight 23's initial efforts were necessarily concentrated on refurbishing the quarters at Gness Field and by dint of many hours of volunteer labor by several of its members much was accomplished by early 2003. Santa Rosa Squadron 157's counsel and help in these early months is gratefully remembered, as is the support of Group 5 in Sacramento.

Consequently, by spring of 2003 priority attention was shifted to training activities and to the expansion of membership. Once this essential core activity was solidly underway, further work on the building itself resumed in the summer of 2003 and the voluntary contributions produced an even more comfortable and efficient facility. This included roofing improvements in time for the 2003-2004 winter season. The squadron gratefully accepted a generous donation of \$500 by pilots based at Gness toward the expenses of the latter project. Squadron Logistics Officer Tom Schiff, always quick to volunteer his services, was prominent among the voluntary workers in making these physical improvements to the facility.

Meanwhile, Communications and Management Information Systems Officer Sam Cogswell, another inveterate across-the-board contributor to the squadron's activities, along with knowledgeable new Senior Member Wes Bethel, made the convenience of LAN service available at the squadron facility.

The *esprit* engendered through Squadron 23's team efforts, hard work, and early successes was nicely reflected in the distinctive new unit patch (an aircraft against Golden Gate Bridge background), designed by David Wertzberg, that was made available by mid-year.

The success of these efforts did not go unnoticed. Flight 23 was elevated to squadron status in April 2003. Moreover, in October at the California Wing Conference in Long Beach, the new squadron was recognized as the "most improved" such unit. Squadron 23 Commander Greg Felton, was named Pilot of the Year in Group 5 and Jon Straub was named Safety Officer of the Year. Both also received Commander's Commendations. Additionally, Ray Peterson, former Squadron 23 commander and since June, Group 5 commander, was voted California Wing "Member of the Year" in recognition of his contributions to CAP over the past half century. Squadron 23 Deputy Commander (and Personnel Officer and Flight Release Officer and Legal Officer and, earlier in 2003, Administrative Officer) Laurence Steffan was deservedly awarded the unit commander's commendation.

In October, Squadron 23's alert Emergency Services Officer Michael Allen received a certificate of appreciation from the California Highway Patrol for his timely response to a serious highway rollover incident on September 1. Michael was able to put to lifesaving use his recent conscientiously acquired EMT/first aid skills.

Such instances of recognition were not undeserved. Squadron 23's members did work diligently, holding regular, well-attended meetings, generally on the second and fourth Monday evenings throughout the year. Invariably, serious training and information sharing were the hallmarks of these meetings. As a result, the squadron made good

progress in acquiring and consolidating ES skills and ratings. At least two members are now qualified to take incident commander training when the opportunity next presents itself.

As part of the nationwide CAP response to the 9/11/01 terrorist attacks and the establishment of a new Homeland Security Department in Washington, D.C., Squadron 23 took on the new task of helping with homeland security during the year. The new assignment was added to the continuing important missions of emergency service, aerospace education, and cadet training. Ironically, this new task had been CAP's initial mission beginning in December 1941. David Wertzberg was appointed the squadron's first homeland security officer.

Squadron 23's members participated regularly in SAR missions and exercises, including ones dedicated expressly to safeguarding homeland security. In late May and early June, the squadron contributed no fewer than 275 hours to an intensive SAR mission based at Ukiah, with nine of its personnel participating on five of the six days of the mission, flying 142 people hours on 36 sorties. Although not as intensive, there were many more such missions and exercises, and standby alerts. These were principally in Northern California, but Squadron 23 members participated in SARs as far south as the high Mojave desert south of Bakersfield.

Squadron members participated in the annual air operations day at Gness for the SAR community on August 23. This Marin Sheriff's Department event was organized by Jeff Iversen and was open to Napa and Sonoma and Marin Open Space and Park Rangers as well. Squadron Commander Greg Felton conducted a UDF ground school on the occasion, from which a Powerpoint presentation is now available.

Some of the squadron's other programs were also notable and indicated a disposition and capability to reach out to the Bay Area aviation-oriented community and to other relevant organizations. On August 28, the squadron hosted a presentation by former United Air Lines Captain Al Haynes (of the spectacular 1989 Sioux City, Iowa crash-landing of UA Flight 232 fame) that attracted more than two hundred persons. On October 27, the president of North Bay EAA Chapter 1232, former UAL Captain and Test Pilot Phil Simon, gave a talk at a regular squadron meeting on the history of aviation charting and navigation. Flotilla Commander Nick Tarlson, U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, and Marin County Assistant Emergency Services Coordinator Bruce Stahley, among others, also made presentations at regular squadron meetings.

During the year, the Squadron's facility was also made available to other appropriate parties, including the local EAA chapter, and to the Gness Field FBO, Air Ward, for ground school classes.

It is noteworthy that Squadron 23's contributions and achievements were accomplished without a corporate aircraft having yet been assigned to it on a regular basis. In September, a well-presented formal request professionally composed by Squadron 23 Finance Officer Rob Grehan was made for assigning a corporate aircraft to Squadron 23 to be based at Gness Field. Such an aircraft is needed to expedite responses to emergencies and to assure that flight proficiency is kept razor sharp.

In the meantime, the Squadron did have access to corporate aircraft at Santa Rosa (Cessna 182), Sacramento (Bonanza A36), and Concord (Cessna 206). On occasion such aircraft stayed for short periods of time at Gness, including one aircraft, a higher performance 265 HP Cessna 182, from Eureka. Moreover, two of the Squadron's own mission pilots, Laurence Steffan and Jeff Iversen, continued to contribute the use of their own aircraft for CAP missions.

Late in the year, Squadron 23 undertook to manage the CAP NorCal glider and will seek to develop a glider program.

On September 22, Squadron 23 launched its cadet program, with veteran cadets from Travis AFB and Sacramento in attendance. While at least one cadet had faithfully attended meetings earlier in the year, giving credence to the unit's "composite squadron" designation, the formal launching signified a determination to develop a cadet program in a structured, professional way. The eight-week cadet basic instruction course was launched the following week. Liz Warren is the squadron cadet program officer as well as aerospace officer.

By the end of the 2003 calendar year, Squadron 23 had 24 senior members and three cadets. This included six mission pilots (Greg Felton, Laurence Steffan, Jon Straub, Jeff Iversen, Rob Grehan, and David Weitzberg), all current, instrument-rated, and proficient. Unfortunately, however, Jon Straub's capable services are being lost due to a new employment opportunity in Las Vegas.

The availability of other CAP mission pilots nearby (Ray Peterson and Aaron Kahn) also facilitates the squadron's readiness to respond to emergencies, swiftly and reliably.

Major Deena Gollner served cooperatively and cheerfully as liaison officer from the USAF, but is expected to retire shortly. Her presence will be missed.

The squadron was saddened by the news that local CAP supporter Helene Stratman, formerly a CAP Lt. Col., had passed away on November 29, 2003. She had joined CAP in 1973 and was considered "a pillar" of the cadet programs in Marin and San Francisco.

The squadron historian and PAO underwent an unexpected major heart surgery in August, but by the end of the year was showing signs of life...and he did not fail to fly on December 17, the one hundredth anniversary of controlled, powered, heavier-than-air flight!

Perhaps it is propitious that the centennial of flight was celebrated during what was a very successful year for CAP Squadron 23.