

The CAA Helps America Prepare for World War II

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CAA Chairman Robert H. Hinkley is credited with the vision behind the CPTP

On June 27, 1939, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Civilian Pilot Training Act of 1939 into law. The law not only strengthened our national defense prior to entering World War II, but also opened up pilot training to many who would never have had an opportunity to learn to fly. The act allowed the FAA's predecessor agency, the Civil Aeronautics Authority (CAA), to expand an experimental program, authorized in December 1938, to train civilian pilots through educational institutions.

The U.S. was aware of similar civilian pilot-training programs already at work in several European countries (particularly Germany and Italy) in the period preceding World War II, and decided that it needed to expand quickly the number of U.S. aviators.

This all-out push for more pilots made it possible for hundreds of women and African-Americans to enter the somewhat exclusive world of flying. In addition to opening the cockpit door to more minorities, the program also helped train future aviation legends such as World War II ace Major Richard Bong and astronaut John Glenn, and Tuskegee airman Brigadier General Daniel "Chappie" James, Jr., and Major Robert W. Deiz.

The act authorized \$5,675,000 to be appropriated for the program during fiscal years 1939 and 1940, and specified that thereafter the appropriation should not exceed \$7 million for any one fiscal year.

The 1938 prototype program had involved 330 pilots and 13 colleges supported by National Youth Administration funds. The new Civilian Pilot Training Program (CPTP) called for training 11,000 pilots during the 1939-1940 school year – a huge leap. Although it did not meet its 11,000-pilot goal during the first year of the program, CAA contracted with 435 universities, which trained over 9,000 men and women in every state of the union as well as in Puerto Rico and the territories of Hawaii and Alaska.

CAA divided the training into two parts: 72 hours of ground school and a minimum of 35 to a maximum of 50 hours of flight instruction. CAA accepted applicants from universities, colleges, technological institutes, 4-year teachers colleges, and junior colleges. Each institution signed a contract with CAA to train a fixed number of students. The schools had to be within 10 miles, or 30 minutes legal driving time (not to exceed 45 miles per hour), of an airport. The airport had to have a sufficient number of landing strips not less than 1,800 feet long and 300 feet wide. The landing area had to have approaches permitting a 20:1 glide path to all required landing strips.

The schools could charge students a laboratory fee of up to \$40. The CAA paid the college \$20 per student for ground school instruction and up to \$290 for the flight course. The college had to use part of

the student's laboratory fee to pay for a CAA medical examination and to provide a minimum of \$3,000 in accidental death and dismemberment insurance coverage, plus \$500 hospital and medical reimbursement insurance coverage. In addition, CAA required the flight operator to carry \$50/100,000 in public liability insurance coverage and \$5,000 property damage insurance coverage.



CPTP graduate, General Daniel "Chappie" James, Jr.

The schools trained both men and women. The law specifically contained a provision introduced by Representative Everett M. Dirksen (R-IL) that "none of the benefits of training or programs shall be denied on account of race, creed, or color." Although training remained mostly segregated, instruction for black students began at six schools: the West Virginia State College for Negroes; Howard University in Washington, DC; Tuskegee Institute in Alabama; Hampton Institute in Virginia; Delaware State College for Colored Students; and North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College. The program soon expanded to

several more schools. Overall, the CPTP graduated around 2,000 black pilots.

Women also found opportunities in the CPTP. Four women's colleges initially participated, and women enrolled at male-dominated schools signed up at a ratio of 1 woman for every 10 men. When war preparation needs demanded that all graduates enlist, women were automatically excluded because they were not allowed to fly in the military at that time. Nonetheless, by mid-1941, the CPTP had trained around 2,500 women; many eventually became Women Airforce Service Pilots, or WASPs.

The Civilian Pilot Training Act also provided that at least 5 percent of the trainees be noncollege students. In its second year of running the program, CAA announced its plans to provide training to 7 percent noncollege students in 70 (later expanded to 76) communities. In these programs, CAA mandated 1 instructor per 50 students. At the end of the 12-week ground school course, 10 students from each community would be selected competitively to go into flight training. As stipulated, only 1 woman could be among the 10 selectees.

When President Roosevelt called for the production of 50,000 airplanes a year on May 16, 1940, CAA announced that it would expand the CPTP to provide pilots for the increased number of planes. In 1940, the CPTP had graduated 9,885 pilots, and in the 18 months before the United States entered the war, the number of pilots in the country rose from 31,000 to over 100,000, primarily through the CPTP.



CPTP trainee Jeannette Kapus at Cram Field, Davenport, Iowa. Courtesy Wisconsin Aviation Hall of Fame.

Once the United States entered the war, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 8974, which transformed the CTPT into a wartime program. The CPTP became "exclusively devoted to the procurement and training of men for ultimate service as military pilots, or for correlated non-military activities." Only men between ages 18-37 could undergo training. In July 1942, the President signed a bill amending the Civilian Pilot Training Act to provide for training of civilian aircraft mechanics.



Naval flight instructors in the CAA War Training Service at the University of Arizona

On December 7, 1942, the CPTP became the CAA War Training Service, a designation that recognized changes already in progress to align the program more closely with the needs of the armed services. Beginning July 1, 1942, and lasting until the following December 15, CAA provided training only to members of the inactive reserve of either the Army Air Forces or the Naval Reserve. On December 15, the Navy placed its CAA program trainees on active duty. The Army did the same in the summer of 1943.

In all, some 300,000 pilots were trained in the War Training Service phase of the program, which lasted until June 30, 1944, for the Army and August 4, 1944, for the Navy. By the time the Civilian Pilot Training Program/War Training Service ended in 1944, the program had operated at 1,132 colleges and universities and 1,460 flight schools, and had trained over 435,000 pilots. In the end, the program successfully accomplished its goal of strengthening our national defense by increasing the number of pilots. At the same time, it attracted talent that went on to become famed aviators and provided new opportunities for Americans from a variety of backgrounds.

