WNY GROUP HISTORY

Buffalo Group was Western New York Group's original name. History reveals that during WWII the current group was originally two groups: so large were the number of members and squadrons in the Buffalo area. When there were group wide promotions, one group assembled in Shea's Buffalo Theatre in the morning for awards and promotions. The second came in the afternoon. Reportedly these became 'Standing Room Only' events.

After the war group membership shrank with only one group surviving. During the war years the squadrons in and surrounding the City of Buffalo were numbered Buffalo, I, Buffalo II, Buffalo, III, etc. Similarly, it is believed, the units around the Jamestown and Niagara Falls area were numbered reflecting those cities' names. The Jamestown Group of WWII eventually became part of Buffalo Group. Buffalo Group's First Sergeant was Lt Col Frank Wilson Warhus, who with his wife, 1st Lt Erma Warhus, moved to East Aurora, NY in 1946 and started the East Aurora Flight which grew into the East Aurora Cadet Squadron, NY 31020, which is now known at South Towns Squadron, NY 020. Colonel Warhus served as commander until 1967 when he was transferred to Buffalo Group as Legal Officer. In 1959, East Aurora Squadron achieved national fame when nine cadets were awarded the CAP Cadet Certificate of Proficiency on the same day. The date was 31 DECEMBER 1959. That record has never been repeated to anyone's knowledge.

The group had a second name before being designated Western New York Group. In 1968, under the command of MAJ Edward V. Le Feber, who was the wing's youngest group commander at the time, the group headquarters moved first from the US Federal Building, Ellicott Street, Buffalo, where it had been since 1942, to the NYARNG's Connecticut Street Armory, for 18 months, and finally to the 914th TAG, Niagara Falls AFB, NY in 1970. At the time of the final move, the base was a regular Air Force Base with a force of 5,000 personnel. During this time, the base transitioned to full time reserve status. Group headquarters was the top floor of what is now the Airmen's Dormitory the faces the runway. The headquarters provided 28 private offices for the group headquarters' 36 active officers. It was at this time, the group name was changed to Niagara Frontier Group reflecting the scope of the entire region.

In the early 1990s, under the administration of wing commander Colonel Herbert Lavin, every group was re-designated to their current names. This naming was an unexpected course of action by the wing commander and to some, even today, the 'geographic description' he selected are not truly representative of certain areas.

Records indicate that Niagara Falls AFB and ARS has continuously hosted CAP squadron since 1950, and perhaps, longer. Captain Merritt Andrews was Niagara Falls Squadron Commander from 1950 to 1961, then his half-brother, Captain Ray Miller, assumed command for several years with MAJ Walter Biermann serving as commander for more than eight ears.

In the period 1968 through 1976, Niagara Frontier Group became a real force within New York Wing. It led the wing in overall air searches, cadet special activities participation, senior programs, unit citations, and SAR Ribbon Awards. In 1970, the group had grown to 13 squadrons. With the advent of Jamestown being able to create two more squadrons and having

Dunkirk Squadron assigned to it, a new Jamestown Group was chartered under Lt. Col Michael Montagna in 1972.This brought Niagara Frontier down to nine squadrons plus the group headquarters. These squadrons were TAK, Ken-Ton, East Aurora. Batavia, Lockport, Niagara Falls, Hamburg, Lewiston-Porter, and Buffalo I.

From 1966 through August 1980, New York Wing was subdivided into seven sectors commanded by a sector commander. Niagara Frontier, Jamestown, Southern Tier, and Rochester Groups comprised Sector VI. The last Sector VI Commander was Lt. Col Edward V. Le Feber. Sector VI represented manpower and resources of 128 HF and FM stations, 3 repeaters, 28 units, six corporate aircraft, 1 COV (an old USAF Ambulance Bus), 28 member-owned aircraft, and, most importantly, 768 cadets and senior members: most of whom were active. During that time, six out of twelve monthly editions of the CAP Times or CAP News carried an article or photo about something that happened within the sector, primarily Niagara Frontier Group.

Niagara Frontier Group become well known to CAP personnel at Maxwell AFB and ARRC staff. Colonels George Ezzo, Larry Stubbs, and Le Feber became staff consultants for many out-of-wing missions. Note that this was in an era when there was no internet, no cell phones, where telephone calls resulted in expensive long distance fees, and communication was through CAP radio networks or US Postal Service: i.e. snail mail. ELT was in its infancy. And, oh yes, minimal funding from NHQ or any state agency: although the governor's office did financially support CAP until the early 1980's when the wing commander determined that, "if CAP cannot support itself, we don't deserve state aid." At that point, state support was terminated…by CAP.

During the early years, New York's air fleet was a hodge-podge of whatever CAP could get through literally "begging, borrowing, or stealing", to coin a phrase. PA18s were common as were L-4s as well as a few Stearman Bi-planes. We did start acquiring C-150 and 172s. We had USARMY O-1 "Bird Dogs" and De Haviland Beavers, and tragically a C-45. Color scheme? Whatever came with the airplane. Just slap on a CAP Decal. Never a new airplane and all costing a fortune to maintain: mostly out of the member's pockets. There were no great safety standards that we know today. No two aircraft were alike. Aircrews were not interchangeable with aircraft as they are today. Each group claimed ownership of assigned aircraft, often refusing to let pilots from another group check out in it, let alone ride in it. Territorialism was the order of the day.

So, while 'the good old days" were glorious to most of the members back then when CAP did what it had to do with whatever resources were available… we, who have contributed to this little trip down CAP's Memory Lane, wish to remind you that CAP has never been better than it is today.

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20 JAN 2015

CAP Member since SEP 1957