

What's in a number?



MAXWELL AFB. Ala. - Just what does the number 61 mean on the Illinois Wing patch? Obviously, it does not mean Illinois was the 61st wing to be formed within Civil Air Patrol. By the same token, what do the numbers on the Indiana, Michigan, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Wisconsin wing patches signify?

To find the answers, let's turn back the clock to 1941 and examine the plan devised by Civil Air Patrol founders. Loosely identified with the Office Civil Defense, as CAP was at the time, it was only natural that a system of unit numbering similar to the OCD's would be adopted by CAP. What evolved was a system where the first digit of a two digit number was the same as that used by the Army Corps area, hence OCD and CAP. The second digit, separated from the first by a dash, represented the state within the corps area. CAP then had a numbering system where a two digit number represented each of the CAP wings.

The answer to the initial question is: The "61" on the Illinois Wing patch signifies that Illinois was wing number 6-1 based on it being the first state in the 6th Army and OCD area. It follows that the number on the other patches enumerated were their respective corps area and state numbers. The dash was removed from the numbers as they appear on the patches for convenience.

The exception to numbering scheme was in the case of Hawaii, which was assigned the number 49-1 at the time of its formation at a later date. Incidentally, the other non-continental wings were assigned numbers in accordance with the original plan. Alaska was assigned 9-8 and Puerto Rico assigned 3-5, although they too were formed at a later date.

Squadrons were then assigned numbers in a sequential manner based up on the wing's number. Thus the second squadron to be formed in Illinois would have been 612. Note too that the dash is again removed.

The same scheme continued as relates to the assignment or serial numbers to individual senior members. The digits subsequent to the first two were sequentially assigned. The first member in the Illinois Wing would have been assigned serial number 6-1-1.

Cadet serial numbers were assigned in a manner similar to senior members except that the dashes were eliminated. The first cadet in the Illinois Wing would have had number 61-1. Again Hawaii was an exception, cadets from the pacific wing were assigned serial numbers beginning with 86.

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