



OFFICE OF THE NATIONAL COMMANDER  
CIVIL AIR PATROL  
UNITED STATES AIR FORCE AUXILIARY  
MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA 36112-5967

19 March 2020

Fellow Civil Air Patrol Volunteers and Staff –

We're all being bombarded by messaging from divergent sources. News broadcasts, friends, social media, everyone has an opinion, a factoid, or a perspective to share. The uncertainty of the rapidly evolving situation leads to great anxiety because we feel helpless and ill-equipped to fight an invisible foe.

The magnitude of anxiety being experienced across the United States, indeed worldwide, reminded me of something that Thomas Paine wrote in December 1776 during another period of uncertainty. Slightly modified, here is the opening line: "These are the times that try men's [and women's] souls."

Yes, I thought, these are most challenging and unsettled times. Very trying indeed, but we've been here before. I thought about the historical context when Paine wrote his essay – the colonies had recently declared their independence. Hope was high, but the reality they lived in was the oppressive times of the Revolutionary War. The odds must have seemed insurmountable that the colonies would prevail, yet perseverance and grit won out despite the turmoil of that period.

What also came to my mind was the historical period when Civil Air Patrol was founded – the dark days just prior to the start of World War II. Our World War II-era adult and cadet volunteers also faced great uncertainty in their communities, states, nation, and world stage. At the time no one would have been foolish enough to predict the scope of the global crisis or could have imagined how it would pull a nation together, yet it did, and we're a better, stronger nation for it.

We have now entered another period of great uncertainty across this great nation of ours. Our new nemesis, coronavirus, is causing fundamental changes to the very fabric of our society and how we interact in our world. Nonetheless, history has shown that collectively we prevail through our strength of character and force of will.

So, how do we, members of Civil Air Patrol, fit in during this uncertain time? After all, we're in the business of serving others and helping those in need. If you're like me, sitting at home grates against my personality. Like you, I would like to get out there and do something about this situation that moves the needle.

The good news is that there are mission requests slowly coming in that are reasonable for us to support. As I write this, many agencies who rely on CAP for support are assessing what they need before they ask for help. I expect more requests to come in as time progresses. Rest assured that we will do our part to serve others while mitigating and minimizing the risk to our members.

In the meantime, we must focus on adhering to the guidance I sent out on March 14 to ensure we remain healthy so that we can help others when called to do so. We will maintain mission-ready status

so that we can execute assigned missions. We will support one another in our respective units to ensure that our wingmen are holding up to the pressures that we face in this crazy environment we find ourselves in. And we will provide those in our communities with a shining example of calm professionalism and excellence that Civil Air Patrol is known for.

We are all leaders, you and me. We all have a responsibility, through our self-leadership or leadership of others, to inspire, lift up, and motivate those around us. I truly believe that the same grit, determination, and burning desire to serve others resides in you as did those characteristics in our World War II-era Civil Air Patrol volunteers and the patriots of the Revolutionary War. I know, that's a bold statement on my part, but it's a statement straight from my heart. I have faith in you. I've seen what you're capable of accomplishing, and it's confidence-inspiring. You well reflect the best of this amazing organization that we are in. We will rise to the occasion. We will persevere like our forbearers, we will conquer the challenges we face, and we will be a better, more innovative organization as the result!

I am so very proud of each of you. Be safe, be well, take care of your wingmen, and let's come out of this worldwide crisis an even stronger organization than we already are. Share good news where you find it. Be positive. Be supportive. Be always vigilant; we are One CAP.

Major General Mark E. Smith, CAP  
Chief Executive Officer/National Commander

*"These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands by it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly: it is dearness only that gives everything its value. Heaven knows how to put a proper price upon its goods; and it would be strange indeed if so celestial an article as freedom should not be highly rated."*

Thomas Paine, December 23, 1776