

2026 Maryland Wing Cadet Conference

Program and Agenda

*current as of 17 April

CHECK-IN & NETWORKING – 0800-0900

OPENING – 0900-1000

Opening Remarks – hosted by Maj Nathan Rolfe, MDWG Director of Cadet Programs

Remarks by MG Janeen Birckhead, Maryland National Guard Adjutant General (video); BG Andrew Collins, Maryland National Guard Assistant Adjutant General; Sam Eckholm (video), USAFA graduate and SE Media founder

Keynote speaker: Mr. Ron Gula, President of Gula Tech Adventures

Location: Hamilton

Get your Cadet Conference started on the right foot! Hear from the organizers of the event and a distinguished lineup of speakers, including keynote speaker Ron Gula, video remarks from Major General Janeen Birckhead, Adjutant General of the Maryland National Guard, and remarks from Brigadier General Andrew Collins, Assistant Adjutant General-Army of the Maryland National Guard. Additional distinguished guests will also share brief remarks. We'll provide you with vital information on the variety of activities and presentations available throughout the day, orientation to the host facility and amenities, and wrap up with an ice-breaker activity to put you in the right frame of mind to learn, explore, and have fun.

NETWORKING BREAK – 1000-1015

BREAKOUT SESSION #1 – 1015-1115

Soaring to New Heights: National Flight Academies & Cadet Wings – presented by various cadets

Location: Hamilton

Join six cadets currently enrolled in Cadet Wings for an inside look at the National Flight Academy and Cadet Wings programs! Hear firsthand stories about hands-on flight training, leadership challenges, and life-changing experiences in aviation and aerospace. This session will give you tips on applying, insights into what it's really like to take your cadet experience to the

skies, and inspiration to reach new heights in your own cadet journey—whether your goal is piloting aircraft, exploring aerospace careers, or simply pushing yourself to achieve more.

Leading by Serving: A Conversation on Servant Leadership – presented by Maryland State Senator William Smith

Location: Vaughn

What does it take to lead with impact, integrity, and heart? Join Maryland State Senator Will Smith for an inspiring session on servant leadership, where you'll learn how putting others first can make you a stronger, more effective leader. Through real-world examples from public service and community leadership, Senator Smith will share practical strategies, insights, and stories that show how leaders empower teams, build trust, and create positive change. This session is a must for cadets ready to step up, lead with purpose, and make a difference in their communities and beyond.

Backbone of the Force: Leadership Lessons from Chief Master Sergeants— presented by various Chiefs, moderated by C/1st Lt Sahana Kidambi, Frederick Composite SQ

Location: Hawking

There's a saying in the U.S. Armed Forces: "The Chiefs are the backbone of the military." In this session, you'll hear what that truly means from a panel of active-duty and retired Chief Master Sergeants. They'll share stories from the front lines, insights into leadership, and the vital role Chiefs play in shaping the force. Cadets will gain a firsthand look at what it takes to lead at the highest enlisted levels, learn lessons that can be applied in their own cadet journey, and discover how experience, dedication, and leadership come together to keep the mission—and the team—strong.

Encampment – presented by Lt Col Gary Renfrow, 2026 Tri-Wing Encampment Commander

Location: Chesapeake

Encampment is one of the most important milestones in a cadet's career, but preparing for it can feel overwhelming. In this track, you'll learn what to expect, how to show up ready, and what it takes to succeed during encampment, from daily routines to leadership expectations. Whether you're attending for the first time or returning on staff, this track will give you the knowledge and confidence to make the most of your encampment experience.

Exploring Military Cyber Operations – presented by BG Joed Carbonell, Commander, 175th Wing, Maryland Air National Guard

Location: Friedman / Zero Trust Room

Military cyber operations are a critical component of modern warfare, defending and securing information in an increasingly contested domain. In this session, Brigadier General Joed Carbonell will guide you through the role cyber plays in mission success, the structure of cyber operations, and the skills required to operate in this field. Whether you're exploring future career paths or looking to expand your understanding of the cyber domain, this seminar offers a mission-focused overview of one of the most vital and dynamic areas of modern military operations.

K9 Search and Rescue – presented by Chesapeake Search Dogs

Location: Lamarr

Ever wonder how highly trained dogs and their handlers find missing persons in challenging conditions? Join this hands-on session to learn directly from experts about how K9 Search and Rescue teams operate, integrate into missions, and amplify ground search capabilities. You'll work toward your GTM1 sign-off while gaining real-world insights, practical skills, and a deeper understanding of these incredible teams in action—preparing you to contribute effectively and confidently in future missions.

NETWORKING BREAK – 1115-1130

BREAKOUT SESSION #2 – 1130-1230

Flying in Gliders – Options for Cadets – hosted by the Mid-Atlantic Soaring Association

Location: Hamilton

Civil Air Patrol made the tough decision last year to sunset the glider program. This put an end to glider orientation flights and flight academies. But this doesn't mean that it's impossible to fly in gliders outside of CAP. Learn about glider flight options and opportunities, some of which are very close by, and continue to explore this unique type of flying.

Unlock the System: Digital Mastery & Regulation Recon – presented by MSgt Jordan Watson, Bowie Composite SQ

Location: Vaughn

Stop fighting the interface and start winning the game. We all know eServices can feel like a maze of menus and "404 Not Found," but it is actually the most powerful tool in your cadet arsenal—if you have the cheat codes. In this high-speed seminar, MSgt Watson breaks down the digital barriers to show you how to make the system work for you, not against you. We're stripping away the "legalese" of CAP Regulations to give you a clear, tactical roadmap for your career. Learn how to find exactly what you need in seconds, track your progress with precision, and master the administrative side of leadership so you can spend less time clicking and more time leading. Don't let a manual stand in your way—learn to navigate the system with confidence and take total control of your cadet journey.

Military Aviation Careers and Insights – hosted by SM Rob Noonan, former USAF F-15 and F-117 pilot

Location: Hawking

Hear about military aviation careers firsthand from a career pilot that lived it. SM Noonan is a retired USAF officer who flew F-15s and F-117s in a variety of operational missions. If you want to know what it takes to be a pilot in the military, explore the career paths and routes to get in, and hear about real-life mission exploits, this is the session for you.

101 Drill – hosted by C/CMSgt Aurora DeJesus, Easton Composite SQ and C/Capt John Liao, Towson Composite SQ

Location: Chesapeake

Want to move with precision, lead with confidence, and command attention on the parade field? This session will break down the basics of drill, from fundamental movements to key techniques, and give you guidance for instructing cadets at your home squadron. Perfect for new cadets, aspiring drill instructors, or anyone looking to master CAPP 60-33, you'll leave with the skills and confidence to bring drill to life and lead with authority.

Meet the First Class of Cyber Warrant Officers: Cyber – hosted by 175th COG Wing Warrant Officers

Location: Lamarr

Learn about the history of Warrant Officers in the Air Force and the cybersecurity Warrant Officer program. This session will discuss the role Warrant Officers play in defensive and offensive cyber operations. Gain valuable insight into how to become a warrant officer yourself!

From CAP to the Coast Guard: Maritime and Intelligence Career – hosted by LCDR April Killian, U.S. Coast Guard

Location: Friedman / Zero Trust Room

Learn about operations from our sister service and discover careers in maritime inspection, intelligence, and international relations. Learn how CAP translates directly into real-world jobs and gain valuable insight into the Merchant Marines Academy.

LUNCH – 1230-1400

Air Force Elite: Thunderbirds – Netflix Film

Location: Zero Trust Room

Showing of the 2025 Netflix film, “Air Force Elite: Thunderbirds”

Patch Exchange – hosted by C/Maj Devin Stein, Frederick Composite SQ

Location: OT City (Newton & Franklin)

Got a stash of cool patches collecting dust? Grab your favorite CAP patches, fire or police department patches, and any other unique designs to trade with others from around the Wing! It’s all about swapping stories and scoring some epic new threads for your collection.

Lunch with Wing – hosted by Col Brenda Reed, Maryland Wing Commander

Location: Upstairs cafe area

Come join Wing leadership for an informal lunch. Ask questions, provide suggestions and ideas, or just learn about some of the challenges and upcoming opportunities in Maryland Wing.

Lunch with Region – hosted by Col Liz Sydow, Mid-Atlantic Region Deputy Chief of Staff for Cadet Programs.

Location: Hawking

Take advantage of this rare opportunity to have an informal sit-down with Region leadership. Do you want to know more about the new Region Cadet Competition? This is your chance to hear from the source. Maybe you have ideas or suggestions for new activities. Or you just want to hear about the state of Cadet Programs in the Region.

Lunch with NHQ – hosted by Mr. Jacob McIntosh, Program Manager, Cadet Support Services

Location: Vaughn

Hear directly from the National Headquarters Cadet Programs staff on what's happening around Civil Air Patrol. Come learn about the details and requirements for participation in Cadet Wings, and what you can do to increase your chances of acceptance.

Lunch with Senator Smith – hosted by Will Smith, Maryland State Senator

Location: The Barn

Get personal insight into legislative leadership and civic duties in Maryland. In addition to his service on the General Assembly, Senator Smith is an Intelligence Officer in the Navy Reserves and a lawyer. Use this informal setting to get to know him and pick up some personal tips and insights for your own future.

BREAKOUT SESSION #3 – 1400-1500

Inside Air Force One: Life with the 89th Airlift Wing– hosted by Col Melissa Dombrock, Deputy Commander, 89th Airlift Wing

Location: Hamilton

Ever wondered what it's like to work behind the scenes of the world's most famous aircraft? Join Colonel Melissa Dombrock, Deputy Commander of the 89th Airlift Wing, for an exclusive look at the people, missions, and operations that keep Air Force One flying safely and efficiently. Hear firsthand stories, gain insight into the day-to-day life of this elite wing, and discover what it takes to support some of the nation's most high-profile missions.

From Service to Success: Leadership, Military Experience, and Career Pathways– hosted by Mr. Stephen Chvala, President & CEO, Apollo Technologies Group

Location: Vaughn

Join Mr. Stephen Chvala, President & CEO of Apollo Technologies Group and former enlisted Sailor, for an engaging session on leadership, military experience, and translating those skills into meaningful careers. Drawing from his own journey, Mr. Chvala will provide practical insight into leadership development, navigating military and civilian transitions, and exploring opportunities in defense, government, and contracting sectors. Cadets will gain a clearer

understanding of how to leverage their experiences, build professional networks, and prepare for future career success both in and out of uniform.

CAC Town Hall – hosted by MDWG Cadet Advisory Council Leadership

Location: Hawking

The Wing Cadet Advisory Council is the voice of the 1100+ MDWG Cadets to both the Wing Commander and higher echelon CACs. This town hall provides Cadets the opportunity to interact directly with their representatives to hear about the efforts being worked, and express ideas and concerns in person for consideration.

Dressed for Success: Master the Uniform, Own the Mission– presented by C/CMSgt Ayden Bell & C/1st Lt Alicia Martin, St. Mary's Composite SQ

Location: Chesapeake

In the Civil Air Patrol, your uniform is more than just clothing; it's a symbol of authority, professional excellence, and your commitment to the mission. Whether you're gearing up for a search and rescue exercise or standing tall at a promotion ceremony, knowing the "why" and "how" of your gear is what separates a recruit from a leader. In this high-energy, interactive virtual session, we're stripping away the confusion and getting down to the brass tacks of CAP standards.

Operational Technology and Cyber Ranges – presented by the Technology Advancement Center

Location: Lamarr

Our host facility is a leading provider of training and support to cybersecurity professionals focused on operational technology (OT). What is OT? It is all around us as the computers and technology that support our daily lives, from managing traffic lights to electric and water plants to entire airports. Learn about this special aspect of cybersecurity and see what the TAC is providing on a daily basis.

Small UAS Operations: Opportunities, Regulations, and Real-World Application – presented by The MDWG sUAS Team

Location: Friedman / Zero Trust Room

Interested in flying drones and applying those skills in real-world missions? This session introduces cadets to Civil Air Patrol's small Unmanned Aircraft Systems (sUAS) program and the

wide range of opportunities available. Learn how cadets can become sUAS Recreational Pilots, Technicians, and FAA Part 107-certified Mission Pilots, and what roles they can play in training and operational environments. The session will also break down key regulations, safety considerations, and mission limitations in a practical, easy-to-understand format. Whether you're new to drones or looking to take the next step, this class will provide a clear pathway to getting involved and building valuable skills.

NETWORKING BREAK – 1500-1515

BREAKOUT SESSION # 4 – 1515-1615

Command Presence: Leadership Secrets from the Defense Intelligence Agency— hosted by Col Ezra Caplan, USAF, Executive Officer to the Director, Defense Intelligence Agency.

Location: Hamilton

Leadership goes beyond rank—it's about making decisions, building trust, and leading in complex environments. In this seminar, Col Ezra Caplan, USAF, Executive Officer to the Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, will share his perspective on effective leadership at the senior level, covering key lessons on decision-making, accountability, and leading with purpose while offering practical insight for cadets at any stage of their leadership journey.

Failed Advice for Flying Fighter Jets – hosted by Mr. Nick Osburn

Location: Vaughn

"Don't think, just act." Bad advice for a fighter pilot.... Aviation, by its very nature, is an intensely intellectual endeavor; and no regime of flight is more so than fighter combat. Combat aviation in the F/A-18 is a thinking person's game from planning, to execution, to debrief. Studying and practice are critical! Your life depends on it! Hear stories and anecdotes from a philosophical fighter pilot.

Charting Your Course: Service Academy Panel – hosted by Representatives of the United States Service Academies

Location: Hawking

Curious which service academy is the right fit for you and how to get there? Join representatives from each of the United States Military Service Academies for an inside look at what makes each one unique and how to navigate the competitive application journey. They'll break down the key differences between the academies, walk you through the application steps, and help

you understand what it takes to be a competitive candidate. You'll also get a chance to hear from the office of a congressional representative about how the congressional nomination process works—an essential part of earning an appointment to most academies and something all aspiring cadets should understand. This session is your chance to ask questions, get clarity, and plan your path toward serving at the highest levels.

Congressional Award – Hosted by C/Capt Jiya Rao

Location: Chesapeake

The Congressional Award is the United States Congress' award for young Americans. It is non-partisan, voluntary, and non-competitive. Open to all youth between the ages of 14 and 24, the award involves setting and achieving goals in areas of voluntary public service, personal development, physical fitness, and expedition/exploration. As a CAP Cadet, you are likely already well on your way towards qualifying for this award. In this session, you'll hear directly from a Cadet working on her award now, learn about the application and recording process, the role of a mentor, and personal experiences in her journey towards earning this award. Most importantly, you'll learn how you can start working on earning this prestigious award yourself.

Code the Mission: Hands-On Arduino & Hardware Hacking – presented by the Technology Advancement Center

Location: Lamarr

Stop being just a user of technology and start being the creator. In this high-octane, hands-on lab, you're moving beyond the screen and into the world of physical computing. Whether you're a complete beginner or a seasoned tech-head, this session gives you the keys to the kingdom: Arduino. You'll learn to write code that interacts with the physical world—blinking LEDs, reading sensors, and controlling motors in real-time. We're tearing down the "black box" of computers to show you how hardware and software actually talk to each other. If you've ever wanted to build your own drone components, automate a weather station, or understand the "brains" behind modern aerospace tech, this is your launchpad. Grab a kit, plug in, and let's start building the future.

Beyond the Grid: Master the Airwaves with Amateur Radio— presented by C/2d Lt Paul Lehman, Granite Cadet SQ

Location: Friedman / Zero Trust Room

When the grid goes dark and cell towers fall silent, who keeps the world connected? Amateur (Ham) Radio is the ultimate fail-safe—a high-tech lifeline that functions entirely independent of

the power grid to save lives and unite communities during disasters. In this session, you'll discover why this global hobby is the "backbone" of civilian communications and how you can join the ranks of those who own the airwaves. Whether you want to be a hero in Emergency Communications (EMComm), a tech wizard building your own antennas, or a space explorer bouncing signals off the moon and chatting with the International Space Station, there is a frequency waiting for you. We'll show you why Ham radio is a thrill for all ages, the diverse ways it's used today, and exactly how to get your license so you can start working international "pileups" and making your mark on the spectrum.

PICTURES/NETWORKING – 1615-1700

SPECIAL SESSIONS – TIMES VARY

Professional CAP Photo Station – hosted by 1st Lt Peter Foiles, Mt Airy Composite SQ

Location: Studio, 0830-0900, 1200-1330

Your digital first impression matters, whether it's for eServices, a Teams profile, or an NCSA application. Skip the selfies and get a high-quality, professional headshot featuring the U.S. and CAP flag background. Swing by the station to get a sharp, regulation-compliant photo that reflects your rank and commitment. Just make sure your uniform is squared away and your hair is in regs before you step in front of the lens.

Maker Space and STEM Expo – hosted by Maj Laura Smith Valezquez, MDWG Director of Aerospace Education, and C/2d Lt Alexander Rolfe, MDWG Cadet Aerospace Education Officer

Location: Hopper, 1015-1700

Step into the lab and get hands-on with the future of aerospace and technology. From high-tech engineering displays to interactive gear, you'll see exactly how STEM powers the Civil Air Patrol mission. Best of all, you won't leave empty-handed: head over to our fabrication station to laser engrave your own custom keepsake. Whether it's a keychain or a dog tag, you'll get to watch the laser work in real-time and take home a piece of the expo you designed yourself.

Civil Air Patrol sUAS Flight – hosted by the MDWG sUAS Team

Location: Outside, 1015-1700

Take the controls and get airborne with the Maryland Wing sUAS Team. This hands-on flight station is open all day, giving you the chance to fly a Small Unmanned Aerial System under the guidance of certified instructor pilots. Whether you're a seasoned drone pilot or have never

touched a controller, you'll receive expert instruction on flight maneuvers and mission safety. Don't just watch from the sidelines—get some stick time and see what it takes to join the ranks of CAP's unmanned aviation crews.

Senior/Cadet Leader Passport – hosted by the Cadet Conference Planning Team

Location: Everywhere, 1015-1700

Ready to turn the conference into an all-out scavenger hunt? Grab the passport from your swag bag and track down specific individuals and key sessions to snag those official stamps! It's the ultimate excuse to network like a pro, meet the VIPs, and fill your book for a chance at some cool prizes and serious bragging rights.

Operation Lost Eagle SAR Escape Room – hosted by C/Maj Ayaan Zareen, C/2d Lt Nicholas Chandler, Bethesda Chevy Chase Composite SQ

Location: Meet at Main Entrance 5 minutes before time slot, 1015-1045, 1100-1130, 1145-1215, 1400-1430, 1445-1515, 1530-1400, 1415-1445. 7, 30-minute sessions (Max 5 Cadets Per Session) Sign-up required

A light aircraft has gone missing, and your team is tasked with finding it. In this hands-on escape room, you'll work together to decode messages, use a sectional chart, and solve a series of clues to locate the crash site before time runs out. You'll have 30 minutes to figure it all out—see if your team can complete the mission in time.

Uniform Raffle – hosted by Capt Lisa Markland, Group 1 Cadet Programs Officer

Location: TBA, 1015-1700

Do you think you know CAPR 39-1? Come put that knowledge to the test. You'll be presented with three uniforms, which are not quite up to standard. Think you can spot the discrepancies? Submit your observations, and those with the correct answers will be entered in a raffle to win some Vanguard Gift Cards.

CLOSING – 1700-1800

Raffle Drawings – hosted by the Cadet Conference Planning Team

Location: Hamilton

Keep an eye on the prize pool throughout the day! We're raffling off a variety of custom baskets packed with gear for every interest, including Cyber, Leadership, Military, and Fitness themes. Make sure to get your tickets in for a chance to take home some top-tier swag and gear.

Eaker Award Presentations – hosted by Col Dennis Bissell, Mid-Atlantic Region Commander

Location: Hamilton

Witness leadership excellence in action as we celebrate one of the highest achievements in the cadet program. We'll be hosting a series of Eaker Award presentations to honor those who have conquered the final milestone of the Phase IV Leadership journey. Come support your fellow cadets as they receive their second diamond and join the prestigious ranks of CAP's top student leaders. It's a rare chance to see the culmination of years of hard work and get inspired for your own path to the top.

Closing Remarks – hosted by Col Brenda Reed, Maryland Wing Commander; video remarks from Maj Gen Regine Aye, CAP National Commander

Location: Hamilton

Wrap up your day back where it all started. Hear from your Wing Commander, as well as video remarks from your National Commander and other distinguished dignitaries as we wind down the day's activities. Provide some feedback on the event. What did you like? What didn't you like? What do you want to see next time? And yes, there WILL be a next time, so don't miss these closing remarks as we look forward to the next Cadet Conference.