



No 65 Squadron

Motto: Without Impediment

No 65 Squadron forms part of No 95 Wing of the Combat Support Group, Air Command. Headquartered at RAAF Base Townsville in Queensland, the Squadron's A Flight is based at RAAF Base Townsville in Queensland, and B Flight is located at RAAF Base Richmond, New South Wales. The Squadron's role is to provide air base recovery functions to support expeditionary operations. The Squadron brings together two important expeditionary capabilities for the RAAF: airfield engineering and explosive ordnance demolition which are essential to air base recovery. The Squadron badge depicts a tower superimposed on a shield enveloped in flames representing the duality of the Squadron's functions. The Squadron's motto is: *Without Impediment*.

The airfield engineering and explosive ordnance demolition roles have long and distinguished histories in the RAAF. Since the beginnings of Australian military aviation, the development of airfield facilities has been essential for the conduct of flying operations. When the RAAF came into being in 1921, Works or Facilities Staff were included in the Air Force Headquarters and on 1 July 1925 the Directorate of Works and Buildings was established

with a small staff. Between 1940 and 1945 the Directorate's personnel strength grew from thirteen to 140 and included specialist Air Force and civilian staff.

The '5' in No 65 Squadron is a direct reference to No 5 Airfield Construction Squadron. From April 1942 to July 1943, the Air Force formed ten airfield construction squadrons, providing an organic construction capability with a combined staff of about 5 000 officers and airmen on active service. Most of the airfield construction squadrons were disbanded in 1945. No 5 Airfield Construction Squadron was reactivated in 1951. In addition to other distinguished actions, No 5 Airfield Construction Squadron followed Allied assault troops onto the beaches of Labuan during Operation *Oboe Six* and worked to rehabilitate the airfield which had been deeply cratered by repeated Allied bombing and Japanese mining. After the end of World War II, the Squadron formed part of the British Commonwealth Occupation Forces in Japan where it continued airfield construction work. No 5 Airfield Construction Squadron was recognised through the award of the following battle honours: Pacific 1942-45, New Guinea 1942-43, Moresby

1942–43, Milne Bay, Netherlands New Guinea, and Borneo 1945. No 5 was the last Airfield Construction Squadron to be disbanded in 1974.

The '6' in No 65 Squadron, refers to No 6 Bomb Disposal Squad, the last such squad to be disbanded after World War II. Unlike the airfield construction squadrons, bomb disposal squads, were incorporated within other units at various RAAF stations and as a consequence their histories are highly dispersed. The RAAF's first two officers and twenty-two airmen to undertake bomb disposal training commenced this training on 24 March 1942 at the Armament School at RAAF Station Point Cook, Victoria. On graduation, they were allocated to squads formed at RAAF Stations Darwin in the Northern Territory, Townsville in Queensland and Port Moresby, Papua. The officers and airmen who performed bomb disposal repeatedly worked under threat of death and showed a special kind of courage. Bomb Disposal Squads led by Flight Lieutenant Ralph Taylor and Flying Officer Henry Belcher accompanied American forces on their invasion of Pityilu in the Admiralty Islands in May 1944. They disarmed bombs that had been dropped prior to the landing, keeping the invasion force safe, and earlier in the same campaign proceeded ahead of the American infantry and mechanised forces detecting mines and clearing a path. Several members of these squads were seriously injured. Between them, five squad members earned a Silver Star and four Bronze Stars from the American Army.

In recent times, while Explosive Ordnance Demolition and Airfield Engineering existed within Combat Support Group, they resided within separate units. In the lead up to forming No 65 Squadron, in May 2014, the Explosive Ordnance Demolition Flight of No 1 Security Forces Squadron and the Airfield Engineering Flight of No 383 Contingency Response Squadron were brought under the interim management of No 95 Wing headquarters. The decision to amalgamate them into an air base recovery squadron followed a detailed review of force protection requirements, with particular reference to the establishment of

expeditionary airfields and air bases in support of aircraft mission generation.

No 65 Squadron was first formed on 1 July 2015 under the command of Wing Commander Justin Cockroft. On formation, No 65 Squadron headquarters was located at RAAF Base Amberley in Queensland. However, after a further review in 2018, the Squadron headquarters was relocated to RAAF Base Townsville in two stages which took effect on 1 January 2019 and 1 January 2020. This move co-located the Squadron headquarters with its major detachment in Townsville and also relocated the Air Force Explosive Ordnance Demolition personnel from No 20 Explosive Ordnance Disposal Squadron based at Enoggera, Queensland to No 65 Squadron. The Squadron benefitted significantly from the reduction in its geographical dispersal.

While only enjoying a brief existence, No 65 Squadron has made important contributions to operations with members deploying to Operations *Accordion* and *Highbroad*. Operation *Accordion* supports ADF operations, contingency planning and regional relationships in the Middle East. Operation *Highbroad* commenced on 1 January 2015 and is Australia's train, advise and assist mission in Afghanistan, where the Afghan National Security Forces take the lead for all combat operations.

Beginning in September 2015, a team of No 65 Squadron Airfield Engineers constructed the multi-purpose temporary hangar at RAAF Base Learmonth. The construction took about three months, and in the process, the Squadron demonstrated the capability to deliver a construction project at short notice.

Operation *Render Safe* conducted from 12 September to 7 October 2016, took No 65 Squadron's explosive ordnance disposal specialists to the Solomon Islands, near Honiara in Guadalcanal and Mbanika, in the Russell Islands. The six-man team, as part of a multinational task force, found and cleared more than 200 items of unexploded ordnance left over from World War II. Military personnel from Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom took part in this operation,

NUMBERED UNITS

which concentrated on Guadalcanal and around the Russell Islands and Florida Group.

In February 2017, No 65 Squadron was the first unit into Avalon, Victoria, ahead of the International Airshow and was the last unit to leave after the event ended. In between, the Squadron: laid out more than 209 tonnes of aircraft matting for taxiways, aprons and pathways; constructed and outfitted three deployable aircraft maintenance and logistic support hangars; and set up multiple 'Base X' tents all the while ensuring compliance with Victorian safety regulations. After the show the unit personnel took it all down again.

In October 2017, No 65 Squadron participated in Exercise *Kingswood 17* held at Defence Establishment Orchard Hills, New South Wales. Exercise *Kingswood* is a biennial exercise in which the Squadron is joined by No 36 Civil Engineer Squadron of the United States Air Force and the United States Marine Corps'

Marine Wing Support Squadron. In *Kingswood 17* a range of scenarios were exercised involving airfield damage assessment and repair, crashed aircraft recovery and rapid airfield clearance, as well as unexploded ordnance and improvised explosive device clearance.

The Squadron supported Operation *Atlas* conducted in support of the 2018 Gold Coast Commonwealth Games. In addition, nine squadron members led by Sergeant Paul Lucano, who was born in Bathurst, demonstrated their airfield construction skills by building an unsealed apron at the Bathurst Airport for the use of the local Air Force Cadets to safely park their aircraft. The Squadron's hard work and dedication earned it the Markowski Cup in April 2019. In 2020, No 65 Squadron personnel deployed in support of Operation *Bushfire Assist 2019-20*. They assisted by removing hazardous trees and cutting fire breaks, among other tasks.



No 65 Squadron personnel cutting a fire break in the Bando Forest near Tumut, NSW during Operation *Bushfire Assist 2019-20*. Source: Department of Defence