



No 96 Wing

Motto: Steadfast in Support

No 96 Wing forms part of the Combat Support Group, Air Command and is headquartered at RAAF Base Amberley, Queensland. The Wing is the principal formation providing the Air Force's permanent air base operations capability, and specialises in all facets of air base operational support. No 96 Wing's badge depicts a traveller's palm, a tree-like perennial commonly found in the Darwin area, whose hollow leaf stems can hold water making it resistant to drought and useful to thirsty travellers. The motto: *Steadfast in Support* is inscribed on the scroll. The badge design and motto are shared with those of the former Base Squadron Darwin, a unit that formed in 1952 and disbanded in 1994.

No 96 Wing was first formed as No 396 Combat Support Wing on 20 November 2000 at RAAF Base Darwin as part of Combat Support Group. The Wing's formation simplified the span of direct control of the Officer Commanding Combat Support Group by reducing the number of direct reports. The Wing's formation also streamlined the combat support arrangements at RAAF Bases Darwin and Townsville.

On formation No 396 Combat Support Wing comprised a headquarters element as well as Nos

321, 322, 323 and 324 Combat Support Squadrons based at RAAF Bases Darwin, Tindal and Townsville, and Royal Malaysian Air Force Base Butterworth, respectively. In addition, No 396 Wing controlled the RAAF's three bare bases Scherger, Learmonth and Curtin through the Bare Base Management Flight, the Officer-in-Charge of which reported directly to the Officer Commanding No 396 Wing.

In December 2001, under a major restructure of Air Force health services, the RAAF formed the Health Services Wing within the Combat Support Group. However, the Health Services Flights at Darwin, Tindal, Townsville and Butterworth remained under the command of No 396 Wing's Combat Support Squadrons at those bases.

Combat Support Group was further reorganised on 1 July 2005, to better satisfy strategic guidance and to implement improvements identified following a review of air bases, and the inaugural Airworthiness Board for air base support services. The primary change placed Air Command fixed air bases (except for RAAF Base Glenbrook) under the command of the Officer Commanding No 396 Combat Support Wing. The Wing's organisational structure after these changes incorporated a headquarters element as well

as Nos 321 (Darwin), 322 (Tindal), 323 (Townsville) and 324 (Butterworth) Combat Support Squadrons as before, plus new additions: the Combat Support Units located at Amberley, Edinburgh, Richmond and Williamtown. The Wing's headquarters establishment was supplemented from the disbandment of the Headquarters No 322 Combat Support Wing at Tindal. Training Command was still in existence at the time and Combat Support Units at RAAF Bases East Sale, Wagga and Pearce which were under its control were unaffected.

By early 2007, ongoing commitments to operations in the Middle East Region and the attendant high tempo of deployed operations motivated another review of the Combat Support Group and the roles of its various formations. By this time, other RAAF organisational changes had occurred including the disestablishment of Training Command and the formation of Air Force Training Group as part of Air Command. Command of the existing bases and Expeditionary Combat Support Squadrons was redistributed between Nos 395 and 396 Wings. In addition, No 396 Wing also assumed an expeditionary role and designation. Some units under the command of the two Wings were disbanded or renamed while others were transferred. The resultant structure of No 396 Expeditionary Combat Support Wing from 1 January 2007 incorporated Nos 321 (Darwin), 322 (Tindal), 323 (Townsville) and 324 (Butterworth) Expeditionary Combat Support Squadrons, No 1 Airfield Operations Support Squadron, No 1 Combat Communications Squadron, and the Combat Support Units at RAAF Bases Edinburgh and Pearce. No 396 Wing also retained control of the three bare bases, Learmonth, Curtin and Scherger.

In 2009, consistent with government guidance, Defence initiated the Strategic Reform Program which had an essential objective of achieving savings amounting to \$20 billion over ten years. In response, Combat Support Group undertook an organisational review to optimise its structure and to better support current and emerging Air Force capability, while also achieving productivity gains. The resulting

restructure again saw the disbandment, renaming and transfer of several units. No 396 Expeditionary Combat Support Wing was assigned responsibility for fixed air base support services, but with the rider, that it provides sustainment forces for expeditionary combat support operations.

These changes took effect on 1 July 2010, after which No 396 Expeditionary Combat Support Wing had under command twelve 'City Squadrons' located in every state and territory in Australia. They were: Nos 13 (City of Darwin), 21 (City of Melbourne), 22 (City of Sydney), 23 (City of Brisbane), 24 (City of Adelaide), 25 (City of Perth), 26 (City of Newcastle), 27 (City of Townsville), 28 (City of Canberra), 29 (City of Hobart), 30 (City of Sale) and 31 (City of Wagga Wagga) Squadrons. Meanwhile, in the preceding four years, the role of the Air Force Active Reserve had progressively changed resulting in the further integration of reservists into the Permanent Air Force. Previously the primary focus of 'City Squadrons' was in training and preparing reservists for augmenting Permanent Air Force units. From 1 July 2010, 'City Squadrons' were required to integrate their training function with the provision of fixed air base support services at their home base.

On 1 August 2011, the command arrangements implemented a year earlier within Combat Support Group were refined. Nos 322 and 324 Expeditionary Combat Support Squadrons transferred to No 396 Wing, while Nos 23 (City of Brisbane) and 26 (City of Newcastle) Squadrons transferred to No 395 Wing. At the same time No 28 (City of Canberra) Squadron was transferred out of Combat Support Group. These changes were implemented to facilitate the Air Force's Combat Support Improvement Program, and to identify and implement future efficiencies.

As part of the Combat Support Improvement Program, Combat Support Group initiated a workforce analysis and organisational design project which formed the basis of further transformational change. The consequent organisational changes which targeted workforce efficiencies, were implemented in phases commencing on 1 January 2014. Under these changes, the descriptors of

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expeditionary combat support were dropped from the designations of the Wings and squadrons of Combat Support Group and Nos 395 and 396 Wings were renamed Nos 95 and 96 Wings respectively. Nos 29 (City of Hobart) and 31 (City of Wagga Wagga) Squadrons were transferred out of Combat Support Group altogether, while Nos 17 and 19 Squadrons located at Tindal and Butterworth, respectively, were transferred into the Group and under command of No 96 Wing. The new structure of No 96 Wing also incorporated the following 'City Squadrons': Nos 13 (City of Darwin), 21 (City of Melbourne), 22 (City of Sydney), 23 (City of Brisbane), 24 (City of Adelaide), 25 (City of Perth), 26 (City of Newcastle), 27 (City of Townsville), and 30 (City of Sale).

No 96 Wing grew by the addition of further units in subsequent years. On 1 April 2015, No 20 Squadron was formed at RAAF Base Woomera and placed under Command of No 96 Wing. On 1 October 2017, Nos 29 (City of Hobart) and 31 (City of Wagga Wagga) were once again transferred to

Combat Support Group and placed under command of No 96 Wing. Following these moves, the Wing has under command eleven 'City Squadrons' and three other squadrons, making fourteen units in all. No 96 Wing's units are widely dispersed across Australia, with No 19 Squadron being located in Malaysia. Responsibility for the RAAF Bases Learmonth, Curtin and Scherger also rests with No 96 Wing.

The Wing headquarters staff develop operations policy and plans as well as doctrine and standards. The staff also oversees the Wing's force generation activities and provides legal advice on command matters. Individual members of the Wing headquarters also deploy on operations from time to time.

Despite undergoing multiple changes in structure and roles over the years, No 96 Wing and its units have been unwavering in their support of Air Force operations. The Wing contributes personnel and resources to deployed operations and exercises while also providing all facets of air base operational support at fourteen fixed-bases, two 'bare bases' (Scherger and Curtin), and one forward operating base (Learmonth) all around Australia and overseas in Malaysia.



No 23 Squadron member deployed on Operation *Bushfire Assist 2019-20*. Source: *Department of Defence*