

# RAAF Base Wagga

## A short history



RAAF Base Wagga is situated at Forest Hill some 11 kilometres east of the city of Wagga Wagga, New South Wales. It has been a permanent RAAF Base since July 1940. Suitable land was purchased from the estates of the Brunskill and Lyons families early in 1939 and development work commenced immediately. It was always intended that the new Base would be permanent and brick structures were therefore extensively used.

The Ensign was hoisted for the first time on 29 July 1940, as No.2 Service Flying Training School became operational. The first Commanding Officer was Wing Commander F.R.W. Scherger. Pilot trainees came to the Base from elementary flying training schools and continued their training to 'Wings' standard on Wirraway and Anson aircraft - the latter being withdrawn as the school concentrated on fighter type training.

A spectacular 'piggy-back' landing of two Ansons near the small town of Brocklesby occurred on 28 September 1940. In this incident two aircraft collided and became firmly attached in a 'piggy-back' fashion. The two trainee pilots from the bottom and one from the top aircraft descended by parachute, but the remaining trainee (Leading Aircraftman Fuller) found that as the engines of the bottom aircraft were still operating he could control the two aircraft. He force-landed successfully.

No.60 & No.61 Squadrons were formed in January 1942, each operating 18 Wirraways. This enhanced the tactics of staff pilots. No.31 Squadron was raised at Wagga Wagga before proceeding on operations to the north and 5 Operational Training Unit provided advanced training on the Beaufighter during this period.

The close association with the RAAF and the people of the City of Wagga Wagga was enhanced by the establishment of No.2 Training Group Headquarters in Romano's Hotel in 1942, where it remained until 1946.

No.2 Communications Flight occupied the civil aerodrome at Gumly from 1942 to 1944.

After the disbandment of No.2 Service Flying Training School in March 1942, the spacious engineering facilities at the Base enabled development of No.5 Aircraft Depot to repair operational aircraft. During the next three years, this Unit carried out maintenance work on 1686 engines and 602 aircraft, including such types as Anson, Beaufighter, Boomerang, Beaufort, Kittyhawk, Ventura, Vengeance and Mitchell. The Base was then further developed with the addition of more Bellman hangars and domestic accommodation. In 1944 the Base recorded its highest ever service population of 2270. For a brief period the United States Army Air Force used the Base when the 4th Air Depot Group and the 70th Bombardment Squadron moved in with their bombers prior to transfer to the Pacific islands.

In 1943 vital repair work was severely interrupted when a spectacular fire destroyed the instrument repair section.

No.1 RAAF Hospital was moved from temporary quarters at the Base to spacious accommodation at Turvey Park, a suburb of Wagga Wagga. The hospital buildings were declared surplus in 1948 and formed the basis of the Teachers College which became an important faculty of Charles Sturt University.

At the end of World War II, No.5 Aircraft Depot was disbanded and the Base was placed in care and maintenance with hundreds of surplus aircraft being parked for eventual sale.

With the move of No.1 Engineering School to the Base from Ascot Vale the Unit became the principle trade training school of the RAAF.

Until 1985, the Base basically consisted of Headquarters, Base Squadron and the RAAF School of Technical Training (RAAFSTT).

The restructuring of RAAFSTT formed independent training squadrons with a Base squadron reporting to headquarters.

Base Squadron Wagga's history began in March 1956, when it was recognised as a Unit in its own right after the formation of RAAF Wagga. At this time, Unit routine consisted mainly of support to RAAFSTT.

During 1981 the Base celebrated the RAAF Diamond Jubilee with an Officers' Mess commemorative dinner attended by local dignitaries, and an Open Day. In January 1985, an electronic scoreboard was installed in the gymnasium to coincide with the Base implementation of the RAAF physical fitness program.

October 1989 saw the first Uniplex computer package installed on the Base. For the 50th anniversary of the formation of RAAF Wagga, Base Squadron set up a display of photographs and memorabilia in the Wagga Wagga Commonwealth Bank chambers. The Base celebrated the anniversary by exercising its right of Freedom of the City, an Officers' Mess dining-in night, an all ranks ball and an Open Day, at which one of the highlights was the five cakes iced with the crests of the five RAAF Wagga Units.

During the 1980s major accommodation and training projects were constructed, making RAAF Base Wagga one of the most modern training facilities in Australia. This was further expanded with the transfer of the Radio School to the Base in 1994. Base Squadron Wagga was disbanded on 29 June 1994.

In 2007, a brand new \$16M facility was built to house No.1 Recruit Training Unit, which returned to Wagga from RAAF Base Edinburgh to occupy their new home.

RAAF Base Wagga has grown from a small flying training school to an organisation responsible for the majority of the RAAF's ground training. It has developed a close relationship with the local community. It will continue to serve, committed to uphold the Base motto - **'We Prepare'**.