

# 455<sup>th</sup> EXPEDITIONARY CIVIL ENGINEER SQUADRON



## **MISSION**

## **LINEAGE**

455<sup>th</sup> Expeditionary Civil Engineer Squadron

## **STATIONS**

Bagram, Afghanistan

## **ASSIGNMENTS**

455<sup>th</sup> Expeditionary Mission Support Group

## **COMMANDERS**

Maj. Michael Johnson

LTC Stephen Becker

## **HONORS**

**Service Streamers**

**Campaign Streamers**

**Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers**

**Decorations**

## **EMBLEM**

On a disc parted Azure and Sable by a bar dancette Argent, overall a bull's skull Gules, detailed of the second, between the horns in chief two deltas ascending bendwise, points to dexter

parted per pale Or and of the third, all within a narrow Yellow border. Attached above the disc, a Blue scroll edged with a narrow Yellow border and inscribed "WIN THE FIGHT" in Yellow letters. Attached below the disc, a Blue scroll edged with a narrow Yellow border and inscribed "455 ECES" in Yellow letters. **SIGNIFICANCE:** Ultramarine blue and Air Force yellow are the Air Force colors. Blue alludes to the sky, the primary theater of Air Force operations. Yellow refers to the sun and the excellence required of Air Force personnel. The red bull skull represents the courageous manner in which the unit provides combat support capability of PRIME BEEF civil engineers. The mountains refer to the challenges encountered in the theater of combat that the unit must rise above. The flight symbols allude to the primary mission of supporting the airfield.

## **MOTTO**

## **NICKNAME**

## **OPERATIONS**

He singled out the 455<sup>th</sup> Expeditionary Civil Engineer Squadron, commanded by Lt. Col. Stephen Becker, deployed 301st Civil Engineer Squadron commander, for their outstanding job in maintaining the busiest runway in Afghanistan. Colonel Becker began command Sept. 8 of the 455<sup>th</sup> ECES, a 67-troop strong unit composed of active-duty personnel from 12 different bases throughout the United States, Europe and Guam. Their specialties included firefighting, engineering, explosive ordnance disposal, heavy equipment operations construction projects within the last four months. Their largest and most visible project was the Bagram runway, which required ongoing repair due to excess use, age and weather.

A nine-man repair team spent at least three hours every day repairing shallow breaks in the concrete. These critical "spall" repairs kept the loose debris from damaging aircraft engines and tires. It's estimated this structure supported around 3,000 vital combat and humanitarian operations each week, giving it the title of the "busiest runway in Afghanistan." Other major projects completed in the past four months include: contributing to the Pakistan earthquake relief efforts; installation of a new aircraft arresting system resulting in 12 successful engagements of fighter aircraft; sealing 80,000 linear feet of cracks and joints on the airfield; the removal of 60,000 square meters of rubber on the runway to prevent slippery surfaces; and preparing for multiple dignitary visits — including the vice president of the United States, the secretary of the Air Force and the secretary of defense.

With this much activity occurring in such a volatile area there were considerable risks involved. "The area was extremely dangerous because there was no guarantee we wouldn't hit a landmine while digging to build new ramps and taxiways," Colonel Becker added. During his tour, there were three contractors who lost limbs while trying to and armed escorts to monitor the contractors. "One of the greatest challenges was coordinating with 15 other joint coalition engineering organizations to ensure we were not competing against one another for the scarce resources," said Colonel Becker. Even with 20 percent of their unit being forward deployed to support missions throughout Afghanistan, this unit still managed to complete 42 airfield clear areas for construction projects; none of the injured personnel belonged to the 455th ECES.

The previous commander was airlifted to Germany for treatment of an injury from an anti-personnel mine just before Colonel Becker's arrival. "The EOD teams were in constant danger with each mission they conducted outside the wire," said Colonel Becker. "During these last few months they have successfully conducted more than 200 missions and destroyed more than 7,000 enemy munitions." There were also some close calls when members from the fire department were attacked during two separate deployments. Fortunately, only their tent and side of their fire truck was damaged by shrapnel during one of the attacks. "There is nothing that prepares a commander for the helplessness he feels when his fire department calls him on a satellite phone requesting close air support shortly after they have survived a rocket attack," Colonel Becker solemnly recalled.

With all of the work to be accomplished there wasn't a whole lot of time to sleep or play. "The position required you to focus on the job 14 to 16 hours a day, seven days a week," Colonel Becker said. "There was no downtime. There's too much going on with coordinating airfield construction and running the day-to-day operations of a squadron — I worked on problems and issues right up to the time I got on the plane to head home." The colonel departed for home around the middle of January and can now appreciate the many contributions made by himself and his comrades toward the nation that continues its quest for freedom and independence. "It has been an honor to be the commander of an active duty squadron complete with EOD and fire department teams," said Colonel Becker. "Despite all of the so-called hardships we have embraced into our daily routine, this deployment will be one I will cherish for the rest of my life. It's the one where I used all of my training. It's the one that I am able to point to as having made a difference in our fight against terrorism."

Runway Repairs at Bagram Complete Ahead of Schedule Air Force civil engineers at Bagram Airfield in Afghanistan completed a critical repair project for the base's main runway ahead of schedule. Airmen from the 455th Expeditionary Civil Engineer Squadron and the 577th Expeditionary Prime Base Engineer Squadron repaired four sets of Ultra High Molecular Weight polyethylene panels on the main runway, which were located under the arresting cable system. The panels are crucial to prevent the cables, when rolled over, from eroding grooves in the pavement, states an Air Forces Central Command release.

Repairs to the panels included testing over 900 large bolts, and taking out any that failed to meet torque requirements. A total of 502 of the 992 large bolts were replaced, according to the release. Initial plans projected 16 outages for the runway at Bagram, requiring 12 days, but engineers completed the task in only eight days, said Maj. Ryan Kaspari, 455th ECES operations chief. "This project will likely be the most important task our airmen complete while deployed," said Lt. Col. Jason Lay, 455th ECES commander. "We are handing over a completely operational airfield."

The 455th Expeditionary Civil Engineering Squadron, Bagram Air Base, includes 16 members of the Iowa National Guard's 185th Civil Engineering squadron. The Airmen are involved in base sustainment and aircraft arresting activities, while on a six month deployment to Afghanistan. Bagram Airbase is located near Kabul and served by a 10,000 foot runway. There are over 32 acres of ramp space, five aircraft dispersal areas with a total of over 110 revetments. Many of the support buildings and base housing were originally built by the Soviets.

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Air Force Order of Battle

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Sources

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The Institute of Heraldry. U.S. Army. Fort Belvoir, VA.

Air Force News. Air Force Public Affairs Agency.