**Wing Military Aviation Unit**

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**Wing** is a term used by different military aviation forces for a unit of command. The terms wing and [group](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Group_(air_force_unit)) are used for different-sized units from one country or service to another.

In some military aviation services, a wing is a relatively large formation of two or more groups, which in turn control two or more [squadrons](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Squadron_(aviation)). In other contexts a wing is a smaller unit, comprising two to four squadrons, with several wings forming a group. For example, In the [United States Air Force](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Air_Force), a wing is equivalent to a group in the air forces of most [Commonwealth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commonwealth_of_Nations) countries (although the [Canadian Forces](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canadian_Forces) are an exception; see below) and both are equivalent to an army [regiment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regiment), and a USAF group is equivalent to a wing in most Commonwealth air forces.

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| --- | --- |
| **British pattern** | **American pattern** |
| Group | Wing |
| Wing | Group |
| Squadron | Squadron |

**Commonwealth usage**

**Origins**

On its establishment in 1912, the [British](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom) [Royal Flying Corps](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Flying_Corps) (RFC) was intended to be an inter-service, combined force of the [British Army](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Army) and [Royal Navy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Navy). Given the [rivalry](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interservice_rivalry) that existed between the army and navy, new terminology was used, in order to avoid marking the corps out as having an army or navy ethos. While [the term "wing" had been used in the cavalry](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cavalry_wing), its more general use predominated. Accordingly, the word "wing", with its allusion of flight, was chosen as the term of subdivision and the corps was split into a "Military Wing" (i.e. an army wing) and a "Naval Wing". Each wing consisted of a number of squadrons (the term "squadron" already being used by both the Army and the Navy).

By 1914, the naval wing had become the [Royal Naval Air Service](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Naval_Air_Service), and gained its independence from the Royal Flying Corps. In 1915, the Royal Flying Corps had significantly expanded and it was felt necessary to create organizational units which would control two or more squadrons; the term "wing" was re-used for these new organizational units.

The Royal Flying Corps was amalgamated with the Royal Naval Air Service in 1918, creating the [Royal Air Force](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Air_Force). The RFC usage of wing was maintained in the new service.

**Current use**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Unit type** | **Commanding Officer** |
| Operational flying wings | [Group Captain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Group_Captain) |
| Ground-based wings | [Wing Commander](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wing_Commander_(rank)) |

In most [Commonwealth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commonwealth_of_Nations) air forces, as well as some others, a wing is usually made up of three or four [squadrons](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Squadron_(aviation)). In these air forces a wing is inferior to a group. Originally all wings were usually commanded by a [wing commander](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wing_Commander_(rank)) (equivalent to a [lieutenant colonel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lieutenant_colonel)). From World War II onwards, operational flying wings have usually been commanded by [group captains](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Group_captain) (equivalent to [colonels](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colonel)), whereas ground-based wings have continued to be commanded by wing commanders.

A wing may also be used for non-flying units, such as the [infantry](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Infantry) forces of the [RAF Regiment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RAF_Regiment), (in which a wing equates to a [battalion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battalion)). Additionally, [RAF stations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RAF_station) are administratively divided into wings.

In 2006, [expeditionary air wings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Expeditionary_air_wing) were established at the RAF's main operating bases. These expeditionary air wings consist of the deployable elements of the main operating base and other supplementary forces. Expeditionary air wings may be subordinated to an [expeditionary air group](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Expeditionary_air_group&action=edit&redlink=1).

In the [British](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_people) [Air Training Corps](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Air_Training_Corps), a wing consists of a number of squadrons within a designated geographical area, usually named after the [county](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/County) in which it is based. In this regard, a wing is inferior to a "[region](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Region)" which is made up of six wings. In all, there are 36 Air Training Corps wings in six regions within the [United Kingdom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom), each of which is commanded by a [RAFVR(T)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RAFVR(T)) wing commander.

**Canadian usage**

While the original [Royal Canadian Air Force](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Canadian_Air_Force) followed the British pattern, the modern [Canadian Forces Air Command](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canadian_Forces_Air_Command) is an example of a Commonwealth air force which does not follow British usage. The size of a wing (base) follows US usage (see below); it varies greatly and may comprise personnel numbering in the thousands.

In the 1990s, the [Canadian Forces Air Command](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canadian_Forces_Air_Command) (the post-1968 RCAF) altered the structure of those [bases](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canadian_Forces_Bases) under its control, declaring them to be Wings under the overall control of [1 Canadian Air Division](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1_Canadian_Air_Division) in [Winnipeg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winnipeg,_Manitoba). For instance, [CFB Trenton](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CFB_Trenton) in Ontario was redesignated 8 Wing Trenton. The base commander of these bases (as well as other wings whose headquarters were stood up on bases not controlled by Air Command, such as 16 Wing at [CFB Borden](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CFB_Borden) and 1 Wing at [CFB Kingston](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CFB_Kingston)) were re-designated Wing Commanders (or Wg. Comd.). As well as continuing their functions as the commanding officers of the bases they were assigned to, they also serve as formation commanders to all squadrons and units duly assigned to them by 1 CDN AIR DIV HQ and AIRCOM HQ (regardless if they are physically located on the base in question or elsewhere; as witness [12 Wing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CFB_Shearwater) in Nova Scotia, which has one unit, [443 Maritime Helicopter Squadron](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/No._443_Squadron_RCAF), based at [Patricia Bay](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victoria_International_Airport) near [CFB Esquimalt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canadian_Forces_Base_Esquimalt) in British Columbia, on the other side of the country from Shearwater).

**United States usage**

*Further information:* [*Origin of USAF wings*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Origin_of_USAF_wings)

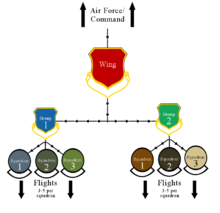


Diagram of a typical US Air Force wing organizational structure.

By comparison, in the [United States Air Force](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Air_Force), a [wing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Wings_of_the_USAF) is normally the organizational tier below a [Numbered Air Force](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Air_Force#Numbered_Air_Forces_.28NAF.29). Most USAF wings are commanded by a [Colonel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colonel), but some are commanded by [Brigadier Generals](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brigadier_General). USAF wings structured to fulfill a mission from a specific base, and contain a [headquarters](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Headquarters) and four groups: an operations group, a maintenance group, a medical group and a mission support group. Such a wing is referred to as a Combat Wing Organization, which is comparable to a [brigade](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brigade) in the [US Army](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Army). Other wings, such as [Air Expeditionary Wings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Air_Expeditionary_Wing), exist for various other purposes, and their scope may extend to one base, one theater or worldwide.

The [United States Navy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Navy) follows the British structure in that a Wing is an administrative formation commanding two or more [squadrons](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Squadron_(aviation)) of [aircraft](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aircraft) that are based on land. Several Wings may be combined into a group. For example the Patrol and Reconnaissance Group (CPRG) is in command of the three Patrol and Reconnaissance Wings (CPRW), which in turn command the various [Patrol Squadrons](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patrol_Squadron) (VP) or Fleet Reconnaissance Squadrons (VQ). A [Carrier Air Wing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carrier_Air_Wing) (CVW, formerly known as a [Carrier Air Group](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carrier_Air_Group)) consists of several squadrons and is an operational formation that is based on an [aircraft carrier](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aircraft_carrier). The squadrons of a CVW are also assigned to an administrative type wings (such as [Strike Fighter Wing Atlantic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strike_Fighter_Wing_Atlantic)). Navy groups are commanded by [Rear Admirals](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rear_Admiral) (Lower Half) and wings are commanded by [Captains](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Captain_(naval)).

In the [United States Marine Corps](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Marine_Corps), a wing is an overall command consisting of at least two [Marine Aircraft Groups](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_United_States_Marine_Corps_aircraft_groups) and their subordinate squadrons and support units. Being equivalent to a [division](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Division_(military)) in size, its commander is usually a [Major General](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Major_General).

In the [Civil Air Patrol](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_Air_Patrol), there are 52 wings (each of the 50 states plus [Washington, D.C.](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Washington,_D.C.) and [Puerto Rico](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Puerto_Rico)). Each wing supervises the individual groups and squadrons, which are the basic operational unit of the organization. Some wings, for example [Delaware Wing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Delaware_Wing)

**Equivalents in other countries**

Most other Western air forces tend to follow the US nomenclature, insofar as having squadrons coming directly under groups. Immediately above this however, some air forces have foreign terms which are equivalent to a US "wing". For example: *Geschwader* in Germany; *Polk* in Russia; *Stormo* in Italy; and *escadre* in pre-World War II [French Air Force](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_Air_Force), which is also the official French translation of a wing in modern-day [Canadian Forces](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canadian_Forces).