

## Spécial A400M : « Faire bouger les lignes »

- Entretien avec le Général Soulet, Commandant du CFA
- Reportage sur la Base-mère de l'Atlas

# “L'ENTRÉE dans une NOUVELLE ÈRE”

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La transformation du  
Soutien commun

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The Australian MRTT KC-30A :  
« A Tanker of Choice »





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# The AUSTRALIAN MRTT KC-30A :

## A « Tanker of Choice » For Operation OKRA

RAAF F/A - 18F Super Hornet conducts a mission over Iraq



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■ On April 1, 2014, your command changed its name from Airlift Group (ALG) to Air Mobility Group (AMG), going from the Caribou/C-130 package to the current more comprehensive mobility package of C-130Js, C-27Js, C-17s and KC-30As. What are the foundations to best understand such a transition ?

The shift was motivated in large because of the reintroduction of Air to Air Refueling (AAR) through the KC-30A and the growing maturity of this platform. The shift also highlights the expansion of AMG capabilities within the RAAF. Renaming the Group signaled an important change to the focus of AMG and the way ahead. The name change also aligns us with naming conventions of both the RAF and USAF Air Mobility commands.

AMG now has considerable capacity, sustainability, speed and reach. The sheer capacity of our AAR assets and heavy lift platforms has fundamentally changed the landscape of Air Mobility within Air Force.

■ The movement of the RAAF from Australia to Iraq was a major statement about the self-deployment capability of the RAAF enabled by the AMG. Could you describe this effort ?

Operation OKRA has indeed accelerated the maturing process of the KC-30A. This was a defining moment for the RAAF and really the first time we self-deployed an air combat package, equipment and personnel over such a long distance and in such a short period of time. The maturing of the KC-30A was the game changer, in conjunction with our heavy lift fleet. Assembling a combat focused capability piece by piece has not been without its challenges, as the KC-30A still has a foot in both the operational space and project space. However, both the project and operational teams are working the issues collegiately.

At the end of 2013, the squadron was transferred from a project focused Transition Team to Number 86 Wing – and in doing so was placed directly into the hands of the war fighter. In 2014 the Wing, in conjunction with the project

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office, addressed the training and key operational issues that were preventing the full utilization of the KC-30A. The shift in operational focus, as a result of transferring the KC-30A to the Wing, is reflected in the increase in AAR from 40% to 75%.

The deployment to the Middle East has also accelerated the certification of aircraft able to be tanked by the KC-30A. In three months, we have dramatically increased the number of aircraft certified. This would not have happened without the press of events and the operational tempo associated with the deployment. It is the tanker of choice in Iraq, as we are being told by coalition partners.

In addition, as we go forward, the excess of space, weight and power that resides in the KC-30A lends itself to the introduction of capabilities that can work effectively with combat aircraft and the Wedgetail. In the future, the KC-30A will clearly be used as a communication node in the battlespace and thereby compliment the capabilities of the Wedgetail.

■ The coming of the A400M as a new platform in France has allowed the French Air Force new command (CFA for « Commandement des forces aériennes »), which is in charge in particular of readiness, to re-think how to use other assets and going forward about modernization of the legacy assets. Do you have a similar process especially regarding the coming of the C-17 and KC-30A into the Australian armed forces ?

We are indeed. The Chief of Air Force has set the foundations for Plan Jericho, which looks at the interactivity and connectivity of key platforms in the RAAF and how best to transform Air Force to meet future operational needs. Obviously, AMG is a key part of this effort. We are not looking at just adding lift and tanking capabilities, but we are focused on how these traditional assets can connect to our forces in

Classic Hornet formation with the KC-30A



the battlespace and provide enhanced C2 and situational awareness for Australian and coalition warfighters. We currently have disparate levels of communication capabilities across each platform within AMG. To address this shortfall we are installing satellite links in 12 C-130Js by the end of 2016. We are also working the ground station piece and are focused on having an AMG control center able to know where our aircraft are at all times in order to better support the force.



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F/A-18F

*As we move forward with the KC-30A, modifications for that aircraft as well a modernization program for the rest of the fleet will provide a wider range of roles that can be applied to the networked battlespace*

A FAF Rafale being refueled by a RAAF KC-30A over Iraq



Similarly, we are focused on shaping a more effective rapid air tasking capability across the fleet and to do so we are adding significant situational awareness capabilities across our aircraft. In doing so, we will provide a very wide range of options for decision makers. The C-130J is a good example about recrafting legacy assets as new air mobility aircraft enter service. In addition, with broader lift needs now being met by the C-17s and the KC-30As, we have the capacity to better tailor our training and capabilities, in the C-130J, to the needs of the Special Forces. We will also extend this reshaping to the C-17A and the C-27J. And as we move forward with the KC-30A, modifications for that aircraft as well a modernization program for the rest of the fleet will provide a wider range of roles that can be applied to the networked battlespace. For us, the KC-30A is a brilliant platform for enhancing our overall capabilities.

■ *The nature of air mobility has changed dramatically over the last decade. How do you view these changes in terms of changing the role of the AMG within the RAAF overall?*

By 2017, with the maturing of the KC-30A and the introduction of the C-27J, we can rethink the role of AMG. We will have considerable flexibility and capacity with regard to airlift within Air Force, and this allows for us to create options that better integrate AMG with overall

RAAF and defense operations.

The Air Force transformation under Plan Jericho is not just about networking; it is about changing the way we think about operations and integrating as a fighting force. In that sense, cultural change is inevitable. In that context, it is clear that the introduction of new capabilities into AMG is a key driver on that journey. The Chief is leading a broad process of cultural change that includes training, experimentation and the development of tactics. All of these initiatives will allow the RAAF to operate more flexibility and adapt readily to the future.

<sup>1</sup> An initial version of this interview has been published by our US-based partner website Second Line of Defense at: <http://www.sldinfo.com/transforming-the-royal-australian-air-forces-sustainable-reach-the-key-role-of-the-raafs-air-mobility-group/>

<sup>2</sup> See Air Commodore Warren McDonald's biography at: [http://www.sldinfo.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/CDRAMG\\_Bio.pdf](http://www.sldinfo.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/CDRAMG_Bio.pdf)

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