

The Perspective of the French Air Force on the Entry Into Service of the A400M

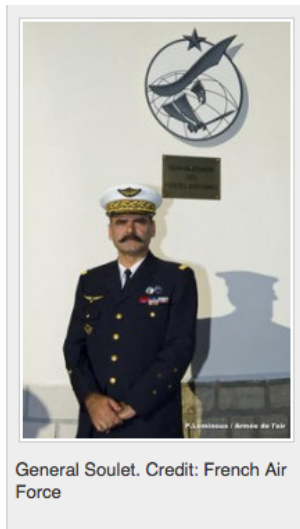
The Introduction of the A400M into the French Air Force: A Catalyst for Change

01/23/2015 – *The A400M has entered into service with the French Air Force concurrent with a change in the French Air Force (FAF) command structure and the growing importance of the European Air Transport Command (EATC).*

This means that the training, and operational approach of the new French command and the evolution of the EATC will shape the approach to further developing and using the aircraft.

<http://www.sldinfo.com/the-introduction-of-the-a400m-into-the-french-air-force-a-catalyst-for-change/>

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In an interview during her visit to the Bordeaux-Mérignac Air Base in June 2014, Murielle Delaporte interviewed General Serge Soulet, the Commander of the Air Forces, which is a newly readiness command. Her full interview appears in the latest issue of *Opérationnels SLDS*.

Delaporte is the co-founder of Second Line of Defense, and the publisher and editor-in-chief of *Opérationnels SLDS*.

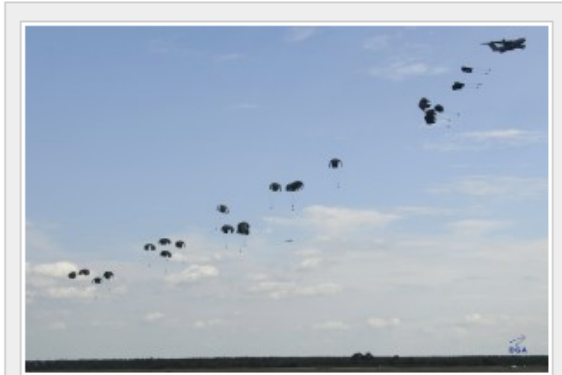
In this piece, we will highlight some of the key highlights from that interview.

The new command headed by General Soulet is the Unified Command of the New Generation or the CFA NG.

It provides support for the standing up, and deployment of the French Air Force world-wide.

It is a unique French command drawing together preparation, training and support for the force at home and abroad.

As such, the command is looking at the entire chain of custody for the support to operations of French Air Force platforms.



The Airbus A400M new generation airlifter has successfully demonstrated its ability to airdrop multiple containers of the kind typically used in military and humanitarian operations. In tests conducted at Cazaux, France, the aircraft dropped 24 x 1 tonne Container Delivery Systems (CDS) in a single pass. The 48 x 48 inch containers are loaded in two rows inside the cargo hold and released by gravity. This test demonstrates the maximum capacity of the A400M for this type of container and is a key contractual requirement for the A400M. Credit: DGA 10/10/14

It is from this perspective that the A400M is being introduced into the FAF and its relationship to the entire lift and combat fleet.

An additional aspect of contextual significance is the emergence of the multinational EATC.

According to the [EATC](#) itself, the role is to enhance synergy and capabilities among the member nations airlift and tanking fleets.

The Netherlands, Belgium, France and Germany have put major parts of their air transport- and air-to-air refueling fleets under the operational control (OPCON) of the EATC.

On 22 November 2012 Luxembourg officially joined the EATC, Spain followed on 03 July 2014, finally Italy on 04 December 2014.

Now the missions of almost 200 aircraft are planned, tasked and controlled out of Eindhoven.

In addition to that the EATC runs a nationally defined level of responsibility for aircrew training, coordination of training and exercise objectives as well as the harmonization of appropriate air transport regulations of the participating nations.

The overall objective is to manage the scarce resource air transport as effectively and efficiently as possible.

As Delaporte notes, the introduction of the A400M is both cause and consequence of the EATC.

The A400M as a multinational project allows EATC members to shape ways to work more effectively together and the EATC provides a framework within which multinational cooperation

can be enhanced within the role out of the A400M itself, notably with the first users of the aircraft, namely, France, Germany and Spain.

In the interview, General Soulet highlights several key aspects of the A400M roll out.

First, he notes that the Multinational Entry into Service or MEST team played a key role in preparing for the introduction of the aircraft into the FAF.

The French team forged into a MEST worked closely with Airbus Military in training and preparing for the introduction into service of the A400M in 2014.

Second, similar to the position of [Air Commodore Warren McDonald](#) who argued that the introduction of the KC-30A has meant that the RAAF has had one foot in operations and another in program development, General Soulet underscores that the A400M will mature as it operates.

This is true because new capabilities are being added to the aircraft over time, and that the maturation of the aircraft requires building in over time the findings from real world operational experience.

Third, a major change facing the FAF or any air force using the A400M, is to unlearn some past experience.

He argues that the A400M essentially changes the nature of the game inherited from the Transall or the C-130.

He argues as well that the aircraft is not simply a logistical asset, but a tactical one in terms of its ability to operate close to the forces engaged in the battlespace.

But this capability to do so will not happen in a day, it will take some time to develop.

Notably, the self-protection systems being added to the aircraft as well as operational experience will be crucial to sorting out the best way to use the A400M in operational insertion and support of force.

“Because of the capability of the A400M, the distinction between logistical and tactical missions is attenuated; it is not simply a cargo aircraft.

The A-400M can operate close to the operational forces. It can operate in an environment significantly degraded and to operate in a certain level of threat as well.”

Fourth, the introduction of the A400M will lead as well to working through how to use the other airlift assets.

The FAF will closely study how to best use the A400M and with that address the question of the modernization of its other lift assets as well.

“The A400M will not be a 100% replacement of all other airlift needs....We will determine the best employment strategy for the legacy and new airlift assets.”

Fifth, the multinational aspect of the program is crucial from his point of view. The existence of the EATC means that common standards and concepts of operations for the A400M can evolve over time. He made it clear in the interview that he does not want to see a divergence in capabilities of a common aircraft as happened between France and Germany with the Transall.

The EATC can play a key role in reaching what he sees as a core objective from deploying a common A400M fleet: “We want to use the same aircraft in the same manner with the same norms and a similar concept of operations.”

For a look at the EATC approach to the A400M see the following:

<http://eatc-mil.com/48/A400M>

The EATC will become the biggest future user of the A400M, about 110 to 120 aircraft will in a few years fly on EATC OPCON.

That's because the national EATC assigned squadrons fly most on EATC orchestrated and conducted assets for air transport (AT), aeromedical evacuation (AE) and air-to-air refueling (AAR).

Moreover the EATC has an interest and strong will to combine the nations needs to set up international agreed future concepts for the A400M in order to reach out for one European military air transport backbone, one international understanding: The best interoperability for future missions and the benefit for the Participating Nations is the EATC Commander's guideline to make the EATC a true enabler in the field of European military AT.

<http://eatc-mil.com/105/The-EATC-involvement-in-A400M-matters>

The Entry into Service of the A400M into the French Air Force: Rolling Out its Operational Capabilities

01/25/2015 – The French Air Force is the lead Air Force in putting the A400M into service.

The FAF has built from the ground up an approach, which is designed to leverage the multi-national character of the program.

The French Air Force (FAF) is the lead Air Force in putting the A400M into service.

The FAF has put together a comprehensive approach to doing so, and has carefully considered



the operational context within which the aircraft will be used.

The FAF has built from the ground up an approach, which is designed to leverage the multi-national character of the program.

And although the FAF does not use the term, clearly they have an enterprise concept in

mind for the A400M, whereby the sustainment and operational sides will be closely integrated within the FAF and with those partners willing and able to do so.

In an interview last June with Lt. Col. Paul Creuset, then the commander of the MEST (Multinational Entry to Service Team), Murielle Delaporte discussed the preparation by the FAF for the entry into service of the A400M.

The MEST was dissolved as the A400M went into service in the Fall of 2014.

Lt. Col. Creuset is now head of the EMATT or *équipe de marque avions de transport tactique*.

Her full interview has appeared in the latest issue of in [*Opérationnels SLDS*](#).

Delaporte is the co-founder of *Second Line of Defense*, and the publisher and editor-in-chief of *Opérationnels SLDS*.

[SLIDESHOW]

In this piece, we will highlight some of the key highlights from that interview.

It is clear throughout the interview and throughout the French experience that the FAF has been preparing for a very different type of airlifter than those, which they have previously flown earlier.

And as such, they have built from the ground up a different approach to receive the aircraft, and to standup the initial squadron or to shape the way ahead with the aircraft in terms of concepts of operations as well as maintainability of the fleet.

At the heart of the perceived differences associated with the aircraft, ranging from digital systems, to a new cockpit, to new composite materials to maintain.

Also important is to prepare for the shift from the initial logistical operations to what the French refer to as tactical operations.

What is highlighted by the logistical versus tactical operational distinction is the clear understanding that the A400M is not simply a bus transporting personnel and equipment.

It is a key element in the evolving role of airlift, which is to insert and support force within the battlespace.

As we noted [earlier](#):

Air lifters have moved from being buses or trucks carrying materials and troops from point A to point B to becoming key elements of a networked battlespace.

And with the revolution in airdropping, the entire approach to support of forces, both dispersed and on the go, has changed entirely.

The MEST was established to prepare for the arrival of the A400M.

It is clear from the interview that the FAF was preparing for a different type of airlifter than in the past and saw the need to put together a “dream team” of players with different operational backgrounds, in order to ensure that past understandings of air lift would not rubber stamp the approach to the new aircraft.

According to Lt. Col. Creuset, the “dream team” included a variety of personnel from varied backgrounds, including Transall and Hercules pilots, CASA pilots, pilots experienced with Airbus commercial aircraft, and a Rafale pilot who was familiar with the kind of connectivity with which the Rafale operates.

“We are not preparing for a Transall Plus.”

And the MEST worked closely with the British as well as the Germans in preparing the ground for the future.

The Lt. Col. noted that the FAF has an agreement with the Royal Air Force's Air Warfare Center and this relationship has been tapped into to shape a way ahead.

"We can profit from their experience and they can profit from ours."

This theme is clearly a key part of the entire approach to standing up and looking forward to the operational use by a multinational fleet, from the French perspective.

Not surprisingly, Lt. Col Creuset like General Soulet, the Commander of the Air Forces, emphasized the key role of the European Air Transport Command (EATC) in shaping a way ahead as well.

Lt. Col. Creuset noted: "the French approach is to favor a broad global approach to the A400M compared to simply bilateral agreements." Clearly, the EATC is crucial to both shaping and executing such an approach.

The EATC is becoming an engine for interoperability.

The idea is to enhance elements of commonality to the maximum extent possible via the EATC and to give them a number of responsibilities in order to make it easy for a German crew or a French crew or that of another nationality to have a similar concept of operations.

And the EATC can also open step by step the maintenance sector (MCO) for clearly maintenance is a keystone of the entire effort.

After having put the aircraft into operation, a key effort for the FAF is to shape its tactical capabilities.

Here several key capabilities will be introduced in the period ahead and are the major focus of attention to Lt. Col. Creuset in the period ahead. Among these capabilities are the tanking of and the tanking by the A400Ms; the introduction of advanced self-protection systems, the introduction of MEDEVAC capabilities, etc.

Looking back on the MEST experience, the Lt. Col. concluded: "The MEST allowed us to optimize the time and efficacy of putting the aircraft into service."

The FAF has underscored that the multi-national aspect of the program is a core foundation for shaping common concepts of operations and laying the foundation for common support structures as well.

A total of nine aircraft have now been delivered and the aircraft is in service with four nations.

The 14 photos in this slideshow highlight the following:

- First production Airbus Military A400M in French Air Force colors
- A400M Air to Air Refueling
- A400M and French Patrol
- A400M Flares
- Airbus Military A400M successfully performs unpaved runway trials
- A400M initial airdrop trial 2014
- Airbus A330 MRTT tanker aircraft refuels Airbus A400M
- A400M drops 24 x 1t containers. Copyright DGA / Nicolas Audouin
- First German A400M during its maiden flight
- Gen Dato Sri Roslan after inspecting the first Airbus A400M for Royal Malaysian Air Force
- First UK Royal Air Force A400M
- First Flight A400M German Air Force
- A400M for the Turkish Air Force
- Airbus A400M successfully demonstrates tanker capability

Credit Photos: Airbus Defence and Space