



# Brigadier General Stéphane Gourg

## As Effective as Required, as Efficient as Possible

Ten years of existence, ten years of air mobility! EATC was designed as a multinational operational command and is undoubtedly one of the most successful pooling and sharing initiatives in Europe. In ten years of successful, safe and effective command of air mobility operations, it has also become a recognised centre of expertise in air mobility. Here is a brief history of ten years of key achievements.

## EATC is an Integrated Command ...

From the outset, EATC was conceived as an integral part of national chains of command. This is a central feature of the command and one of the reasons for its success. There is no doubt in the minds of the EATC team that EATC is closely linked to each of the member nations' national chains of command, and that each nation looks at EATC as an extension of its own national chain of command. This founding principle is also reflected in the structure: the seven National Senior Representatives (NSRs) are integrated into the staff in key leadership positions, as well as in the operational planning processes as EATC-led missions are exclusively linked to member nations' requests.

In addition, EATC's software platform MEAT is key to integration. It is EATC's command and control tool *par excellence* that facilitates sharing operational information between nations and EATC. MEAT was designed and implemented in 2010, shortly after the creation of EATC. Like in the past, today the system links each national operational command, wing or squadron to EATC headquarters, located at Eindhoven Air Base. As such, MEAT is one of EATC's most valuable assets and its modernisation constitutes a priority for the command and the nations.

## ... Delivering High Quality Service on a Daily Basis...

The performance of an operational command is rated in the area of operations. The same goes for EATC. In this respect, EATC now generates nearly 8,000 air missions per year, including 500 AAR missions and 50,000 flight hours. This is reflected in the transport of about 260,000 passengers per year, the management of 1,500 patients to be evacuated, the dropping of 80,000 paratroopers and the transport of 22,000 tonnes of cargo. Over the past ten years our command reached substantial production volumes of almost industrial scale. This demonstrates the relevance of the EATC concept as a long-standing pooling and sharing initiative.

Besides the quantity, the quality of the services provided is even more important. EATC strives to meet military requirements and to adhere to five key principles: safety, security, effectiveness, reliability and efficiency.

- Safety and security: our daily business is aviation and support to military operations. Aeronautical and operational risk management is of course fully integrated into the operational processes. Each planned and tasked mission is subject to precise studies in this area. We check compliance with safety and employment rules, define mitigation measures and, if necessary, call on the national chains of command, which have the final decision. It is a shared responsibility with the nations and EATC has a pre-defined important role to play.
- Effectiveness and reliability: EATC is responsible for the planning, preparation, tasking and control of the execution of air mobility missions for the benefit of the member nations and for the best possible use of the fleet of 170 aircraft that the nations put under EATC's operational control. However, what is paramount is to deliver effective support to the military operations in which nations are engaged. EATC never lose sight of that priority.



- Efficiency: undoubtedly, one of the main expectations of our founding nations was the implementation of efficient management and operation of the airlift, AAR and aeromedical fleet. This is a task that we carry out in our operational processes every day, detecting and seizing all opportunities to pool missions and promoting the exchange of services between nations, where possible. This is now a reality: each week, assets from one nation are transporting personnel or cargo from another nation. While the volume of flight hours exchanged remains modest, the frequency is there. This is the most important point, as it reflects the dynamics of the exchange of services and the fact that nations have accepted the principle and become accustomed to it.

Furthermore, experience shows that when operational requirements increase – as is the case for the deployment of military operations – the volume of flight hours exchanged increases very quickly. In this respect, the years 2013 and 2014 were exceptional in terms of volume, when exchanged services reached almost 20% of the total flight hours managed by EATC. This is largely due to the start of military operations in the Middle East and Sahel, although the Afghan theatre was already mobilising some of our resources. That said, one of EATC's main objectives for the upcoming years is to introduce a shared inter-theatre shuttle system to areas of military operations. Apart from ensuring effective support to operations, this concept will offer better use of air mobility assets, structure the exchange of services between nations and free up resources for additional requirements, including training.



(Photo: Armée de l'Air & de l'Espace)

### ... Proving Flexibility and Responsiveness...

Another way to assess the effectiveness of a military organisation is to look at its contribution to crisis management. In this respect, the last ten years have been eventful. EATC has played its role and taken its place alongside and for the benefit of nations, proving its flexibility and responsiveness.

Let us recall that when EATC was created in 2010, it participated only months later in the repatriation of more than 1,000 European nationals from Libya.

**Brigadier General Stéphane Gourg** became the Chief of Staff of EATC in September 2020. He graduated from the French Air Force Academy in Salon de Provence in 1990 and completed undergraduate pilot training in 1992. He started as a command pilot at the Transport Squadron "ETEC" in Villacoublay, and has accumulated over 6,000 flying hours in his career on the Mirage 2000, Falcon 50, Falcon 900, Airbus 310 and Airbus 340. Brigadier General Gourg participated in multiple missions around the world, over the Balkans, African territories, Middle East and Afghanistan, providing strategic airlift and aeromedical operations. In 2014, he was Head of International Affairs at the French Military Aviation Authority in Villacoublay and three years later he was appointed the position of National Military Representative at EU, NATO and Eurocontrol in Brussels.

In 2013, when France launched Operation "Serval" in Mali, EATC's partners Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands provided important logistical air support through EATC.

In 2014 and 2015, EATC managed humanitarian air support operations in Iraqi Kurdistan and Nepal.

In 2017, when Hurricane Irma hit the Caribbean region, EATC seconded some of its staff to locally coordinate operations for assets under EATC command and control.

In 2020/2021, in the context of COVID-19, EATC was heavily involved in repatriating EU citizens, delivering pharmaceutical and medical supplies and organising numerous aeromedical evacuations.

These are just a few examples. What is important is that it is in the light of our past experiences, nations have asked EATC to study engagement scenarios, such as the evacuation of nationals, humanitarian operations or EU/NATO military operations. The aim is to anticipate and prepare a more coordinated and structured response in the field of military air mobility, taking advantage of an operational organisation that shows experience on a daily basis.

### ... While Fostering Interoperability

Alongside operations, improving interoperability is an important mission that has been entrusted to EATC from the outset. In this area, the progress made over the last ten years is astounding. There are four reasons for this success.

**First, necessity is the law.** Common operations require common rules. EATC is an operational command and as such was confronted with difficulties related to the lack of harmonisation between the nations. Thus, we began establishing common internal procedures in conjunction with the national chains of command, followed by rules for the use of crews. Progressively, our efforts resulted in the backbone of all our common documentation, the operations manuals.

**Second, no dogmatism, only pragmatism.** To illustrate, I will give you two examples: it was for the needs of a high altitude parachuting exercise of Belgian paratroopers from a French C130, that EATC started the harmonisation of the parachuting procedures in 2011. Similarly, in 2018, the transport of a French Puma helicopter on board a German A400M was the starting point for the harmonisation of loading and tie-down-procedures on A400Ms under the auspices of EATC.

**Third, overall coherence.** EATC strives to address all activities that contribute to the success of an air mobility operation. For the sake of simplification and effectiveness, EATC has been led to engage in the harmonisation of ground handling operations, diplomatic clearances requests, cross maintenance and dangerous goods transportation. Additionally, EATC strived to facilitate the implementation of harmonised procedures and techniques by leading or supporting trainings and Exercises for Tactical Operations (ETAP), Air-to-Air Refuelling Operations (EART) and Ground Handling Operations (CATT, DART) as soon as 2012.

**Fourth, expertise.** EATC is all about pooling and sharing, which means that nations have pooled much of their airlift, AAR and medical evacuation assets, but also expertise within EATC. In doing so, EATC has undoubtedly become a unique force for reflection and work in the field of air mobility in Europe. EATC is most competent, skilled and experienced to tackle common problems and bring nations together on combined proposals. In other words, EATC has a form of regulatory power through its expertise, without any regulatory transfer of national responsibilities, and it works perfectly.

In conclusion, I might say EATC is like a vintage champagne: it has a uniqueness that if aged increases in complexity and quality. Over the past ten years, we have proven that our integrated command combines all ingredients for a full taste: high-quality service and successful air mobility missions, flexibility and responsiveness, interoperability and harmonisation of procedures.

