

“Train As You Fight, Together!”



*French, German, Italian and Dutch tankers during EART.
(Photos: G.J.A. van Boven/EATC)*

Precisely when shortages are visible, some imaginative ideas spring up, to preserve a certain culture and maintain what has been achieved. As far as EATC is concerned, lack of assets to fulfil all important air mobility tasks often causes a decrease in training, which can lead to loss of proficiency. However, it has been proven throughout history that a shortfall, if well-managed, can become an opportunity for improvement.

EATC's Training and Exercises Branch (known as TREX) promotes multinational training events and courses to achieve harmonisation and standardisation in the whole air mobility arena, always bearing in mind a cost-effective approach. Different domains are handled by experts, who think up, plan and run projects not only for the benefit of the seven EATC member nations, but also for non-EATC partners. AAR, ground handling, maintenance or tactical airlift are key capabilities that nations are willing to improve by developing common tactics, techniques and procedures. Common documentation, shared experiences and strong networking are of utmost importance to achieve the desired end state of being able to fight together in operations.

“Train as you fight, fight as you train” is a very well-known motto in European air forces, which should be followed by the phrase “and always in a harmonised and standardised way with your partners and allies”.

“The Line Between Disorder and Order Lies in Logistics”

Usually in our air forces, the ‘iron’ – or today carbon fibre – birds and their flight crews are the visible spearhead of air power. However, EATC is fully aware that supporting functions are indisputably required to achieve

successful air mobility operations. Furthermore, harmonising supporting functions unquestionably benefit several domains.

Therefore, ground handling operations are a key domain for enhanced interoperability in air mobility. TREX developed two exclusive events fully dedicated to the personnel of the ground handling units when it took over from the EAG in 2016: the CATT and the ACATT.

Both trainings aim at training handlers and processing passengers, luggage and cargo in a multinational environment. Strengthening existing skills and improving interoperability among the participants are objectives of both events. These objectives are met through familiarisation with multinational processes, specified in EATC documents. Thanks to both academics and “on the job training” covering the whole scale of handling operations, trainees enhance their knowledge of airlift related logistic operations, material and handling

equipment used by EATC and EAG nations. Since 2017, CATT is held at the home of Italian 3rd Wing in Villafranca di Verona, and since 2019, ACATT is hosted by the German Airborne and Airmobile Training School in Altenstadt.

TREX always strives for improvements of trainings, taking into account the needs and requirements of the member nations and the experts. To support EATC's endeavours, an impressive virtual reality training system with the use of an A400M mock-up was developed by Germany. This system offers a 360-degree virtual environment for training and will hopefully enrich the entire EATC community of ground handlers in the future.

Another support function where EATC plays an important role is maintenance. This is a vast area encompassing several sub-domains like cross servicing, repairs, spare parts management or recovery. In the near future, TREX will develop cross-maintenance training events in close coordination with other EATC branches. The output will support the overarching EATC project to enable nations to create multinational maintenance teams for combined deployments.

EATC also concentrates on rare capacities. The EATC fleet is so heterogeneous that removal/recovery of disabled aircraft becomes more and more complex. For most forces, it is neither economically lucrative to procure and to store all the necessary equipment for each aircraft, nor to provide manpower with required qualifications. Consequently, multinational cooperation has been established in the scope of removing immobilised or disabled military aircraft. The main goal of this cooperation is to ultimately reduce the logistical footprint by pooling and sharing required equipment.

Part of this initiative is a multinational DART, which is organised by EATC. It offers the perfect environment to achieve a certain level of interoperability in aircraft recovery and to proof and train on new means. Since 2012, about 400 trainees from EATC countries and partner nations

have been successfully trained. DART originally started as a training for team members. Since 2019, a Disabled Aircraft Recovery Officer (DARO) training for team leaders has been added. This event combines theoretical preparation with a live DART.

Fuelling Fixed Wings' Interoperability

Already in 2012, AAR was identified as a capability shortfall in Europe and a plan to further develop this capability was set up by the EDA. Lessons learnt from operations led to an assessment, that more training dedicated to tanker crews was needed. Therefore, EATC, supported by EDA, developed the sole European training event for tanker aircraft, the EART. EART is organised yearly in conjunction with a large fighter exercise like the Dutch FRISIAN FLAG or the Spanish OCEAN SKY, and aims at training tanker air and ground crews and increasing their know-how in complex multinational scenarios. The event is also a unique opportunity for exchanging information and procedures and building interoperability within the European AAR community. EART is also used as a test-bed by EATC experts to develop and refine common procedures and receive immediate feedback from all actors.

EART was initially designed for strategic tankers, like A330 MRTT or KC767. Today, we also focus on more tactical assets like the A400M or the KC130J to perform AAR missions in support of fixed or rotary wings. In order to foster interoperability in this area, EATC just recently started to investigate new training opportunities.

In the early 2000s, the situation of the tactical airlift domain had similarities with that of AAR. Under the umbrella of European Air Transport Fleet (EATF) programme (led by EDA), European partners identified the lack of multinational air transport training events as a major shortfall in Europe. Therefore, they committed to deliver a series of exercises or trainings. EATC was asked to support the initial implementation of this project and developed – together with EATF nations – a training and a course both dedicated to tactical airlift. After several iterations, those events were merged into a single programme known as ETAP. To facilitate the execution of

single training events, a standing organisation, the ETAC was founded in Zaragoza (Spain) in 2017.

The ETAP objective, shared by EATC, is the enhancement of the European tactical airlift operational capability, through pooling and sharing of experience, best practice, training opportunities and organisational costs.

Although aircrews are the primary training audience of ETAP, the programme has been evolving, providing participants with the opportunity to receive flexible training in the aforementioned fields of supporting functions. EATC is leading the development and the execution of these additional training modules dedicated, for instance, to maintenance teams, CATO crews or paratroopers.

In addition to ETAP and other multinational exercises, TREX also fosters cross-participation. It is defined as the notion of inviting partner countries to participate in national trainings or exercises. Exchange of know-how and culture undoubtedly strengthens interoperability. Through yearly conferences and continuous exchange of information, TREX encourages nations to share their training opportunities. The long-lasting shortfall of assets in the last decades prevented this idea from reaching full cruise speed, though the current increase of airlifters should entail more cooperation.

Side Aspect: Benefiting From Distance Learning

Like any organisation, EATC improves and refines its own processes and products for the benefit of its seven air forces. Improving the training events means enhancing outputs and optimising resources. TREX identified that some time will be saved for more flying sorties or practice time by excluding academics from the real events, and choosing distance learning to prepare every participant beforehand.

TREX developed several online courses in coordination with other EATC branches and national experts. These modules are used by the ETAC to run ETAP projects. In addition, other EATC-led training events are already supported by distance learning.

During the last five years, this state-of-the-art teaching method has been developed and advanced by TREX staff





◁ French C160 paratrooper and cargo drop training.
(Photos: French Air Force/Julien Fechter)



members, investing a lot of time with often self-taught skills. It is now time for EATC to move on and professionalise this activity, also reinforced by the COVID-19 crisis. Thanks to the setup of a section dedicated to training aids within the TREX branch, EATC's ambition is to provide highly interactive, modern products and to take a new step in supporting force generation and interoperability building.

Conclusion

Flavius Josephus wrote, "*Their exercises are unbloody battles, and their battles bloody exercises.*" No activity better prepares for combat than combat itself. Therefore, military training should be realistic, as close as possible to actual operations. Most recent operations, conducted by European nations, were handled in coalition, together with allies and partners.

The functional mission of EATC is to enhance interoperability in the air mobility area, in order to enable a more efficient and effective use of assets in combined operations. Multinational training is evidently required to achieve this task.

Hence, EATC's TREX branch is fully engaged in the development and support of multinational training events and exercises. Training together in nearly every air mobility field is a key to success for all existent and future operations.

EATC TREX Branch



Multinational disabled air recovery training.
(Photo: EATC)