Operation PACIFIC ASSIST  
Final Australian C-17 returns from Japan

The remaining Royal Australian Air Force C-17A Globemaster providing support to relief efforts in Japan under Operation PACIFIC ASSIST was due to return home on 25th March following nearly two weeks of humanitarian assistance to earthquake and tsunami affected regions.

Stephen Smith, Australia’s Minister of Defence said in a statement, “Last weekend I approved a one-week extension of the use of the C-17A Globemaster. Now that the initial crisis response is over and the focus of the mission has changed from search and rescue to reconstruction, there are sufficient resources available in Japan to manage further airlift tasks.”

Australia sent the C-17A Globemaster to Japan immediately after the 11th March earthquake and tsunami as part of an Australia’s response, initially providing strategic airlift of civilian urban search and rescue personnel, dogs and equipment. Over the past fortnight, the aircraft has undertaken 23 sorties providing intra-country airlift of vital stores and equipment assisting in the humanitarian effort. During its deployment, the C-17A and its crew moved more than a million pounds (450 tonnes) of cargo, including 41 vehicles, as well as 135 passengers. Australia’s support to Japan at this critical time has been an important reaffirmation of the comprehensive Australia-Japan strategic, security and economic partnership.

The Minister added, “This week I also approved two additional RAAF C-17A Globemasters to undertake a mission from Australia to Japan carrying a remotely operated water cannon system to assist with containment operations at the Fukushima Number One Nuclear Power Plant.

“I congratulate the RAAF ground and flight crews and other ADF personnel who have been involved in Operation PACIFIC ASSIST. Their efforts have been noticed by our Japanese and US partners, and Australians should be justifiably proud that the contribution has helped relieve the suffering of a large number of people.”