

Air National Guard Tanker Weapons System Council (The Tanker “WSC”, pr “whisk”)

Who are we?

The Air National Guard currently maintains and employs 159 Tanker Aircraft at 17 bases nationwide. An additional two locations host Air National Guard “Classic” Total Force Associations, where ANG Airmen maintain and fly aircraft possessed by the Air Force active component. Presently, the preponderance of those tanker aircraft are KC-135 Stratotankers; designed and first flown in the 1950s. The ANG contribution to our nation’s aerial refueling capacity hovers around 50%.

101 st Air Refueling Wing; Bangor, ME	108 th Wing (Clsc Assc.); McGuire AFB, NJ (KC-46)
117 th Air Refueling Wing; Birmingham, AL	121 st Air Refueling Wing; Columbus, OH
126 th Air Refueling Wing; Scott AFB, IL	127 th Wing; Selfridge, MI (KC-46 MOB 8)
128 th Air Refueling Wing; Milwaukee, WI	134 th Air Refueling Wing; Knoxville, TN
141 st ARW (Classic Assoc.); Fairchild AFB, WA	151 st Wing; Salt Lake City, UT
154 th Wing; Hickam AFB, HI	155 th Air Refueling Wing; Lincoln, NE
157 th ARW; Portsmouth, NH (KC-46)	161 st Air Refueling Wing; Phoenix, AZ
168 th Air Refueling Wing; Eielson AFB, AK	171 st Air Refueling Wing; Pittsburgh, PA
185 th Air Refueling Wing; Sioux City, IA	186 th Air Refueling Wing; Meridian, MS
190 th Air Refueling Wing; Topeka, KS	

The ANG Tanker WSC is an advisory and advocacy body composed of Wing Commanders from each of these units / states. We frequently meet virtually, and in-person at least twice a year.

Why do tanker aircraft matter?

Of the five Air Force core functions; Air Superiority, Global Strike, Rapid Global Mobility, Intelligence-Surveillance-Reconnaissance (ISR), and Command & Control... NONE of them can execute missions without robust support from airborne refueling aircraft...i.e. TANKERS.

In spite of that reality, tankers are often not considered when upgrading fighter and bomber aircraft fleets; and sometimes become an afterthought for strategic planners – forcing the tanker community to play “catch up” once those deficiencies are identified.

What do we need?

Concurrent and Proportional Recapitalization! Constituting 50% of the nation’s refueling capacity, only 17% of the current KC-46 recapitalization effort is targeted at Air National Guard units. Only one ANG wing, the 157th ARW in New Hampshire currently possesses KC-46 aircraft; with one other wing just recently classically associated with active duty owned KC-46 tankers in New Jersey. With so much of the nation’s air refueling expertise resident in the reserve component, concurrent and proportional recapitalization of ANY weapons system makes sense for the Air Force and the Department of Defense.

Relevant Modernization at the Speed of Innovation! The existing KC-135 fleet requires immediate modernization to keep the weapons system relevant for Great Power Competition / Conflict. Recapitalization aside, ANG KC-135s will continue to support Operational War Plans well into the future. It is not absurd to postulate the last KC-135 crew member has not been born. We cannot send our sons and daughters into combat ill equipped to survive.

The KC-135 Modernization Priorities are:

1. **Hybrid SATCOM.** Leverages existing commercial off the shelf (COTS) technology to ensure beyond line of sight (BLOS) unclassified and classified voice and data connectivity. The

Department of the Air Force program is called “**Commercial Access to NIPR & SIPR**”, or “**CANS**.” Coupled with existing Real Time Information in the Cockpit (RTIC) upgrades, CANS gets us closer to the dream of Tankers augmenting existing Air Battle Manager (ABM) platforms as airborne command and control nodes. Hybrid SATCOM has \$25.7M in FY26, with a total program requirement of \$1.05B.

2. **Hardpoints.** Efforts to install and/or modify existing hardpoints on KC-135 aircraft require more prioritization and funding. With power and cabling in the wings and the existing **High Value Airborne Asset (HVAA) pod**, the KC-135 becomes an agile warfighting platform capable of supporting cutting edge communication, defensive sensors, and self-defense capability. Hardpoints are \$250K per ship set. Wiring upgrades are programmed at \$900K in FY24 with a total program cost (entire fleet) of \$130.15M.
3. **Center Console Refresh.** There are myriad other efforts to modernize varying aspects of the venerable KC-135. Most of the critical challenges can be solved with the ongoing Center Console Refresh (CCR) program; which is primary a software upgrade and user interface. CCR currently has \$14.1M in FY24, with a total program estimate of \$876.65M.

All of these priorities are COTS available now, flexible, and scalable to future technological advances; allowing the legacy tanker community to keep pace with new acquisition tankers, a recapitalized combat fleet of fighters and advance bombers, and those who would challenge American air superiority. Additionally, these modifications are being developed in such a way that the technology can be transferred to any other large frame aircraft...to include the KC-46 itself. This represents significant risk and investment buy-down.

Infrastructure! Most Air National Guard tanker locations are lacking in adequate Aircrew Alert Facilities and Sensitive Compartmented Information Facilities (SCIFs). Supporting homeland defense, deterrence, and power projection from the homeland demands increased investment and standardization across the tanker enterprise.

SUMMARY:

If you are an advocate for the Air National Guard tanker community, then you support:

- Fielding new weapon systems not just concurrently and proportionally across the active-duty Air Force, Air National Guard, and Air Force Reserve; but PRIMARILY in the Air National Guard, so as to better leverage the Guard’s technical expertise and combat experience.
- Robust legacy aircraft modernization ensuring the entire tanker fleet remains ready and relevant for the next fight:
 - Hybrid SATCOM / Commercial Access to NIPR & SIPR
 - Hardpoints and HVAA pods
 - Center Console Refresh
- Programmed / congressionally directed investment in Air National Guard Alert Facilities and SCIFs that establishes a standard across installations.
- Requiring all programs of record that modernize fighter and bomber aircraft to include funding for keeping tanker aircraft apace with communication and integration. This includes hardware, software, and flight simulator upgrades.

The best resource for information on KC-135 Modernization is the Air National Guard / Air Force Reserve Test Center (AATC) KC-135 Test Detachment in Salt Lake City, Utah. 151WG.KC135Test.AATC@us.af.mil