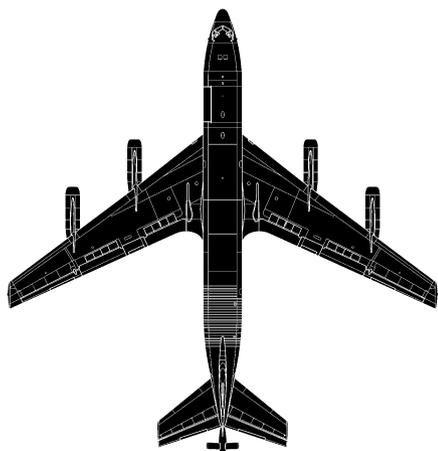


## KC-135 Stratotanker



The KC-135 Stratotanker was USAF's first jet-powered tanker. In the beginning it was used to refuel Strategic Air Command's bombers. The Air Force, however, made heavy use of it in the Vietnam War, Desert Storm, and all other modern wars. It was key to extending the range of not only bombers but also fighters and other aircraft. Ever since its operational debut in 1957, the vaunted tanker has continuously expanded its role.

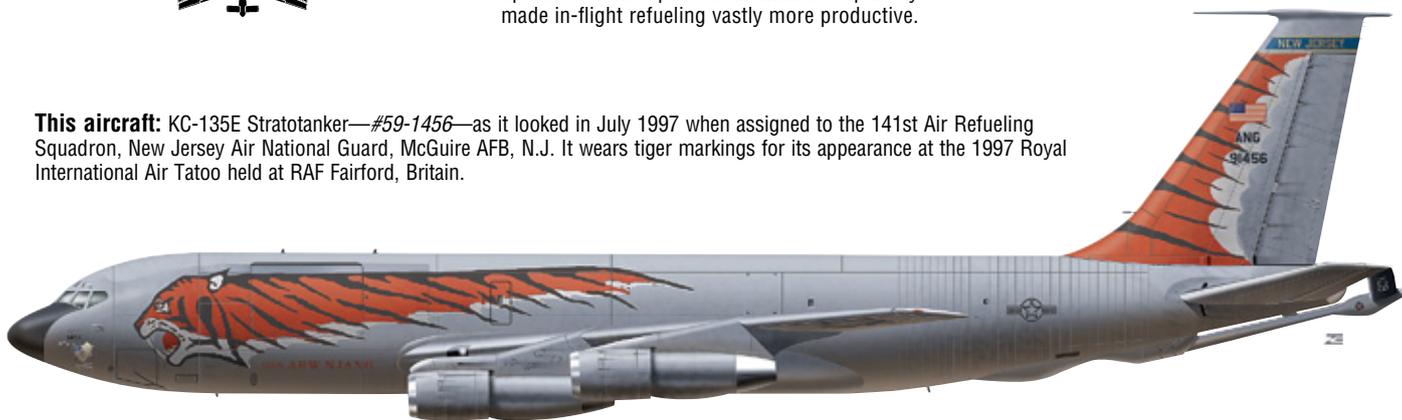
The KC-135 was derived from Boeing's famed 367-80 prototype. SAC acquired the tanker to refuel its powerful fleet of B-47s and B-52s. It is an all-metal, low-wing aircraft with four jet engines suspended in pods. The KC-135 has benefited from constant improvements in engines and equipment over its more than 50 years of operations. Its speed and altitude capability made in-flight refueling vastly more productive.

Special probe and drogue refueling techniques were adopted to permit refueling of US Navy and Marine Corps aircraft.

During the Vietnam War, US fighter and bomber operations hinged upon the KC-135s. While officially confined to operating outside of North Vietnam, KC-135s often entered hostile airspace to save fighters short on fuel. More recently, it proved similarly valuable over Iraq and Afghanistan. The tanker has served in every US war for a half-century. Many variants of the aircraft were derived to carry out ISR and command and control missions. The basic tanker version was also vitally important as a transport aircraft and for humanitarian missions.

—Walter J. Boyne

**This aircraft:** KC-135E Stratotanker—#59-1456—as it looked in July 1997 when assigned to the 141st Air Refueling Squadron, New Jersey Air National Guard, McGuire AFB, N.J. It wears tiger markings for its appearance at the 1997 Royal International Air Tattoo held at RAF Fairford, Britain.



A KC-135R Stratotanker aircraft with a pair of F-15E Strike Eagle fighter aircraft (foreground) and two F-16Cs.

### In Brief

Designed, built by Boeing ★ first flight Aug. 31, 1956 ★ number built 803 ★ crew of four (pilot, copilot, navigator, boom operator) ★ no armament. **Specific to KC-135E:** four Pratt & Whitney TF-33-PW-102 turbofan engines ★ max load 83,000 lb of cargo, 37 passengers ★ max speed 610 mph ★ cruise speed 550 mph ★ max range 11,200 mi ★ weight (loaded) 322,500 lb ★ span 130 ft 10 in ★ length 136 ft 3 in ★ height 38 ft 4 in.

### Famous Fliers

**Notables:** Many, including Curtis LeMay, William Begert, Roger Brady, Jack Catton, John Chain, Russell Dougherty, Raymond Johns, Walter Kross, Arthur Lichte, Stephen Lorenz, Charles Robertson Jr. **Record setters:** Many, including Burl Davenport, William Eubank Jr., Charles Gibbs. **Test pilots:** Charles Gandy, Tex Johnston, Dix Loesch, Frank Wright.

### Interesting Facts

Made possible the "Chrome Dome" strategy by refueling B-52s on combat orbit ★ flew first Vietnam combat missions in June 1964 ★ mounted first "Young Tiger" mission on Jan. 25, 1965 ★ rang up 813,878 refuelings in Vietnam War ★ survived war with no combat losses ★ flown by Capt. Sandra Scott, first female pilot in SAC ★ refueled first fighters sent to Saudi Arabia at start of Desert Shield in 1990 ★ used by air forces of Chile, France, Singapore, Turkey.