

KC-135

Extending Global Reach. Enabling the Joint Force.

The KC-135 provides the core aerial refueling capability that makes U.S. and allied airpower global. Its flying-boom and drogue-compatible configurations refuel Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps and partner-nation aircraft. The platform also supports passenger and cargo transport and aeromedical evacuation — delivering flexible reach during competition, crisis response and conflict.

L3HARRIS' ROLE

L3Harris brings proven C-135 integration, modification and depot maintenance experience to sustain mission availability and accelerate capability to the fleet. Our work spans modifications, mission-system upgrades and maintenance for highly specialized U.S. Air Force and Royal Air Force KC-135 and WC-135 aircraft and program depot maintenance for Chilean Air Force KC-135s.

For KC-135 modernization, L3Harris offers a low-risk avionics approach built on a government-owned architecture and a proven, Commercial Off the Shelf (COTS)-based flight deck performing missions on a C-135 baseline today. The result is an open foundation for future upgrades, reduced integration risk and a practical path to field capability while preserving aircraft availability.

OPERATING FOOTPRINT

KC-135 units operate from a distributed global network. Major operating and training locations include Fairchild Air Force Base, MacDill Air Force Base, Altus Air Force Base, Kadena Air Base and Royal Air Force Mildenhall, together with Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve wings across the United States.

This broad footprint keeps aerial refueling capacity close to operational forces, training routes, homeland missions and global deployment corridors.

WHY KC-135, WHY NOW

The U.S. Air Force plans to operate hundreds of KC-135s into the 2050s, alongside the KC-46 and future tankers. The Government Accountability Office notes that continued reliance on the KC-135 fleet drives increasing mission demand and sustainment workload. Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM)-independent modernization, modification and industry-provided maintenance are essential to keep this indispensable tanker available, supportable and ready for decades of continued service.



FLEET SNAPSHOT

- > **Fleet:** 373 KC-135s and 103 KC-46s reported by the U.S. Air Force in March 2026
- > Congressional mandate for 502 total tankers by 2028
- > **KC-135 Force Components:** active duty (150), Air National Guard (161) and Air Force Reserve (62)
- > **Service Horizon:** Sustainment and modernization actions can support planned well beyond 2050
- > **Production:** 732 aircraft built; first flight in 1956 and final delivery in 1965

CORE CAPABILITIES

- > Flying-boom aerial refueling
- > Drogue refueling from boom attachment or multipoint refueling on pods
- > Passenger and cargo transport
- > Aeromedical evacuation

MISSION-READY MODERNIZATION

- > Replace aging and obsolete flight deck equipment with supportable digital avionics
- > Improve crew situational awareness, automation and workload management
- > Enable worldwide navigation and compliance with evolving airspace requirements
- > Support rapid, incremental communications, connectivity and mission-system upgrades
- > Promote government data ownership and flexibility throughout the platform lifecycle

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L3Harris Technologies, Inc.

1025 W. NASA Boulevard
Melbourne, FL 32919

L3Harris.com