



Comparative Study of KC-135 Operations in Vietnam, Desert Storm, and Allied Force - Historical Perspective on the Development of Air Refueling, Tanker Issues

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This paper examines the operational employment of the KC-135 in three major conflicts. Air refueling is central not only to the tactical operations of a campaign, but the strategic goal of supporting two near simultaneous wars. The efficient management of the tanker fleet is required, to ensure the nation's ability to achieve that goal. Examining the three major combat operations the KC-135 has participated in provides some insight into the issues and potential solutions faced by previous commanders and planners. Learning those lessons may benefit future commanders.

An overall review of the development of air refueling in the United States reveals the influences that shaped the issues still surrounding the tanker force today. Justified under strategic support to the Single Integrated Operational Plan, the strategic implications of air refueling have put the KC-135 commanders at odds with the tactical commanders conducting the three air campaigns to one degree or another. An historical review of these three diverse air campaigns shows similarities in basing problems, the impact of weather, crew to aircraft ratios, and distance and air space limitations. It also reveals some differences in organizational design, supervision at the headquarters, and approaches to planning. In each case there was an initial effort to plan tankers against specific missions. In the earlier two conflicts, the planners adjusted this approach to treat the fuel available and required in the aggregate. Finally, very little information is collected to critically evaluate the efficiency of a tanker force, and the paper recommends some alternatives.

I. INTRODUCTION * General Issue * Problem Statement * Research Objectives * Research Questions * Research Limitations * Methodology Implications * II. LITERATURE REVIEW * Historical Perspective on the Development of Air Refueling * Overview of KC-135 Operations in Vietnam * Tanker Organization in the Vietnam War * Vietnam Basing Issues * Vietnam Air Refueling Policies and Restrictions * Vietnam Planning Factors * Track and Distance Information * Overview of KC-135 Operations in Desert Storm * KC-135 Basing Issues during Desert Shield/Desert Storm * The Organizational Structure for Desert Shield/Storm * Desert Shield/Storm Planning Factors * Airspace and Air Refueling Tracks * Overview of KC-135 Operations in Allied Force * The Impact of Weather on Operations * KC-135 Organizational Structure for Allied Force * Planning Factors * Air Refueling Tracks and Distances * III. ORGANIZATION OF THE TANKER OPERATIONS * IV. SUPERVISION OF TANKER OPERATIONS * V. THE PLANNING PROCESS * VI. CONCLUSION

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