



Ohio Adjutant General's Department

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For Immediate Release

Rickenbacker Air National Guard Base will continue to operate KC-135 tanker aircraft despite not receiving new KC-46A mission

COLUMBUS, Ohio — The Air Force announced today that Rickenbacker Air National Guard Base was not selected as the preferred alternative to be the first Air National Guard-led KC-46A main operating base.

However, the 121st Air Refueling Wing (ARW), located at Rickenbacker Air National Guard Base (RANGB), will continue to operate the KC-135 Stratotanker refueling aircraft.

The 121st ARW was one of five units being considered by the Air Force for fielding of the new KC-46A, and RANGB was being considered to be the first Air National Guard-led KC-46A main operating base. Even though RANGB was not selected as the candidate for the first ANG-led main operating base for the KC-46A, subsequent KC-46A basing decisions will use similar criteria; therefore, current candidate installations will likely compete well for future basing decisions, according to the Air Force.

In selecting preferred and reasonable alternative candidates, the Air Force conducted detailed, on-the-ground site surveys of each candidate base earlier this year, assessing each location against operational and training requirements, potential impacts to existing missions, housing, infrastructure and manpower.

“We are proud and pleased that the Airmen of the 121st Air Refueling Wing will continue to support the critical mission of providing aerial refueling of U.S. and allied aircraft around the world,” said Maj. Gen. Deborah A. Ashenurst, Ohio adjutant general. “While it is disappointing not to have been selected as the preferred alternative for this new mission, we are grateful to have been considered and will continue to position ourselves to be competitive for future Air Force basing decisions.”

The Air Force plans to field a total of 179 KC-46A aircraft between 2016 and 2028, which will include basing at up to four National Guard facilities.

Regardless of the Air Force's final basing decision for the KC-46As, under aviation force structure changes mandated by the FY 2013 National Defense Authorization Act, six KC-135 Stratotankers will be retired from the fleet at Rickenbacker no later than this September, with 12 aircraft remaining in service there. With that determination, about 180 positions will leave the base as well. The timeline for the personnel changes, as well as the exact breakdown of full-time and traditional positions that will be affected, is not known at this time.

"We are very grateful to the members of the Ohio congressional delegation who fought to keep as many of our aircraft flying and great Airmen employed as possible," Ashenhurst said. "The Ohio Air National Guard plays a vital role in our nation's defense, and we look forward to being able to continue operating KC-135s in support of aerial refueling missions worldwide."

Installations that operate the KC-135 aircraft will continue to do so for the about the next 30 years, according to Gen. Mark Welsh III, Air Force chief of staff, in comments made earlier this year. Welsh said while a number of KC-46A aircraft will be phased in to replace many older KC-135 and KC-10 aircraft, some of which are more than 50 years old, he also emphasized the importance of continuing KC-135 modernization efforts.

"I want to stress that the KC-135 units not replaced with the KC-46A will continue to fly the KC-135R for the foreseeable future," Welsh said. "Throughout tanker recapitalization, the Air Force is committed to ensuring continued support of combatant commander requirements."

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