

# Tale of the tanker

The Air Force's quest to buy a tanker to replace the aging KC-135 has taken nearly a decade and has produced nothing. Here's a quick look at the highs and lows of getting a new refueler.



- June 1957**  
First of 732 KC-135s is delivered to the Air Force.
- Late 1960s**  
Aerial refueling during the Vietnam War changes air war forever. Mid-air refueling of fighters and bombers brings farther targets within reach. Combat aircraft are no longer limited by fuel supplies and are able to spend more time in target areas.
- January 2002**  
Congress authorizes the Air Force to lease up to 100 tankers through Boeing.
- April 2004**  
Druyun pleads guilty to giving Boeing preferential treatment during the bidding process.
- December 2003**  
The deal is paused by the Pentagon in light of questionable practices by Darleen Druyun, one of the Air Force's senior acquisition officials.
- Jan. 30, 2007**  
The Air Force issues a new request for proposals from companies interested in building 179 new tankers, now known as the "KC-X." The "X" stands for a number to be determined.
- Feb. 29, 2008** – A Northrop Grumman and European Aeronautic Defense and Space Co. partnership wins the KC-X competition.
- March 11, 2008** – Boeing protests the contract with the Government Accountability Office.
- June 18, 2008** – The GAO sustains Boeing's protest and the Northrop/EADS contract is annulled. Seven weeks later, the Pentagon reopens bidding.
- Sept. 10, 2008** – Defense Secretary Robert Gates terminates the competition for the new tanker, now dubbed the "KC-45," calling for a "cooling-off period."
- Sept. 25, 2009**  
A new request for proposals is released. The Air Force remains in charge, but the Pentagon will have more oversight.
- July 9, 2010** – Deadline for new proposals. Northrop says it won't bid on the new tanker because the new contract favors Boeing; Boeing and EADS submit bids. A bid by US Aerospace is disqualified after Air Force officials claim the bid came in five minutes after the deadline. The GAO is reviewing Aerospace's complaint.
- Fall 2010** – The new tanker contract is expected to be awarded.
- 2015 or 2016**  
Air Force expects the new tankers to take flight.