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Last Utah Air National Guard KC-135E Retires to Hill Museum

SALT LAKE CITY, Utah – The last remaining KC-135 'E' model assigned to the 151st Air Refueling Wing, Utah Air National Guard, will fly to its final home on May 21. Aircraft tail number 57-1510 will be flown from the Utah Air National Guard base in Salt Lake to Hill Air Force Base where it will be accepted into the Hill Aerospace Museum for public display.

Aircraft tail number 57-1510 came to Utah on Aug. 21, 1978 when it was assigned to the 151st Air Refueling Wing and has been with the Utah Air National Guard ever since.

"This is an airframe that has a 30-year history in Utah," said Scott Wirz, director of the Hill Aerospace Museum. "I think that it is only fitting that it come here for exhibit."

The flight of the 'E' model to Hill AFB will conclude over three years of planning and coordination between the Hill Aerospace Museum, the Utah Air National Guard, and the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force.

"This will be our first tanker on display at the museum," said Wirz. "The KC-135 has filled a vital mission and one that is oftentimes overlooked. We take a lot of pride in the Air Force and the Air National Guard plays a huge role in the total force partnership. I think this exhibit will reflect that pride and partnership nicely."

The 151st ARW has been flying the KC-135 Stratotanker since 1978, but the aircraft has undergone several engine modification programs during its tenure. The 'E' model engine modification program started in the early 80s and 157 Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve tankers were eventually re-engined with the Pratt and Whitney TF-33-PW-102 turbofan. The modification was a major improvement over the previous 'A' model engine.

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"Senator Jake Garn was the principal legislator to propose the idea of using surplus Boeing 707 engines and putting them on the KC-135. The Air National Guard sent one of the first two re-engined aircraft here to Utah," said Col. Kelvin Findlay, 151st ARW Wing Commander. A command pilot, Findlay has over 6,000 hours in the KC-135, with over 5,000 hours in the 'E' model.

Col. Ron Blunck, commander of the 151st Maintenance Group, served as both an enlisted crew chief and later a navigator aboard the KC-135.

"The 'E' model modification was a far-sighted and cost-effective decision by the ANG," he said. "The 'E' model's performance was a vast leap forward from the 'A' model, and was a workhorse for the ANG and Air Force Reserve for over 20 years. We could carry heavier fuel loads, and could stop on very short runways with the reverse thrust." "The 'E' model was a very capable aircraft and would still be viable today, but the engines are no longer supported," he said.

In addition to being able to offload more fuel, the 'E' model was 14 percent more fuel efficient than the KC-135A, allowing greater range for the tanker fleet.

The 151st ARW converted to the newest version of the KC-135, designated the 'R' model, in late 2005. The unit then began the process of transferring the outdated 'E' models to other ANG units still flying that model, or to the aircraft "bone yard" facility at Davis-Monthan AFB in Tucson, Ariz.

"We are sad to see the 'E' model go, but the newer 'R' model engines bring us into the 21st century with today's global noise restrictions and fuel efficiency concerns," said Findlay.