

KEVIN D. STAMEY PROGRAM EXECUTIVE OFFICER AND DIRECTOR FOR THE MOBILITY AND TRAINING AIRCRAFT DIRECTORATE U.S. AIR FORCE LIFE CYCLE MANAGEMENT CENTER WRIGHT-PATTERSON AIR FORCE BASE.



KEVIN D. STAMEY PROGRAM EXECUTIVE OFFICER AND DIRECTOR FOR THE MOBILITY AND TRAINING AIRCRAFT DIRECTORATE AT THE U.S. AIR FORCE LIFE CYCLE MANAGEMENT CENTER, WRIGHT-PATTERSON AIR FORCE BASE.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE Talking with Kevin D. Stamey

By Jeff Blundell

hen Kevin D. Stamey was young, his mother gave him a toy plane as a present. "It was either a Christmas present or a birthday present. I actually don't remember, because we lived in Arizona, and it was just hot all the time," he says. The model was a fly-by-wire model, a T6 Texan to be exact. But when he pulled it out of the box, it would not fly.

"It wouldn't start. So, I decided to take it apart and fiddle with it. I was bound and determined not to take that airplane back to the store. I was going to make it work,"

recalls Stamey. "Unfortunately, the little engine sits right behind the propeller. And as I got it started the first time, my middle finger was sticking out a little too far and got cut by the propeller blade. Still, I took it to my mother and showed her that I had gotten it started. She was very proud of me, even though there was blood dripping off my finger onto her kitchen floor." Decades later, Stamey is still making planes work, he just does it on a much larger scale. As a member of the Senior Executive Service, he is a civilian, but carries roughly the same rank as a two-star

general.

Stamey is the Program Executive Officer and Director for Mobility and Training Aircraft Directorate for the U.S. Air Force Life Cycle Management Center at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio. That makes him responsible for shepherding aircraft through their entire lifecycle, ensuring each airframe meets the military's needs and that the cost of keeping it mission-ready stays on budget. He oversees more than 2,100 people and a collection of planes, managing a wide range of activities and installations, and is responsible for all service contracts. His portfolio is valued at \$39 billion. Aircraft under his purview include the C-5, C-17, C-130, C-208, E-9, KC-10, KC-46, KC-135, T-1, T-6, T-7, and T-38.

Stamey recently sat down with us to talk about his journey, his process, and the concerns that keep him up at night.

SPOTLIGHT ON

MAJOR AWARDS AND DECORATIONS

19	99 Oklahoma City Air Logistics Center Outstanding Chief Engineer Award
20	Oklahoma City Air Logistics Center Engineering Director's Award
20	U.S. Air Force Meritorious Civilian Service Award
20	U.S. Air Force Civilian Achievement Award
20	U.S. Air Force Exemplary Service Award
20	U.S. Air Force Civilian Achievement Medal
20	08 Wright-Patterson Category III Civilian of the Quarter
	OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS Certified Green Belt-Lean Institute
	Certified Acquisition Professional, Level III in Systems Planning, Research Development, and Engineering & Systems Planning, Research Development, and Engineering Program System Engineer Certified PM Level I
	(Information courtesy of the U.S. Air Force.)



PG: You began your career at Tinker Air Force Base in 1988. Why did you choose to go there?

Kevin D. Stamey: It was the allure of the B-2 and learning about stealth that brought me to the U.S. Air Force. It was my first real job, as I was straight out of college with an engineering degree. I considered other options, but the thought of designing or building a bracket for something, or being a valve engineer at a chemical plant just wasn't attractive to me, even though those companies were offering more money. It was the idea of doing something I thought was meaningful that led to my decision. That has been my motivator throughout my career: making a difference.

PG: What do you remember most about those early years? Is there a specific plane that you remember working on?

Kevin D. Stamey: The one I remember most fondly is not a plane, it's a cruise missile, because that's where I spent a lot of my early career. It's where I really learned how to be an engineer.

Originally, I worked on what we called the "Advanced Cruise Missile," which was a stealth nuclear cruise missile. Then, it became the entire U.S. Air Force portfolio of cruise missiles.

I have people who I built really close relationships with on that project. People I'm still close with today, because it was much like a family back then. It is a little different in today's working environment with a hybrid workforce. It's hard to have that same sense of camaraderie that you did working in person within those smaller organizations.

PG: Looking at the planes in your portfolio right now, what is harder to manage, newer or legacy aircraft?

Kevin D. Stamey: If you visualize a bathtub, it's got a slope at one end, is flat at the bottom, and has a slope at the other end. Older aircraft start climbing up the end of that bathtub as they age.

In my portfolio, that's the KC-135. It's the core tanker in our inventory today, but it's getting towards the end of its service life and is getting less reliable. We're trying to recapitalize that airplane, because the youngest aircraft is actually 60 years old. By the time we replace all of them, some will be approaching 90 years old.

Returning to the bathtub analogy, on the other end is the KC-46. This airplane is also not reliable enough, because we're still working the bugs out of it. That's common with new airplanes—we call it infant mortality. The reality is that these are very complex systems. And while they're fancy, we always have to figure out where we made mistakes. So, we plan for some things to fail. That's the life we're living with the KC-46 right now.



Air Force)

Kevin Stamey assumed leadership of the U.S. Air Force Life Cycle Management Center's Mobility and Training Aircraft (MATAC) Directorate during a ceremony held at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio. Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics Andrew Hunter presided over the ceremony and presented Stamey with the directorate's guidon. As MATAC's Program Executive Officer (PEO). Stamey leads more than 2,100 military, civilian, and contractor personnel and is responsible for program execution and executive management for all ACAT I, II, III, and sustainmen programs in the Air Force's \$39 billion airlift, tanker, and training aircraft portfolio. (U.S. Air Force photo by Jim Varhegyi.)

As Program Executive Officer and Director for Mobility and Training Aircraft Directorate for the U.S. Air Force Life Cycle Management Center at WrightPatterson Air Force Base in Ohio, Kevin D. Stamey is responsible for shepherding aircraft through their entire lifecycle. (Image courtesy of the U.S.

Kevin Stamey, executive director of the U.S. Air Force Sustainment Center, was the guest speaker at the Emerging Supervisor Development Program held at the Tinker Event Center. Stamey handed out certificates to seventy graduates during the event. (U.S. Air Force photo/Kelly White.)

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The C-17 Globemaster III. one of the largest planes in Stamey's portfolio, played a significant role in Operation Iraqi Freedom between 2003 and 2011 (Image courtesy of Boeing.)

It would be nice if both tankers were in the flat part of the curve. But right now, we've got neither tanker at the bottom of the bathtub.

PG: How long does a typical aircraft spend in that flat part of the tub, and when do you start planning its replacement?

Kevin D. Stamey: It varies greatly by platform and by capability. The KC-135 for example—we started looking at replacing it a long time ago. That's when we decided to build the KC-46 as a one-for-one replacement for the KC-135, with some minor upgrades. We made a decision that we're going to buy 183 KC-46s.

We stopped at that number, because we decided, "Hey, we may not want that exact same tanker, because we know the world changes." This happens for aircraft across the U.S. Air Force inventory. It's not just about the age and reliability of the tanker, it's also about what the capabilities are that you need to be relevant against threats in that particular timeframe.

We're going to buy another tanker on the end of that production cycle that will have a few more mission systems. And then after that, we're going to buy another tanker that has more exquisite things, because threats have been evolving and putting tankers at risk.

It's not a straightforward process, it requires a lot of analysis. In fact, we're doing something called the "Analysis of Alternatives," for the tanker program today, so that we can decide what are the capabilities that the airplane needs to have in the 2030 time-horizon and out into the 2040s and 2050s. We need to look that far ahead, because we don't replace these big expensive aircraft very often. We have to put enough capabilities into them so that they're relevant for 10, 15, 20, and even, like the KC-135, 60-plus years.



The KC-46 can carry more than 200 000 pounds of fuel. This tanker is shown refueling an AV-8. (Image courtesy of Boeing.)

PG: With such long timelines on all these systems, how much do modern-day events such as the conflicts in Ukraine or the Middle East influence your decisions? Kevin D. Stamey: I would say not a lot, because what's happening in Israel and in Ukraine are very different sets of problems from what we are focused on. We don't consider the Middle East conflict or Russia for that matter, to be our pacing challenge.

Still, we do pay attention to those current conflicts, because they create a huge demand on our supply system, and we have to be prepared for that. We would much rather spend those resources on things that help us modernize the fleet to prepare it for what really concerns us, and that's a future fight with an increasingly sophisticated adversary.

PG: You have such enormous costs associated with maintaining the fleet, how do budget decisions get made?

Kevin D. Stamey: The U.S. Air Force has a total budget, and we have to live within that. While the overall budget doesn't fluctuate a lot from year to year, what we buy varies greatly. Each year, the Air Force does "Force Planning." We do that two years in advance, so this year we're working on the fiscal year 2026 budget.

As we build out the 2026 budget, we bring in all of the users, all the combatant commanders, and they bring their requirements. Every year, that list of requirements far exceeds the amount of budget that we have to work with. So, we have to make tradeoffs, and we have to decide we're going to buy less aircraft, or we're going to not fly as many missions.

The numbers are much bigger than what any of us deal with in our own personal lives, but it's very much the same process that we go through. The thing that makes it challenging is that unlike our personal budget, where we can move money from one area to another quite



The U.S. Air Force has requisitioned 183 KC-46 to replace their aging KC-135 fleet. Here, a KC-46 is seen refueling an F-16 near Edwards Air Force Base. (Image courtesy of Boeing.)

legs to get without a tanker."

easily, with public money that just isn't allowed. The Air Force has an "envelope system," where certain amounts of money are earmarked for certain things, and we can't borrow from one envelope, just because we are short in another one. Those envelopes are created by Congress. So, we've got to go back to Congress if we want to move money from one envelope to another. This is especially true in what we call the "execution year," meaning the current fiscal year. When

"We have these very capable fighter aircraft, but they just don't have the close enough to have an effect

The U.S. Air Force's KC-135 fleet is being phased out, but that process will take 25 years. Here, a KC-135R Stratotanker from the 909th Air Refueling Squadron s refueling an F-15C Eagle from the 67th Fighter Squadron at Kadena Air Base in the Pacific, (Image courtesy of the U.S. Air Force.)

Congress approves a budget, we have to live within it. That makes our life challenging, because we can't be as flexible as you and I are in our personal budgets.

PG: There is a famous quote, "All wars are battles of logistics, eventually." Does that mean that transports and tankers are the most important planes in the entire U.S. Air Force?

Kevin D. Stamey: That depends on who you ask. If it's a long war, then yes, it becomes a war of logistics. But I would argue that if vou don't have enough capability to knock down the door, it'll be a short war, and you won't be on the winning side of that war. So, it's got to be both. You've got to have the capability to go in and face off against a near peer threat. Then, you also need to have the capability to sustain an engagement.

Location matters, too. Mobility in a European scenario is a very different challenge than mobility in a South China Sea scenario. In the Pacific, it's all about gas. It really is about being able to provide enough fuel to where you need it. We have these very capable fighter aircraft, but they just don't have the legs to get close enough to have an effect without a tanker.

PG: One last question: What keeps you up at night?

Kevin D. Stamey: The hardest part of my job is preparing for that future fight. There are some daunting problems that we have to solve, and it's not cheap to solve really hard problems. If we had unlimited resources, I probably wouldn't lose sleep over it. But knowing that we have hard choices to make, we've got to narrow it down to the things that are really going to make a difference, and figure out what those key things are, that's what keeps me up at night.