MAJOR GENERAL JEFFREY R. KING
COMMANDER
OKLAHOMA CITY AIR LOGISTICS COMPLEX

MOVERS & SHAKERS

INDUSTRY LEADER INSIGHTS – PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

By John Likakis. Images courtesy U.S. Air Force.

SPOTLIGHT ON

MAJOR GENERAL JEFFREY R. KING

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Asked if, as a U.S. Air Force Reserve Officers' Training Corp (ROTC) cadet, he ever thought he would end up with stars on his shoulders, Major General Jeffrey King replies, "No way! It wasn't even a thought."

King had originally wanted to be a pilot. But a lack of slots for pilots when he was commissioned in the early 1990s steered him toward aircraft maintenance. In our recent conversation, he told us, "I quickly grew a passion for the work and the people doing it. I enjoyed it so much that I never looked back."

King's original goal was to make colonel and command a maintenance group. He has achieved that goal and far more. His rise has been what he calls "an unexpected journey."

His current stop on that journey is as Commander of the Oklahoma City Air Logistics Complex (OC-ALC) at Tinker Air Force Base. This sprawling depot, the Department of Defense's largest, is

Brig. Gen. Jeff King salutes Air Force Sustainment Center Commander Lt. Gen. Gene Kirkland as he assumes command of the Oklahoma City Air Logistics Complex July 1, 2020. King succeeds Brig. Gen. Chris Hill, who retired after a 29-year Air Force career.

ACHIEVEMENTS

EFFECTIVE DATES OF PROMOTION

- May 7, 1993 — Second Lieutenant
- July 16, 1995 — First Lieutenant
- July 16, 1997 — Captain
- Nov. 1, 2003 — Major
- Sept. 1, 2007 — Lieutenant Colonel
- July 1, 2012 — Colonel
- Aug. 17, 2018 — Brigadier General
- July 6, 2021 — Major General

AWARDS AND DECORATIONS

- Legion of Merit with two oak leaf clusters
- Bronze Star Medal
- Meritorious Service Medal with five oak leaf clusters
- Air Force Commendation Medal with "V" device and oak leaf cluster
- Air Force Achievement Medal with oak leaf cluster

(Current as of July 2021. Courtesy of U.S. Air Force.)

comprised of more than 10,500 military and civilian personnel, performing modifications and repairs on aircraft, engines, and components.

They work on aircraft ranging from older models such as the KC-135, E-3, B-1, and B-52 to the new fleets of KC-46 and F-35 aircraft. As with the other Air Logistics Complexes, Oklahoma City also provides engineering and software support for maintenance on those airframes, engines, and related support equipment.

(Fun Fact: The Ogden Air Logistics Complex currently is commanded by Brigadier General Richard Gibbs, who was in the same ROTC detachment as General King. As King points out, "I think the odds of hitting the lottery are better than two cadets from the same small detachment leading two of the Air Force's three Air Logistics Complexes at the same time.")

"Like Ogden and Warner Robins ALCs, Oklahoma City is responsible for conducting scheduled and unscheduled programmed depot maintenance on aircraft. We also repair commodities or exchange-able parts, and those could be anything from engine components to ejection seats to flight-control surfaces," says King.

"The development and sustainment of software for aircraft and equipment is a huge part of our business." He also notes that the complex's software engineering workload has increased by about 10 percent over each of the last several years.

Working with both old and new aircraft presents serious challenges for General King and his people. "From my standpoint, most of our challenges are related to geriatrics and pediatrics: Fleets of very old aircraft and fleets of very new aircraft. Each has their own unique challenges, and some are shared," King sagely states.

"Old aircraft find new ways to break and suffer from ever-shrinking supply bases. Newer aircraft require new methods of manufacture and repair, and, in many cases, suffer from inadequate sources of supply as well. Sometimes, that's because the supply base isn't yet fully producing to meet the aircraft fielding schedule or operations tempo. In some cases, we're still tweaking new systems to achieve the expected mean times between component failures."

King points out that both newer and older aircraft demand extensive engineering support. While supply chain strictures can create problems, a significant drag on maintenance operations can be found on the personnel side.

"We have what I would characterize as a shortage of sustaining engineers . . . in the U.S. Air Force and the industry," states King. "Engineering support is at the foundation of everything we do, from incorporating the latest manufacturing methods to developing new methods of repair to updating technical data to providing guidance for non-standard repairs to maintainers in the field. There's an insatiable demand for sustaining engineers."

The OC-ALC is working to help educate, train, and retain new engineers to help meet that demand. According to King, "The challenge is threefold: developing degree programs that focus on sustaining engineering, creating the pipelines to bring those engineers to the ALC, and retaining them to maintain a deep experience base."

"We're working closely with Oklahoma's universities to adjust curriculums and develop the skills we need. We also provide internships, and have found that about 85 percent of our interns choose to stay with us. That helps a lot. But it's not yet enough to meet our demand for software and sustaining engineers alike. It's something that we continually work on, and we're thankful for such a supportive university system."

The defense industrial base is vital to U.S. Air Force readiness. King notes that shifts in the industrial base environment can pose serious challenges.

"We work closely with the commercial industrial base to support our needs, and, of course, we're always strengthening the organic, or military, industrial base through depot activation and recapitalization. On the commercial side, many of our sources of supply are drying up. This is due to a number of things, from COVID-19 to small or infrequent batch orders that make it not worthwhile for our commercial partners to maintain to industrial capacity—partly due to them finding more lucrative production opportunities elsewhere."

King concludes, "We have to do a better job of steadily transmitting requirements to keep our suppliers active, and we've got to shorten our contracting processes. The bottom line is . . . steady demand and steady funding helps ensure steady supply."

Despite the challenges of keeping a vast array of U.S. Air Force and U.S. Navy equipment operating, King says his job is eminently satisfying. In large part, he says, that is due to the people he works with.

"It's an incredible honor to serve at this level, and to serve with the amazing professionals here at Oklahoma City Air Logistics Complex. They really amaze me every day with their experience, their innovation, their determination. It's truly a joy to work here. As challenging as the environment is, this team makes coming to work very exciting and extremely rewarding."

King notes that the success of the Complex relies on a team of teams working in lockstep. In such a dynamic environment, it takes such strong, capable leadership and close collaboration among a vast web of partners across the Department of Defense, industry, the legislative branch, academia, and the local community to ensure OC-ALC continues to provide first-rate support for the warfighter.

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