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USAF Project Black Spot

In December of 1965, the USAF began *Project Black Spot*. This test program was designed to give the Air Force a self-contained night attack capability to seek out & destroy targets along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. In early-1966, the concept was approved by the Department of Defense & two Fairchild [C-123K Providers](#) (#54-691 & #54-698) were modified by E-Systems of Greenville, Texas to the redesignated NC-123K (often referred to as AC-123K) [configuration](#).

The aircraft were equipped with a long, 57.75 inch nose fairing that housed an X-band forward-looking radar. Below & aft of the extended radome was a turret with Forward-Looking Infrared Radar (FLIR), Low-Level Light Television (LLLTV), & a laser range-finder/illuminator. Also, a low-level Doppler navigation radar & weapons release computer were installed.

Two rectangular aluminum weapons dispensers (for CBU bomblets) were stacked within the fuselage. Each container housed 12 cells, each cell containing three Cluster Bomb Units (CBUs). Depending on the type of CBU installed, the containers had a capacity of between 2,664 & 6,372 one pound bomblets. The bomblets were released through 12 openings in the cargo floor that aligned with the cells in the weapons dispenser. The lower fuselage contained 12 inward opening doors that aligned with the openings in the cargo floor, forming a chute. Bomblet release was controlled by a weapons panel in the forward section of the fuselage. In the event of an emergency, the entire load could be jettisoned manually.

The first aircraft #54-691 was delivered to Eglin AFB, FL in August 1967 & the second #54-698, incorporating an AN/ASD-5 Black Crow direction finder set (engine ignition sensor), was delivered in February 1968.

Prior to deploying to Vietnam, the two aircraft were sent to Osan Air Base, South Korea to be evaluated against the high-speed infiltration boats used by North Korea to send agents into South Korea. The unit remained in Korea from 19 August 1968 to 23 October 1968, & were scheduled for a total of 57 missions. Upon completion of their Korean assignment, the unit was deployed to South Vietnam for a combat evaluation of the "Black Spot" weapons system.

It was in South Vietnam where the aircraft operated under the project name & callsign - "Black Spot". Both aircraft began operations on 15 November 1968, flying from Phan Rang Air Base, with mission staging areas at Binh Thuy & Pleiku. During the combat evaluation period, a total of 69 sorties were flown over target areas consisting of the Mekong Delta & the Ho Chi Minh Trail. From November 1968 to May 1969, these "gunships" flew 186 missions, destroyed 415 trucks & damaged 273 more. While operating as armed night surveillance units in the Mekong Delta, the two aircraft destroyed 151 boats/vehicles, damaging another 108 & noted secondary explosions on 161 targets. Both aircraft completed 70 percent of all missions & had an in-commission rate of 84 percent; not bad for an aircraft that was developed as a testbed & never intended to be used operationally!

Both aircraft were later assigned to the 16th Special Operations Squadron at Udon RTAB. On 5 November 1969, ECM & RAHW gear was installed, & the first aircraft received a Black Crow system. They continued their mission from late-1969 till June 1970 from Udon, often with night fighter escorts because of heavy antiaircraft artillery (AAA) fire.

Although Project Black Spot was a complete success, both aircraft were later refitted to back to the C-123K standard to serve as normal transports, but did retain their unique wrap-around camouflage after the re-conversion.

Project Name	Aircraft Designation(s)
Project Gunship I	AC-47D (Spooky)
Project Gunship II	AC-130A/E/H/U (Spectre/Spooky II)
Project Gunship III	AC-119G/K (Shadow/Stinger)
Project Black Spot	AC-123K (Black Spot)

From: William Petrie **Sent:** Fri, May 20, 2016 1:29 PM **To:** Jim Dunn; **Subject:** Re: Gee I didn't Know that.

Jim, interesting what you did with the ROKs. The Air Force had two AC/NC-123K "Black Spots" that flew, I think, out of Ubon. I believe IO Virgil Ogletree flew with them before he was with the gunships. The Black Spot birds were sent to Asia in 1968 but not in Vietnam....they were sent to Korea to do as Jim mentioned... stop water-borne Infiltration by N Korea into S Korea. They didn't perform very well.

After more failures & fixes they hit Vietnam at Phan Rang in Nov of '68. their mission then was to use FLIR, LLLTV, Black Crow or other stuff & drop CBUs on their targets. The program had Great crews but the aircraft & equipment gave them fits & the program never intended them to be combat-operational. From 68-69 only two birds were flying two sorties per night & they flew much of the same areas we Stingers & the Spectres did. Feb 69 is when they went to Ubon & set up shop with the Spectres of the 16th SOS. Black Spot was then flying exclusively over the Ho Chi Minh Trail & their missions ceased in 1970. I know they didn't lose any aircraft & they did fairly well considering they weren't supposed to be in combat. I don't know what their final figures were but in 1969 they had flown around 186 missions (the 2 birds) with 415 trucks destroyed &, at that time, damaged 273 more. Maybe someone else knows more. Certainly an interesting program. I know when Ogie & I were flying Stingers at the same time he was reluctant to talk about black spot.

Hope this helps a bit. Chief Bill

On Fri, May 20, 2016 10:48 AM, Jim Dunn wrote:

Do any of you remember seeing or hearing about the AC-123? I was an advisor to the Korean AF [ROKAF] in 66 - 69 & don't recall anything about it. <http://www.theaviationzone.com/factsheets/ac123.asp>

The Korean AF did modify one of their C-46's with two 50 Cals from old F-86's & installed sheet metal tubes [like stove pipe] to drop flares & Lu's. It was based on their observing the AC-47 Spooky in RVN.

It was very basic without sensors or any fire control.

The Koreans sent three divisions [60,000 troops] to RVN in 1966.

The AC-46 was used below the DMZ to help look for Infiltrators in 1968 when 27 [I think] came from North Korea to kill the ROK President. It happened around the same time the **USS Pueblo was captured**. The ROKAF also flew missions over the coastal waters searching for North Korean infiltrators coming by boats. As the Navigator Advisor I got to fly on those missions. I'm sorry now I didn't take any photos.

From the old memory bank, Jim Dunn

On Fri, May 20, 2016 10:48 AM, Bob LaRosa wrote:

Gentlemen here is some more info on the AC-123K Gunship ? Not really a Gunship.

<https://warisboring.com/the-u-s-air-forces-secret-cluster-bombing-cargo-plane-727b14269425#.pk2yg1nm9>

<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/systems/aircraft/ac-123.htm>