

18th Special Operations Squadron

The 18th Special Operations Squadron traces its lineage to the 18th Bombardment Squadron (Heavy) that was constituted on 20 Nov 1940 & activated on 15 Jan 1941. Training in PT-17s, LB-30s, & B-18s until 7 December 1941, "The Day That Lives in Infamy", the Squadron was transferred to western United States in January 1942 to reinforce defense forces & to serve as a replacement training unit until the end of 1943 when preparations for overseas duty began with training in B-24 Liberators.

In April 1944, the 18th Bombardment Squadron, Heavy was transferred to the Eighth Air Force, 34th Bombardment Group (Heavy) in England. In May the 18th Bombardment Squadron, Heavy started combat operations by attacking German airfields in France & Germany. The 18th Squadron bombed enemy coastal defenses & communication lines in France in preparation for & support of "D-Day" & the Normandy Invasion on June 6, 1944. Thereafter, the 18th continued attacking enemy forces by supporting allied ground forces at St. Lo in July & by bombing strikes on V-weapons sites, gun emplacements, & supply lines throughout the summer of 1944.

Thereafter, the 18th soon converted to B-17 "Flying Fortresses" & started bombing strategic targets such as oil refineries, war industry factories, marshalling areas & air fields in Germany in October 1944. In March 1945, the squadron started interdiction missions on enemy communication lines while supporting Allied ground forces until Victory in Europe (V-E) Day on May 8, 1945. After war's end, the squadron was used to transport liberated Allied prisoners of war to recovery centers & to transport food to Holland flood victims. The 18th then came home to the United States & was inactivated on August 28, 1945 at Sioux Falls Army Air Field, South Dakota.

Chronology of the 18th Special Operation Squadron AC-119K Stinger Gunships

18 Jan 69 The U.S. Air Force constituted the 18th Special Operations Squadron.

25 Jan 69 The 18th Special Operations Squadron activated under the 1st Special Operations Wing for training at Lockbourne AFB, Ohio. The 4413th Combat Crew Training Squadron (CCTS) responsible for training crews. The 4413th CCTS had received its first AC-119K model gunship on November 8, 1968.

5 Mar 69 The 18th SOS received first aircraft for training at Lockbourne, AFB.

3 Jul 69 First crews reported for training with the 4413th CCTS while waiting for more K-model gunships from Fairchild-Hiller.

11 Oct 69 Advance elements of 18th Special Operations Squadron in place at Phan Rang Air Base, Republic of Vietnam.

21 Oct 69 First six (6) AC-119K gunships departed Lockbourne for Phan Rang, RVN.

3 Nov 69 First AC-119K gunship arrived at Phan Rang.

13 Nov 69 First combat mission conducted by AC-119K gunship.

1 Dec 69 7th Air Force officially approved AC-119K gunship radio call sign of "Stinger". The primary mission for Stingers in SEA was interdiction of enemy supply lines on the Ho Chi Minh Trails & in Laos but also flying ground support & site defense missions as needed.

31 Dec 69 Twelve (12) AC-119K Stinger gunships stationed in-country RVN.

A Flight, Da Nang Air Base = 6

B Flight, Phu Cat Air Base = 3

C Flight, Phan Rang Air Base = 3

25 Jan 70 Last AC-119K arrived at Phan Rang Air Base, RVN.

1 Feb 70 A total of eighteen (18) AC-119K gunships based in South Vietnam; most of them configured & available for combat.

4 Feb 70 All eighteen AC-119K gunships configured for combat missions.

17 Feb 70 First AC-119K Stinger gunship combat mission flown out of Udorn Royal Thai Air Base, Thailand.

19 Feb 70 First Stinger Loss – Crash short of runway at Da Nang Air Base. All crewmembers survived

Apr/May 70 Helped to raise the 45-day siege of Special Forces Camps at Dak Seang & Dak Pek, RVN with close air support & illumination.

1 Mar 70 Sixteen (16) Stinger gunships based at Da Nang & NKP. Da Nang Stingers flew South Vietnam & Steel Tiger in Laos. NKP Stingers flew Barrel Roll in Northern Laos.

1 May 70 Cambodian Incursion

8 May 70 Miraculous Stinger Combat Mission over Laos that resulted in Captain Milacek & his crew receiving the McKay Trophy for the most meritorious flight of the year.

1 Jun 70 Mid-1970 Stinger Bases of Operation & Numbers: Da Nang AB = 9, Phan Rang AB = 4, Udorn RTAB = 3

6 Jun 70 Second Stinger Loss – Runaway Propeller after take-off at Da Nang. Crew of ten (10) members bailed-out. All but one crewmember rescued from South China Sea.

1 Aug 70 First daylight combat missions for Stinger Gunships in support of Cambodia operations.

26 Oct 70 D Flight moved from Udorn RTAB to Nakhon Phanom RTAB.

31 Dec 70 End of 1970, Stinger Bases of Operation & Numbers: Da Nang = 7, Phan Rang = 3, Nakhon Phanom (NKP) = 6
28 Feb 71 Famous Tank Kill Mission of Da Nang Stinger Eight Soviet PT-76 light tanks were destroyed at night near Hill 31 in Laos during Operation Lamson 719.

5 Mar 71 NKP Stinger controlled bailout of crew except for pilot, co-pilot, & flight engineer due to critical fuel shortage. All crewmen rescued by helicopter within two hours of bailout. Pilot, co-pilot, & flight engineer remained onboard & nursed the gunship to base for a safe landing on fumes.

By Apr 71 All Stinger Gunships located at Da Nang or NKP. Gunships at DaNang flew armed reconnaissance or “truck killing” missions mostly in the Steel Tiger region of the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos, with a secondary Combat Air Support mission in support of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) in South Vietnam. Stingers assigned to NKP flew interdiction missions on the Ho Chi Minh Trails & Close Air Support for Allied Forces in the Plain of Jars “Barrell Roll” region of northern Laos.

10-11 Apr 71 Renowned Back-to-Back Truck Kill Missions by Da Nang Stinger Polish Bandit Combat Crew. Destroyed 19 enemy trucks the night of the 10th & destroyed 21 trucks on the night of the 11th. A record of 40 trucks destroyed by one Stinger gunship in two consecutive night missions.

June 1971 4413th CCTS transferred from Lockbourne to Hurlburt Field & re-designated the 415th Special Operations Training Squadron. Eight AC-119Ks & six AC-130s were assigned to the squadron. Tail numbers for the AC-119s were: 52-5910, 52-5911, 52-5926, 52-5940, 53-3187, 53-3197, 53-7839, 53-8145.

25 Aug 71 7th Air Force transferred 18th SOS to the 56th Special Operations Wing at Nakhon Phanom RTAFB, Thailand with a detachment at Da Nang (30 Sept '71 - 31 Dec '72) & an FOL at Bien Hoa. Stingers played key roles in Commando Hunt VII Campaign (Aug.'71-Mar.'72), the Spring Offensive by enemy troops launched 30 Mar '72, & Linebacker I Campaign (May'72-Oct.'72).

2 May 72 Third Stinger Loss – Operating from FOL at Bien Hoa, Stinger 41 shot down near An Loc, RVN. Three (3) of ten (10) crewmembers killed. Last daylight mission for Stinger gunships.

Jun/Jul 72 Two (2) AC-119s from the 415th Special Operations Training Squadron (SOTS) ferried to SEA.

13 Jul 72 Stinger 12 & 17 prevented a hostile rocket attack against Da Nang Air Base north of Hill 55.

1 Oct 72 “Project Enhance”, directed by the Air Force Chief of Staff, transferred to the VNAF, sixteen (16) PACAF-assigned AC-119K gunships & six (6) 1st SOW AC-119K gunships, thus wiping out the entire 1st SOW AC-119K force

Oct 1972 Six (6) AC-119s from the 415th SOTS at Hurlburt ferried to Phan Rang, RVN with stops at McCord, Elmendorf, Adak, Midway, Wake, Guam, & Clark Air Base, Philippines. Eight days from Hurlburt to Phan Rang.

2 Nov 72 18th SOS gunships transferred to South Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) for 18th instructor crews to begin training VNAF aircrews.

18 Dec 72 First training flight for Vietnamese in AC-119K #53-7831 at Da Nang under “Project Enhance”.

31 Dec 72 The 18th Special Operations Squadron Deactivated.

1 Jan 73 Project Enhance” re-designated “Project Enhance Plus”.

24 Feb 73 18th SOS instructors received Vietnamese Air Service Medal & Vietnamese Aviation Wings at Tan Son Nhut Air Base for conducting 45-day Stinger gunship training course.

1 Mar 73 AC-119K #53-7839, flying out of Da Nang Air Base, with five (5) USAF Flight Instructors & eight (8) South Vietnamese VNAF Training Personnel onboard was lost to the South China Sea when ground radar failure, extreme low visibility due to fog, & fuel starvation caused crew to bail-out. Everyone rescued next day by small rescue boats, except for one South Vietnamese who lost his life when his unreleased parachute caught in a boat propeller. This gunship loss caused the early termination of “Project Enhance Plus”.

1 Mar 73 Last combat mission for Detachment 1 Da Nang AC-119K Stinger gunship (tail number 52-5911).

The 18th SOS AC-119K Stinger Gunships served combat duty for the United States Air Force in Southeast Asia for three (3) years, two (2) months starting 13 November 1969 & ending 31 December 1972.

NOTE: Squadron Lineages & Chronologies compiled by Dr. Larry Elton Fletcher from the following sources: USAF Unit Lineage & Honors History, Official Unit Records of the 14th SOW, 17th SOS, & 18th SOS at the U.S. Air Force Research Center at Maxwell AFB, Alabama, Websites: 71stsos.com & ac-119gunships.com, Jack S. Ballard’s book, Development & Employment of Fixed-Wing Gunships, & Veterans of the 14th SOW; 71st SOS, 17th SOS, & 18th SOS.