

18th SOS (Special Operations Squadron) Chronology

The AC-119K Stinger Gunship served combat duty for the United States Air Force in Southeast Asia for three (3) years, two (2) months starting November 13, 1969 & ending December 31, 1972. All AC-119k *Stinger* gunships were turned-over to the Republic of Vietnam Air Force (VNAF). None made it back to the United States after the war.

Chronology compiled by Dr. Larry Elton Fletcher. Most Dates & Info taken from Jack S. Ballard's book, *Development & Employment of Fixed-Wing Gunships*. Dates & info also obtained from USAF Unit Lineage & Honors History, Official Documents, & Veterans of 18th SOS. **Note:** Author unsure of exact date for first Stinger daylight mission.

Honors

Campaign Streamers

World War II

- Antisubmarine
- Air Offensive, Europe
- Normandy
- Northern France
- Rhineland
- Central Europe
- Air Combat

Vietnam

- Vietnam Summer-Fall, 1969
- Vietnam Winter-Spring, 1970
- Sanctuary Counteroffensive
- Southwest Monsoon
- Commando Hunt V
- Commando Hunt VI
- Commando Hunt VII
- Vietnam Ceasefire

Decorations

Presidential Unit Citation: Southeast Asia, 1 Apr–31 Dec 1972.

Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards With Combat 'V' Device:

- 1 Jul 1970–30 Jun 1971;
- 25 Aug–30 Nov 1971;
- 1 Dec 1971–29 Feb 1972;
- 8 Apr–13 May 1972.

Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Palm:

[Oct] 1969–31 Dec 1972.

Chronology

TIME PERIOD	HISTORICAL FACTS
January 25 1969	The 18th Special Operations Squadron activated for combat crew 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 Nov 8, 1968.
March 5 1969	18th SOS received first aircraft for training at Lockbourne, AFB.
Oct 11 1969	Advance elements of 18th Special Operations Squadron in place at Phan Rang Air Base, Republic of Vietnam.
Oct 21 1969	First six (6) AC-119K gunships departed Lockbourne for Phan Rang, RVN.
Nov 3 1969	First AC-119K gunship arrived at Phan Rang.
Nov 13 1969	First combat mission for AC-119K gunship.
Dec 1 1969	7th Air Force officially approves AC-119K gunship radio call sign of <i>Stinger</i> .

Dec 31 1969	Twelve (12) AC-119K <i>Stinger</i> gunships in-country RVN: A Flt , Da Nang Air Base = 6 B Flt , Phu Cat Air Base = 3 C Flt , Phan Rang Air Base = 3
Jan 25 1970	Last AC-119K arrived at Phan Rang Air Base, RVN.
Feb 1 1970	A total of eighteen (18) AC-119K <i>Stinger</i> gunships based in South Vietnam; most of them configured & available for combat.
Feb 4 1970	All eighteen AC-119K gunships configured for combat missions.
Feb 17 1970	First AC-119K <i>Stinger</i> gunship combat mission flown out of Udorn Royal Thai Air Base, Thailand
Feb 19 1970	First <i>Stinger</i> Lost when it crashed short of the runway at Da Nang Air Base. All crewmembers survived.
March 1 1970	Sixteen (16) <i>Stinger</i> gunships based at Da Nang & NKP. Da Nang Stingers flew South Vietnam & <i>Steel Tiger</i> in Laos. NKP Stingers flew <i>Barrel Roll</i> in Northern Laos.
May 1 1970	Cambodian Incursion
May 8 1970	Miraculous <i>Stinger</i> Combat Mission over Laos that resulted in Captain Milacek & his crew receiving the McKay Trophy for the most meritorious flight of the year.
June 1 1970	Mid-1970 Bases of Operation & Number of <i>Stingers</i> : Da Nang AB – 9 Phan Rang AB – 4 Udorn RTAB - 3
June 6 1970	Second <i>Stinger</i> Loss – Runaway Propeller after take-off from DaNang. Crew of ten (10) bailed-out. All but one crewmember (the IO) rescued in South China Sea.
August 1970	First daylight combat missions for <i>Stinger</i> Gunships in support of Cambodia operations
Oct 26 1970	D Flight moved from Udorn RTAB to Nakhon Phanom RTAB.
Dec 31 1970	End of 1970, Bases of Operation & Numbers of <i>Stingers</i> : Da Nang – 7 Phan Rang – 3 Nakhon Phanom (NKP) - 6
Feb 28 1971	Famous Tank Kill Mission of Da Nang <i>Stinger</i> . Eight Soviet/North Vietnamese PT-76 light tanks were destroyed at night near Hill 31 in Laos during Operation <i>Lamson 719</i> . First fixed-wing gunship to destroy Soviet tanks in the war.
March 5 1971	NKP <i>Stinger</i> 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.
April 1971	All <i>Stinger</i> Gunships located at Da Nang or NKP.
April 10 & 11 1971	Renown back-to-back truck kill missions of Da Nang <i>Stinger</i> <i>Polish Bandits</i> Combat Crew. Destroyed nineteen (19) enemy trucks on the night of the 10th & returned on night of the 11th to destroy twenty-one (21) additional trucks for a record total of forty (40) trucks destroyed by one <i>Stinger</i> 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 (8) AC-119Ks & six (6) AC130s 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
May 2 1972	18th SOS suffers third <i>Stinger</i> Loss. Operating from the FOL at Bien Hoa, <i>Stinger</i> 41 is shot down near An Loc, RVN. Three (3) of ten (10) crewmembers killed. Last daylight mission for <i>Stinger</i> gunships. <i>Stinger</i> 41 Pilot was posthumously awarded the Air Force Cross.
June/July 1972	Two (2) AC-119s from the 415th SOTS ferried to S.E.A.
July 13 1972	<i>Stinger</i> 12 & 17 prevent a hostile rocket attack against Da Nang Air Base north of Hill 55
Oct 1 1972	<i>Project Enhance</i> , 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.
October 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.
Dec 18 1972	First training flight for Vietnamese in AC-119K #53-7831 at DaNang under <i>Project Enhance</i>
Dec 31 1972	The 18th Special Operations Squadron Deactivated.
Jan 1 1973	<i>Project Enhance</i> re-designated <i>Project Enhance Plus</i> .
Feb 24 1973	18th SOS instructors receive Vietnamese Air Service Medal & Vietnamese Aviation Wings at Tan Son Nhut Air Base for 45-day Stinger training course.
March 1 1973	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 was rescued the next day by small rescue boats, except for one South Vietnamese airman who lost his life when his unreleased parachute caught in a rescue boat propeller. <p>This gunship loss caused the early termination of <i>Project Enhance Plus</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Last mission for Da Nang AC-119K Stinger gunship tail number 52-5911.

Additional Lineage Information

Operations

The 18th Bombardment Squadron (Heavy) was constituted on 20 Nov 1940 & activated on 15 Jan 1941. Using PT-17, B-18 & B-17 aircraft, trained & participated in maneuvers until 7 Dec 1941. Transferred to the western United States in Jan 1942 to bolster defense forces & serve as training unit. Served as replacement training unit from mid-1942 until the end of 1943 & then began preparing for overseas duty in B-24s. Moved to England in Apr 1944 for operations with Eighth AF. Entered combat in May 1944. Helped to prepare for the invasion of Normandy by bombing airfields in France & Germany, & supported the landing in Jun by attacking coastal defenses & communications. Continued to take part in the campaign in France by supporting ground forces at St. Lo, 24-25 Jul, & by striking V-weapon sites, gun emplacements, & supply lines throughout the summer of 1944. Converted to B-17s & engaged primarily in bombardment of strategic objectives from Oct 1944 to Feb 1945. Targets included marshalling yards in Ludwigshaven, Hamm, Osnabruck, & Darmstadt; oil centers in Bielefeld, Merseburg, Hamburg, & Misburg; factories in Berlin, Dalteln, & Hannover; & airfields in Munster, Neumunster, & Frankfurt. In March 1945, with few industrial targets remaining & with Allied armies advancing across Germany, the squadron turned almost solely to interdicting enemy communications & supporting Allied ground forces. After V-E Day it carried food to flooded areas of Holland & transported prisoners of war from German camps to Allied centers. Returned to the US in the summer of 1945. Inactivated on 28 Aug 1945.

Activated at Lockbourne AFB, Ohio, on 25 Jan 1969, the 18th Special Operations Squadron was the first USAF combat squadron to fly the AC-119K gunship, equipped for operations in heavy weather or darkness. They received first aircraft on 5 Mar 1969 & trained over local ranges for the next six months. Deployed to Phan Rang AB, South Vietnam, in Oct 1969-Jan 1970 & flew first combat mission on 13 Nov 1969.

Between 1969 & 1972 maintained forward operating locations for varying intervals at Da Nang AB, Phu Cat AB, in South Vietnam; & Udorn RTAFB & Nakhon Phanom RTAFB in Thailand. Squadron relocated to Nakhon Phanom RTAFB, Thailand, in Aug 1971, & maintained a detachment at Da Nang AB, South Vietnam, & a forward operating location at Bien Hoa AB, South Vietnam. The primary mission for most of the SEA tour was interdiction of enemy supply lines in Laos but they flew ground support & site defense missions as needed. Through close air support & drop zone illumination, the squadron helped to raise the 45-day of the Dak Seang & Dak Pek Special Forces Camps, South Vietnam, in Apr-May 1970. They began daylight interdiction missions over Cambodia in Aug 1970. Intensified anti-aircraft defenses along the Laotian truck routes, a shortage of fighter escorts & the North Vietnamese invasion of South Vietnam forced the 18th Special Operations Squadron to increase support of ground forces in South Vietnam from Mar 1972 on. Squadron aircraft

transferred to the South Vietnamese Air Force on 2 Nov 1972 & squadron began training VNAF pilots. Unit inactivated on 31 Dec 1972.

(Redesignated 18th Test Squadron on 1 Jul 1991 & activated on 15 Jul 1991. Inactivated on 1 Apr 1994. Redesignated the 18th Flight Test Squadron (18th FTS) on 23 Mar 1994 & Activated on 1 Mar 1994. The 18th FTS is now located at Hurlburt Field Florida.)

Assignments

34th Bombardment Group (Heavy) (later, 34th Bombardment Group, Heavy), 15 Jan 1941; 28 Aug 1945. 1st Special Operations Wing, 25 Jan 1969; 4410th Combat Crew Training Wing, 15 Jul 1969; 14th Special Operations Wing, 1 Oct 1969; 56th Special Operations Wing, 25 Aug 1971-31 Dec 1972. Special Missions Operational Test & Evaluation Center, 15 Jul 1991.

Detachments

Det 1 (Nakhon Phanom RTAFB, Thailand): 31 Mar-25 Aug 1971.

Det 1 (Da Nang AB, South Vietnam): 30 Sep 1971-31 Dec 1972.

Stations

Langley Field, Va, 15 Jan 1941;

Westover Field, Mass, 29 May 1941;

Pendleton Field, Ore, 27 Jan 1942;

Davis-Monthan Field, Ariz, 13 May 1942;

Geiger Field, Wash, 4 Jul 1942;

Ephrata AAB, Wash, 1 Dec 1942;

Blythe AAFld, Calif, 7 Dec 1942:

Salinas AAB, Calif, c. 29 May 1943, (operated from Kern Co Aprt, Bakersfield, Calif, 22 Jun-13 Jul 1943);

Blythe AAFld, Calif, 13 Jul 1943-c. 2 Apr 1944;

Mendlesham, England, 23 Apr 1944-24 Jul 1945;

Sioux Falls AAFld, SD, c. 13-28 Aug 1945.

Lockbourne AFB, Ohio, 25 Jan-1 Oct 1969;

Phan Rang AB, South Vietnam, Oct 1969;

Nakhon Phanom RTAFB, Thailand, 25 Aug 1971-31 Dec 1972. Edwards AFB, Calif, 15 Jul 1991-.

Commanders

Capt (later, Maj) Torgils G. Wold, 15 Jan 1941;

Maj (later, Lt Col) Ralph E. Koon, (by 7 Dec) 1941;

1st Lt (later, Capt) Allen Lindberg, c. 13 Feb 1942;

Capt (later, Maj) Theodore A. Milton, 21 Jul 1942;

Maj Charles Lancaster, 28 Oct 1942:

Maj Harold M. Harmon, 19 Feb 1943;

Maj Wesley A. Anderson, 21 Apr 1943;

Capt Winston O. Defieux, 12 May 1943;

Capt Robert Wilcox, 11 Jul 1943;

Capt (later, Maj) James H. Keenan, 26 Jul 1943;

Maj (later, Lt Col) William S. Boyd, 13 Nov 1943;

Capt (later, Lt Col) Frank R. Crabtree, 8 Aug 1944;

Maj Charles Cook, Jun-28 Aug 1945.

Lt Col. Ellwood E. Johnson, 29 Jan 1969;

Lt Col Hugh M. Matheson, 1 May, 1970;

Lt Col Charles F. Apgar, 1 Sep 1970;

Lt Col Leroy A. Bruffat, 15 Feb 1971:

Lt Col Thomas L. Kelsey, 14 Jul 1971;

Lt Col Fritz F. Hugger, 18 Dec 1971;

Lt Col Robert G. Matthews, 1 Jan 1972;

Lt Col Lawrence R. Hileman, (by Oct)-31 Dec 1972.

Aircraft PT-17, 1941; LB-30, 1941; B-18, 1941; B-17, 1941-43, 1944-45; B-24, 1943-44. AC-119, 1969-72.