

Big Gunships of Vietnam

The third of the USAF gunships based on transport aircraft, the AC-119 'Shadow' was introduced to Vietnam combat in 1968 and was intended to fill any gap left by AC-47 phase-out. Along with the AC-130, the AC-119 did sterling work as a gunship.

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Fairchild AC-119G 'Shadow' and AC-119K 'Stinger'

The AC-47D's successor in US Air Force service was the AC-119 'Gunship III' conversion of the C-119 Flying Boxcar transport. The first version was the AC-119G 'Shadow' that was evolved in 1967 on the basis of the C-119G with a powerplant of two radial piston engines. This variant was designed for the 'in-country' fire support role, and was equipped along the port side of the central nacelle with a Night Observation Sight (NOS), four Minigun multi-barrel machine-guns, and an AVQ-8 searchlight: 26 conversions were made.

The more advanced AC-119K 'Stinger' for 'out-country' interdiction of the Ho Chi Minh Trail had additional power as well as greater firepower and more advanced sensors in the form (nose to tail) of an AAD-4 FLIR, a NOS, a Vulcan six-barrel cannon, four Miniguns, a Vulcan cannon, an APQ-133 beacon tracking radar and a searchlight: again, 26 conversions were made.

The type reached Vietnam in January 1969 in the hands of the 71st Special Operations Squadron, but the two primary operators were the 17th and 18th SOSs with the AC-119G and AC-119K respectively. The types were phased out of service in September 1971 and December 1972 respectively, surviving aircraft being passed to the South Vietnamese air force.

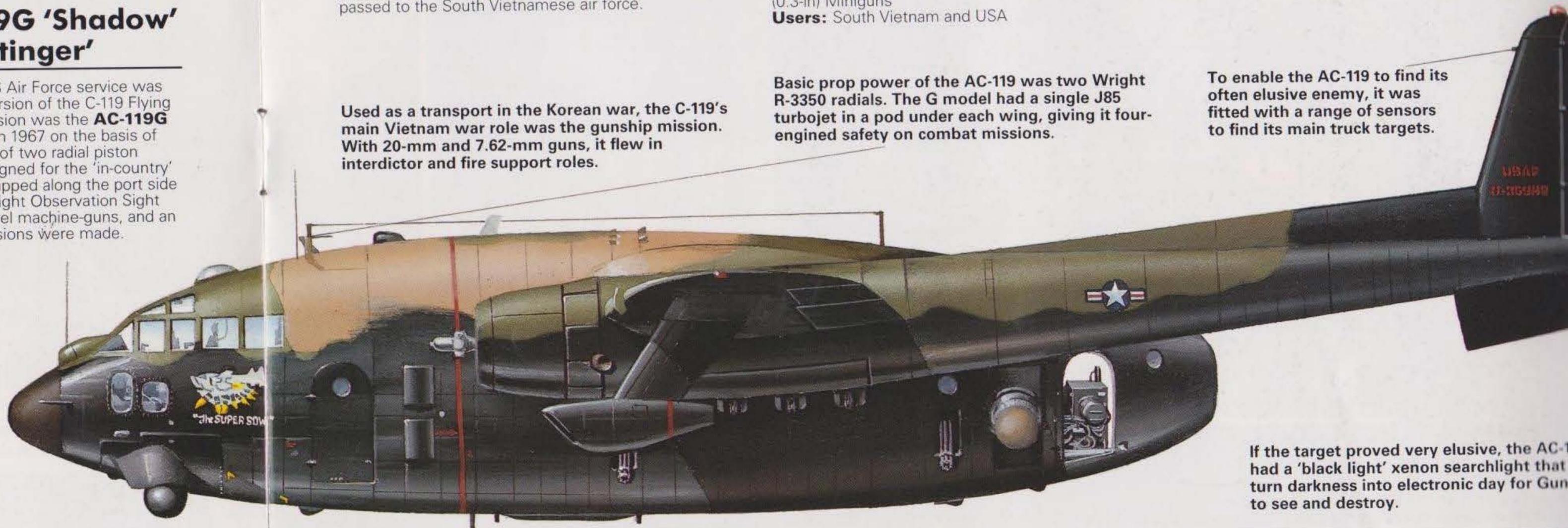
Used as a transport in the Korean war, the C-119's main Vietnam war role was the gunship mission. With 20-mm and 7.62-mm guns, it flew in interdictor and fire support roles.

Specification Fairchild AC-119K 'Stinger'

Type: multi-seat aerial gunship
Powerplant: two 2525-kW (3,400-hp) Wright R-23350-89W piston engines and two 1293-kg (2,850-lb) thrust General Electric J85-GE-17 turbojets
Performance: maximum speed 402 km/h (250 mph); range 3186 km (1,980 miles)
Dimensions: span 33.3 m (109 ft 3 in); length 26.36 m (86 ft 6 in)
Weights: empty 26436 kg (58,282 lb); maximum take-off 36469 kg (80,000 lb)
Armament: two 20-mm cannon and four 7.62-mm (0.3-in) Miniguns
Users: South Vietnam and USA

Basic prop power of the AC-119 was two Wright R-3350 radials. The G model had a single J85 turbojet in a pod under each wing, giving it four-engined safety on combat missions.

To enable the AC-119 to find its often elusive enemy, it was fitted with a range of sensors to find its main truck targets.



If the target proved very elusive, the AC-119 had a 'black light' xenon searchlight that turn darkness into electronic day for Gunship to see and destroy.