

AC-119 Gunships – Shadows and Stingers

- **Fixed-Wing Gunship Background:** Col Ron Terry (Ret) is the “Father of fixed-wing Gunships”
 - He began in ‘60s with a VC-131 fitted with a machine gun as a proof of concept
 - Got an OK from Air Staff to try an AC-47 – worked but AF did not want them – they were considered too vulnerable and were too “outside the box” for fighter and bomber Air Staff
 - Capt Terry pressed on anyway, went to mini-guns, and finally got Air Staff OK to develop AC-130
 - But, C-130 airframes weren’t available in needed numbers so AC-119 was an “interim-solution” platform
 - Although the AC-119 versions are least known of the fixed-wing gunship family, the “Interim-solution” AC-119s flew over 6 years and ended up holding their own as more than just “interim” – we rocked!
- **AC-119G “Shadow”** started with the 4434th, a Reserve unit out of Indiana who were told to put together a new Squadron - the 71st SOS flying AC-119Gs
 - Ferried the birds over - figured out combat tactics – transitioned to Active Duty 17th SOS – ended up stationed mostly in several locations in South Vietnam
 - Flew mostly TICs (Troops in Contact) with some armed recce on trucks and such – 4 mini-guns fired mostly from A thru C altitudes (1500-3500)
 - Flew night and daytime all over South Vietnam and some in Cambodia and Laos – lots of our troops alive today because of them
 - FAC qualified – mostly F-4s with “100% within 1000 meters” about the norm
- **AC-119K “Stinger”** was the 2nd generation with 4 minis, 2 Vulcan 20mm gattling guns, a FLIR, and a NOS
 - Ferried birds over – formed 18th SOS - stationed both Thailand and South Vietnam (TDY rotations Naked Fanny, DangDang by the sea, and Bien Hoa)
 - Primary mission began as night-time armed recce interdicting Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos – fired mostly from C thru E altitudes (3500-5500) in Barrel Roll and Steel Tiger areas in north and south Laos.
 - Got good on finding and blowing up trucks but AAA coverage increased – 23mm and 37mm were normal every night (some 57mm) – 3 scanners (we heard “break left/break right/hover” more than once)
 - Things got hotter in South Vietnam so picked up a lot of TIC and perimeter defense missions - rocket attacks fairly often at both DaNang and Bien Hoa; and AAA showed up more often in South Vietnam including some Stinger hand-helds shot at us
 - Invasion of An Loc near Saigon resulted in detachment at Bien Hoa – before that we took off from DaNang, flew down coast to Bien Hoa, refueled, winchestered, reloaded, winchestered, refueled, then flew back up coast to DaNang
 - Also FAC qualified (we told them to “hit our sparkle”), with fighters also providing AAA suppression as well – “100% within 1000 meters” still wasn’t too unusual with some hairy exceptions like the Marines who dove through a holding pattern of stacked F-4s to blow up a gun position
- **Both AC-119 Models:**
 - Flew over max gross - if G model lost a recip on TO – controlled crash at best. K model’s max gross was about 84,000 pounds and we took off at 89,000
 - Both gunships were transferred to South Vietnamese Squadrons
- **Losses:**
 - 16 crewmembers – Memorial Plaque in Air Memorial Park near the AC-119 Shadow
 - G model lost an engine on take off and crashed – all crewmembers lost
 - K model with runaway prop at DaNang – all but one rescued after bail-out over South China Sea (problem went away with transition to Hamilton Standard 3-bladed prop)
 - K model crash short of runway at DaNang – no crew losses
 - K model shot down at daybreak by 23 and 37 AAA at An Loc – 3 crew lost
 - One killed by rocket attack at DaNang