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USAF Fixed-Wing Gunships

Overview

In December 1962, a proposal was written for a fixed-wing, forward-moving aircraft with side-firing weapons. Although a slow-mover, but forward nonetheless, a Convair [C-131 Samaritan](#) transport plane was the first aircraft used as a flying gunship testbed in mid-1963. With a T-28, it bored holes in the sky proving that a target could actually be tracked. Known as Project Tailchaser, the C-131B (#53-7820) had no weapons and had no gunsight, but it did have some nifty grease pencil marks on the side canopy window. There are no reports as to whether or not the pilot had to shout "Bang, Bang" during these tests.

Eventually, the C-131 was given a gunsight for the side window, but cameras in the cargo area instead of guns. Because of budget constraints, the aircraft was only allowed to make two check flights during the first seven months of testing.

In mid-1964, the test program began in earnest when the C-131 was ferried to Eglin AFB in Florida and a General Electric SUU-11A/A 7.62mm Gatling Minigun was installed. Live ammunition was used and both over-water and over-land tests exceeded all expectations.

In late-1964, tests were continued at Eglin AFB with a similarly armed Douglas C-47D Skytrain (#44-8462). The new program, designated Project Gunship I, converted six more standard C-47D transports into FC-47D, later redesignated AC-47D, gunships. After deploying to Southeast Asia in 1965, these aircraft used the callsign "Spooky", but were commonly referred to as "Puff" (as in "Puff the Magic Dragon"). Many more AC-47 aircraft would soon follow and prove the program an outstanding success.

In June 1967, work began on Project Gunship II by converting a Lockheed C-130A Hercules (#54-1626) into what was to become the best known gunship platform, the AC-130 "Spectre". In September 1967, this prototype aircraft was deployed to Southeast Asia for combat tests, resulting in great success. Over the past 30 years, after several upgrades and modifications, the AC-130 still serves as the USAF's premier fixed-wing gunship.

During the Vietnam War, two other highly successful projects were also undertaken, Project Gunship III, which produced the formidable line of AC-119G "Shadow" and AC-119K "Stinger" gunships, and Project Black Spot, which produced two NC-123K (commonly referred to as AC-123K) gunship-type aircraft.

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)

More Info

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