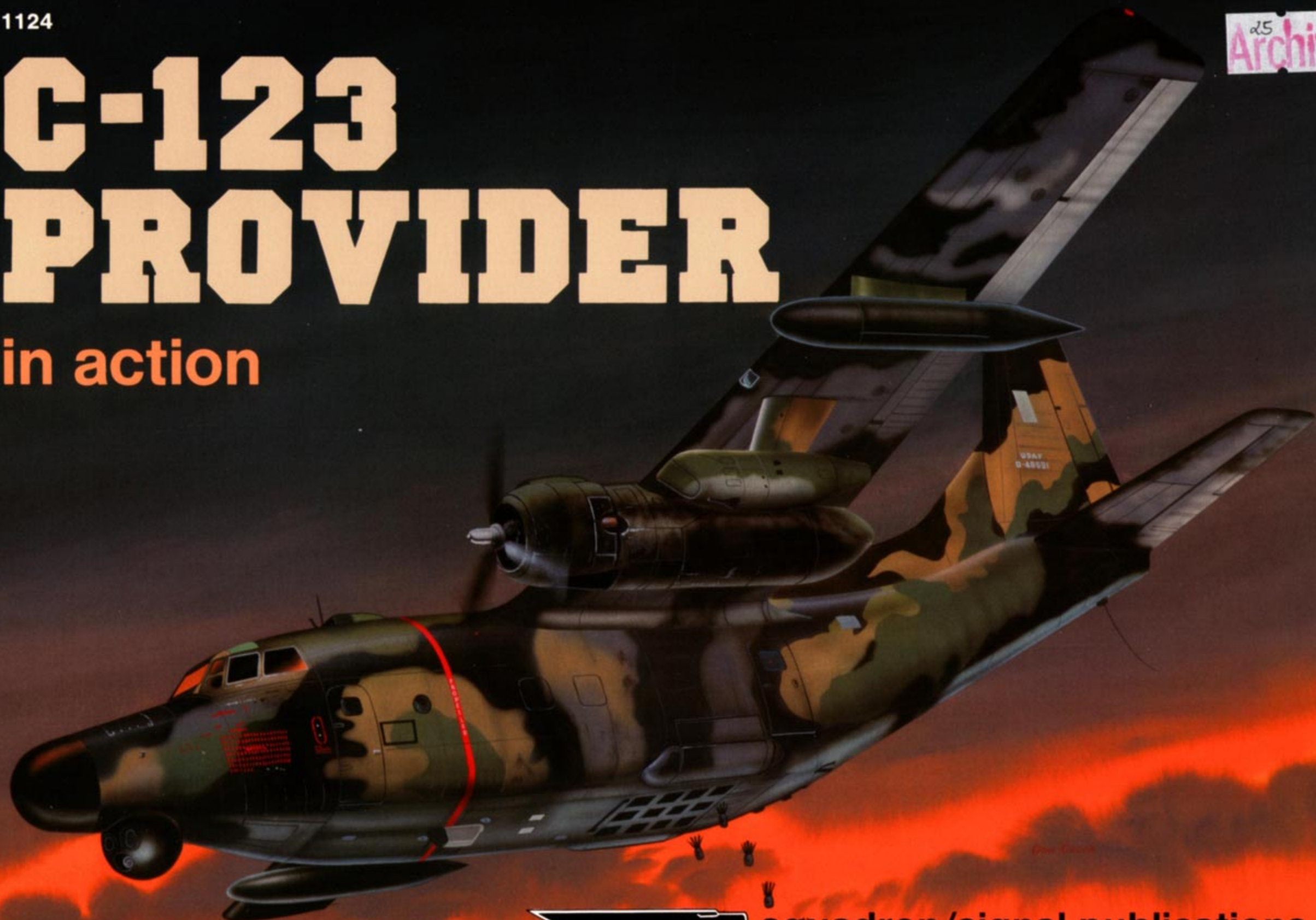


C-123 PROVIDER

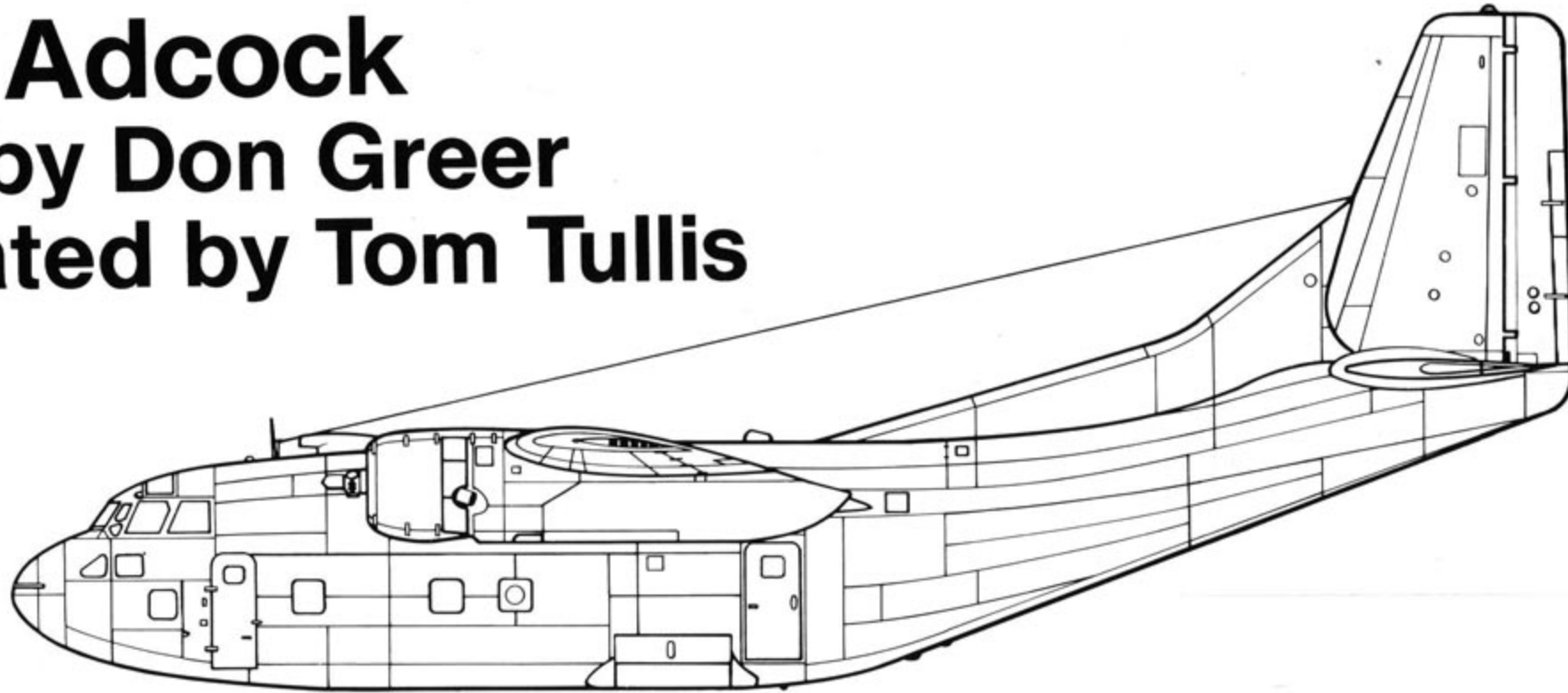
in action



.squadron/signal publications
Aircraft Number 124

C-123 *Provider* **in action**

by Al Adcock
Color by Don Greer
Illustrated by Tom Tullis



Aircraft Number 124
squadron/signal publications



One of the project *Black Spot* aircraft drops part of its load of bomblets on an enemy target along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Depending on the type of Cluster Bomb Unit (CBU) loaded, the NC/AC-123K could carry between 2,600 and 6,300 one pound bomblets.



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Dedication

To the USAF C-123 crew that flew me from Nha Trang to Saigon on 10 June 1964 so I could come home, and to the memory of Harry Doan who lost his life doing what he loved best — Flying.

Acknowledgements

A special thank you to Norm Taylor, for the use of his extensive C-123 photo collection and to Earl Caudell, who filled me in on the handling characteristics of the C-123 and bought lunch. To COL Joe M. Jackson, USAF Ret. (Medal of Honor recipient) — thank you for your extensive help, Colonel. And to all those who assisted with photographs and information, including:

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Gordon Preller
Larry Davis

A C-123K (54-579) Provider of the 311th Tactical Airlift Squadron lands at Khe Sanh, South Vietnam during March of 1968. USAF C-123s brought in over one thousand tons of vital supplies to the besieged Marines during the battle of Khe Sanh. (Fairchild)



Introduction

Assault and intra-theater transport aircraft have played a major role in every conflict since their development just before the start of the Second World War. Both powered aircraft and gliders have been used to deliver assault troops to the battlefield and to keep them resupplied with the tools needed to make war.

In the years just prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, German, British and American aircraft designers all developed military (or modified civilian aircraft) for the troop carrier/assault transport role. The Germans developed the Junkers Ju 52 while the British and Americans mainly used the Douglas C-47 (a military version of the DC-3 airliner).

Assault and cargo glider forces got their start during the war when the Germans used assault gliders on 10 May 1940 against the Kanne, Veldmezelt and Vroenkonen bridges in Holland. The success of these operations caught the attention of a number of aircraft manufacturers who began to design their own assault gliders. In the U.S., Waco took the lead and produced most USAAF gliders, the majority of them being the CG-4s. The CG-4 was destined to be the only U.S. made glider to see action during the Second World War.

Although successful, the glider lacked one important element, its own power. Once the glider landed, its mission was complete, since the glider could not return to base on its own. This shortcoming was addressed early on, in Germany and in the U.S. The German Gotha GO 242 glider was fitted with air cooled engines and the gigantic Messerschmitt Me 321 glider (once envisioned as a cargo transport glider for the invasion of England) was fitted with six air cooled engines becoming the Me 323 *Gigant*. This aircraft was used to resupply General Irwin Rommel's Africa Korps flying across the Med from Italy to North Africa.

The success of German powered gliders did not escape the attention of British and American glider designers. In England, the General Aircraft Ltd. Hamilcar was equipped

The forerunner to the C-123 was the Chase YC-122, a powered development of the Chase XG-18 all-metal assault glider built in 1949. The YC-122B-CA (48-1370) was basically an XG-18 fitted with a pair of Wright Cyclone R-1820-101 air-cooled radial engines. (National Archives)



The CG-20 assault glider was designed from the outset to be powered. Later, the XCG-20 prototype (47-787) would be fitted with four J47 podded jet engines and redesignated as the XC-123A. The CG-20 carried the buzz number GJ-787 and the Stroukoff Avitruk logo on the nose. (National Archives)

with twin engines, becoming the Hamilcar X. It was not as widely produced as the German designs, although after the war Bristol developed the Hamilcar into the Bristol 170 Freighter, producing some 200 aircraft for both the RAF and civil market.

In America, Waco installed two Franklin engines on the CG-4, converting it to the PG-1. As in England, the design did not enjoy the success of the German aircraft. It was not until the Chase Aircraft Company of Trenton, New Jersey, modified their CG-18 glider to take two air cooled radial engines, under the designation C-122, did an American design begin to show promise.

Chase Aircraft, under the design leadership of Michael Stroukoff, pioneered the manufacture of all metal gliders with the CG-18. The CG-18 was basically an all metal variant of the CG-14 cargo glider. The U.S. Airborne forces required an aircraft that could carry the large artillery pieces needed to support airborne assaults and on 2 December 1946, the Chase Aircraft Company received a contract for two large all-metal gliders that could carry up to 16,000 pounds of cargo.

The new design received the company designation MS-8 AVITRUK (Michael Stroukoff Design Number 8) and the military designation XCG-20. The XCG-20 was a high wing, all metal glider with a reinforced nose section for maximum crash protection and a strong tow connection. The XCG-20 featured a tricycle retractable landing gear and hydraulically operated slotted flaps with power for the hydraulic pump being supplied from an on board auxiliary power unit (APU). The XCG-20 could accommodate sixty fully equipped troops or fifty litter patients. The glider had a maximum takeoff weight of 70,000 pounds, although at the time, there were no tow aircraft available that could get such a weight into the air, so the maximum takeoff weight was restricted to 40,000 pounds.

The XCG-20 had a wing span of 110 feet and a length of 77 feet 1 inch. The cargo compartment was thirty feet long, twelve feet wide and ten feet high. From the outset, Michael Stroukoff had decided that this glider would eventually be powered. Two prototypes were built (47-786 and 47-787) and the first of these (47-786) was chosen for conversion to power. The aircraft was fitted with two 1,900 hp Pratt and Whitney R-2800-CB-15 air cooled radial engines. Since the aircraft had been designed as a glider, no provisions had been made for fuel. As a result, the fuel had to be carried externally, rather than in internal wing or fuselage tanks. The rear of the engine nacelles became the fuel tanks and these tanks were unusual in that they could be jettisoned in an emergency.

The powered version of the XCG-20 was given the designation XC-123 and made its first flight from the company's West Trenton, N.J. facility on 14 October 1949. The XC-123 was actually the first of the two XCG-20 prototypes to fly, the glider not making its first flight until 26 April 1950.

The prototype Chase XC-123 successfully completed its flight test period and Chase was issued a production contract for 300 aircraft under the designation C-123B. Chase Aircraft began construction of the C-123B at its Trenton, N. J. facility during 1952 and, after completing five C-123Bs, a majority interest in the Chase Company was purchased by the Kaiser-Fraser Company under the leadership of Henry J. Kaiser. Contract disputes between Kaiser and the USAF resulted in the 300 aircraft under contract to Chase being cancelled by the USAF.

The USAF put the C-123B production contract up for bids and the Fairchild Engine and Airplane Corporation was awarded the contract during 1953. The new contract was for a total of 302 C-123Bs. The second XCG-20 glider prototype was later fitted with four J-47 jet engines (in two twin pods) and redesignated the XC-123A. The Chase XCG-20 would hold the distinction of being the only aircraft to have flown in four different modes: unpowered glider, piston power, jet power and, in the final C-123T variant, turbo-prop power.



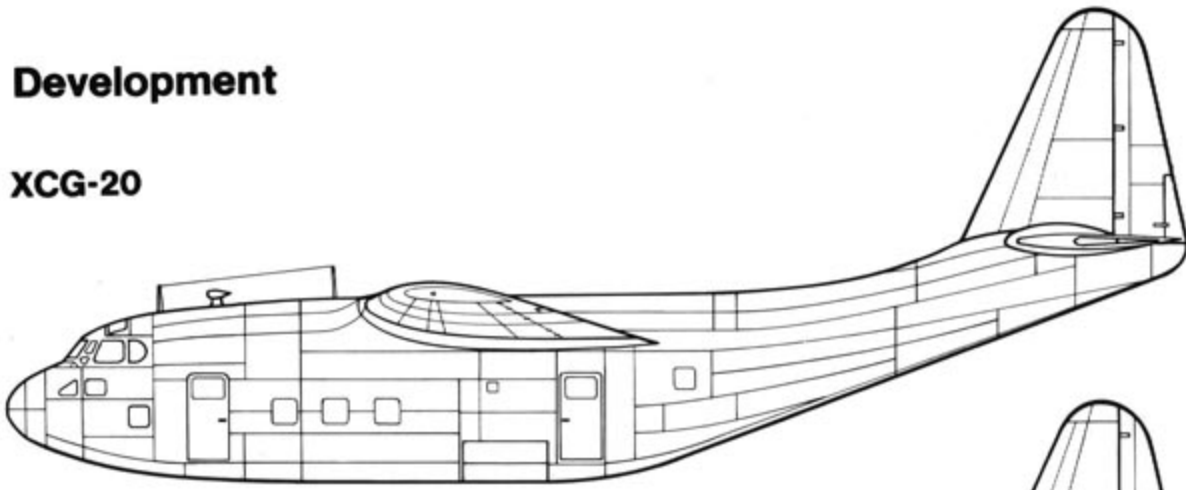
The first production XCG-20 glider was fitted with a pair of air cooled Pratt & Whitney R-2800-83 Double Wasp radial engines and first flown on 14 October 1949. The Chase Aircraft Company under the direction of Michael Stroukoff had developed the MS-8 as both a powered and glider assault transport for the USAF. (National Archives)

The XC-123 was basically a powered glider. Since it was designed as a glider, no provision had been made for fuel, so the rear portion of each engine nacelle was used to carry fuel. These external fuel tanks could be jettisoned in an emergency. (National Archives)

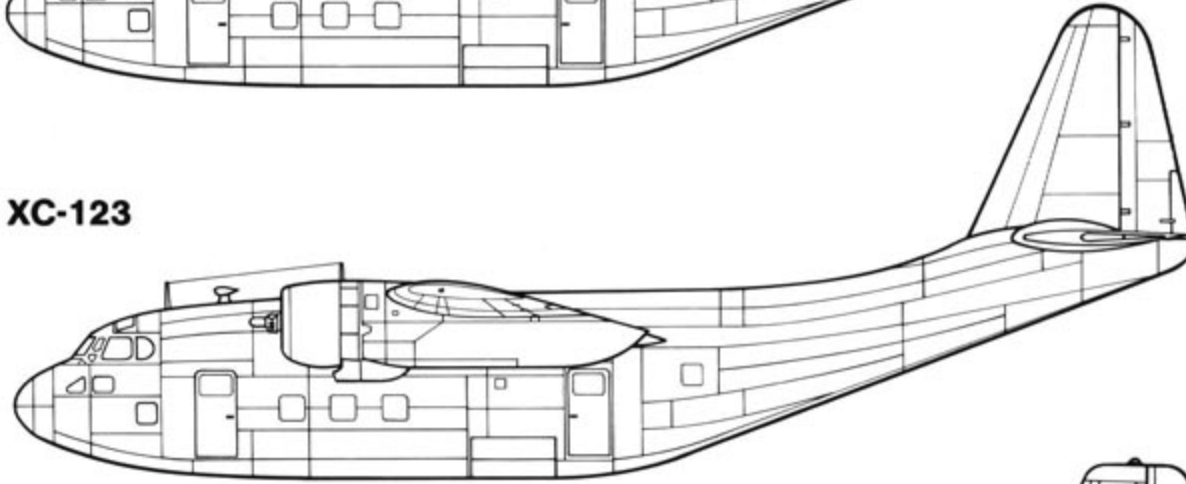


Development

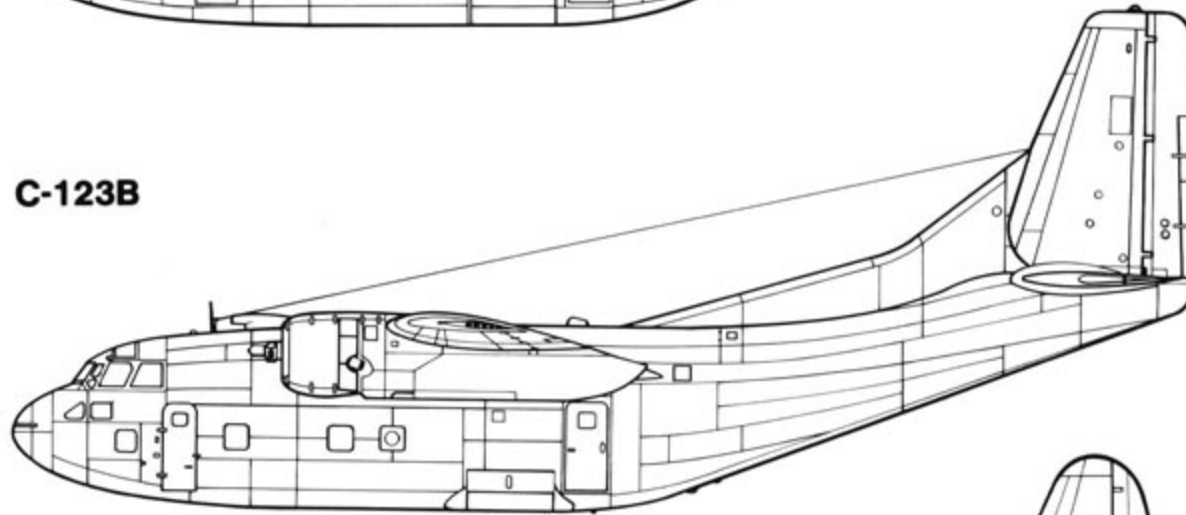
XCG-20



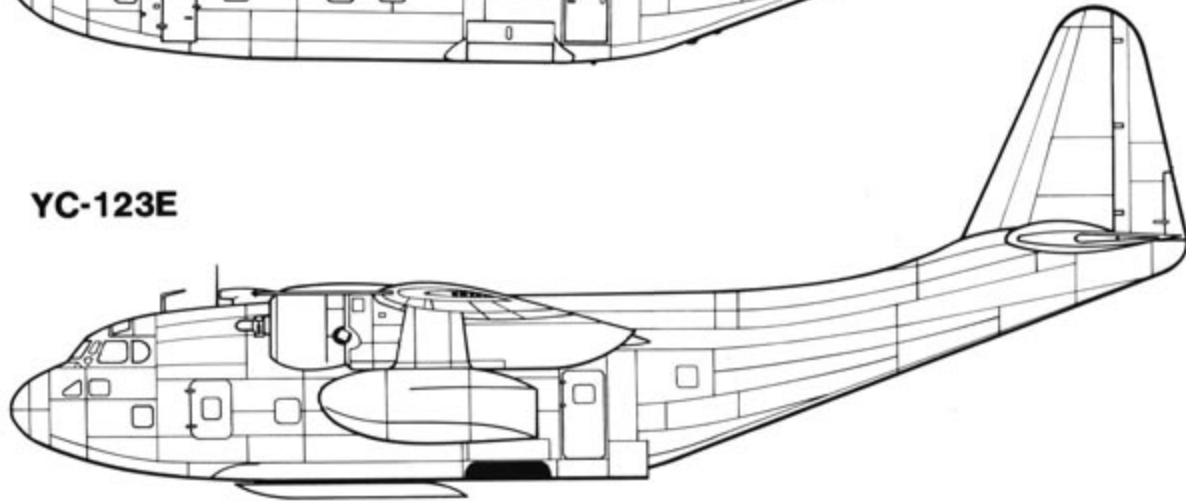
XC-123



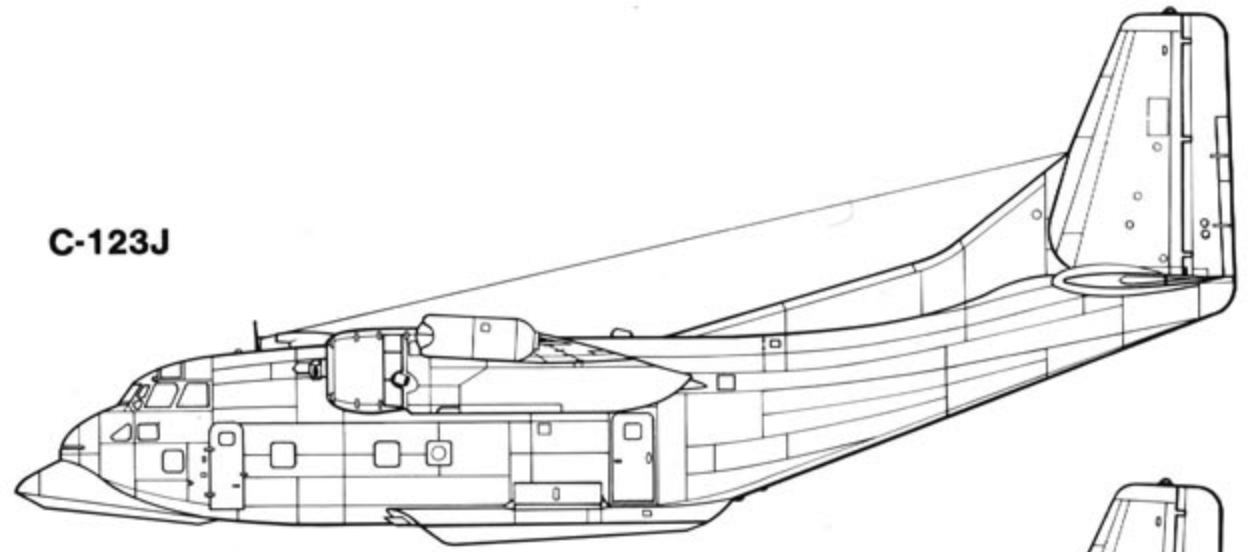
C-123B



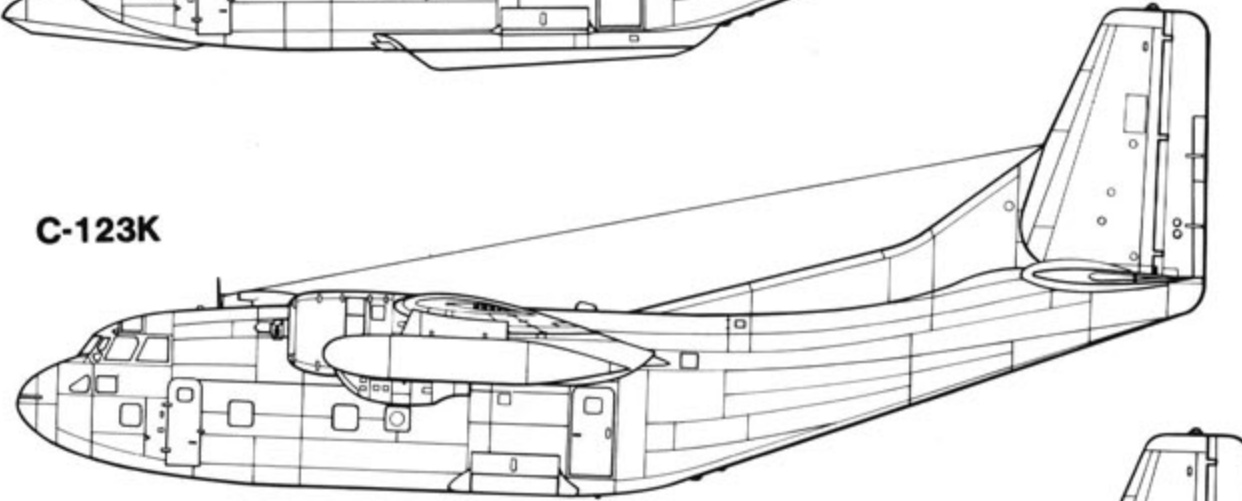
YC-123E



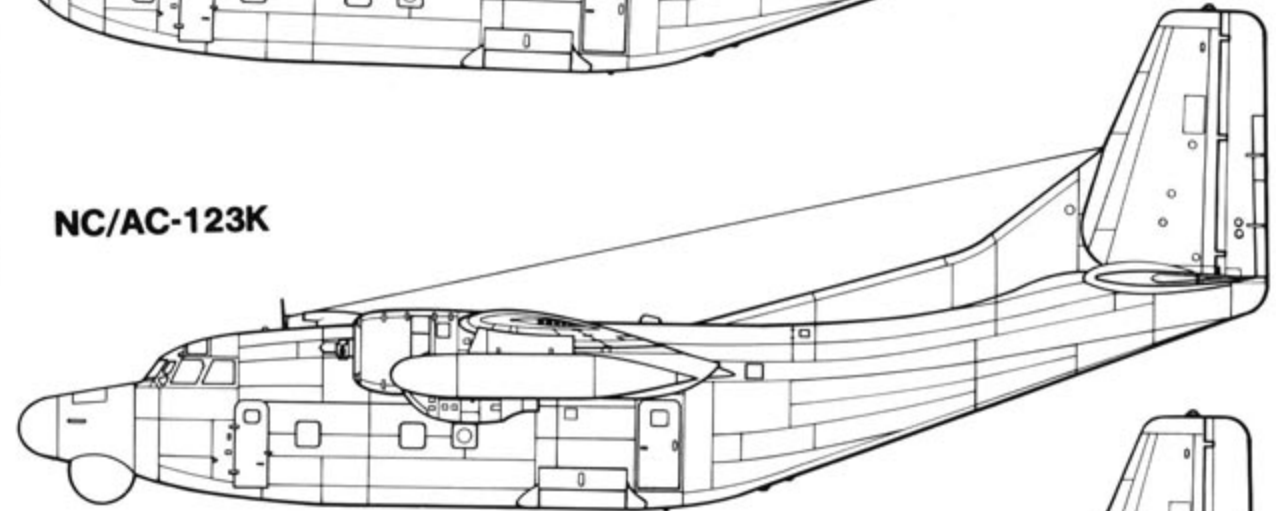
C-123J



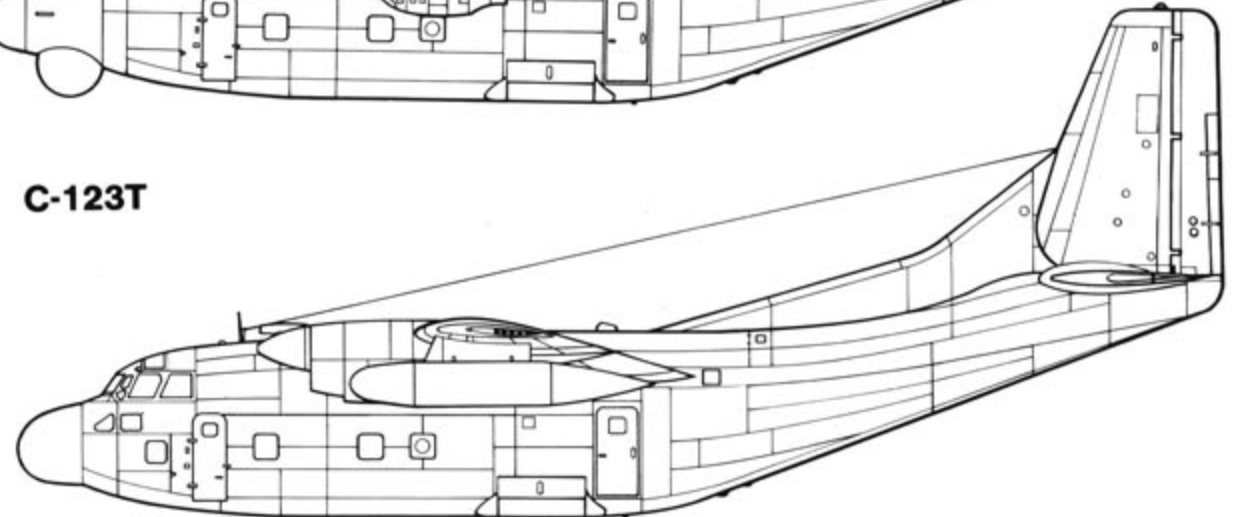
C-123K



NC/AC-123K



C-123T



XC-123A

The second prototype XCG-20 glider (47-787) was fitted with a twin jet engine pod under each inboard wing section. These pods each contained a pair of 5,200 lbst General Electric J47-GE-11 turbojet engines, the same as those used on the Boeing B-47 Stratojet medium bomber. With these engines the aircraft, now designated the XC-123A, achieved a top speed of 500 mph. The aircraft also had the distinction of being the first American-built all jet transport. The XC-123A made its first flight on 21 April 1951, some six months after the piston powered C-123B.

With the exception of the jet pods, the XC-123A was externally identical to the XCG-20 glider. The jet engines enabled the XC-123A to take off at a gross weight of 60,000 pounds, while the glider was restricted, by a lack of a sufficient tow aircraft, to a takeoff weight of 40,000 pounds.

The fuel for the XC-123A prototype was carried in the fuselage in tanks installed under the cargo load floor since no provisions had been made for internal wing tanks. Flight tests by the USAF demonstrated that the aircraft had good short field takeoff and landing capabilities, but the low hanging podded jet engines tended to ingest foreign objects damaging the low slung jet engines. This restricted flight operations to paved air-strips, severely limiting the tactical use of the XC-123A.

With this fact in mind, a decision was made by the USAF to remove the jet engines and replace them with air cooled radial engines. Once the modification was completed, the XC-123A was redesignated as the YC-123D and the serial number was changed from 47-787 to 53-8068.

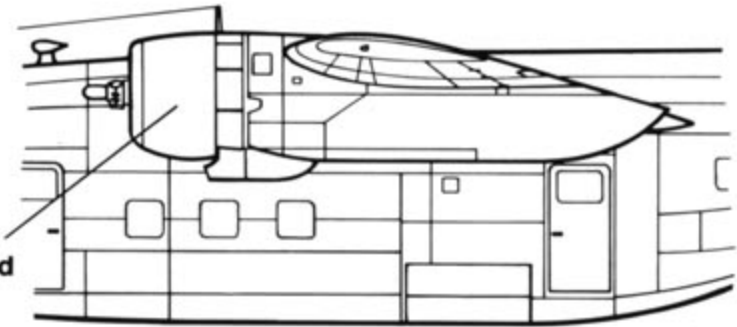


The second production XCG-20 glider (47-787) was fitted with four J47-GE-11 jet engines (the same as the Boeing B-47) under the designation XC-123A. The aircraft was the first U. S. built jet powered transport and had a top speed of over 500 mph. Fuel was carried in a tank mounted under the cargo bay floor since no provisions had been made in the wings for fuel. (National Archives)

Power Plants

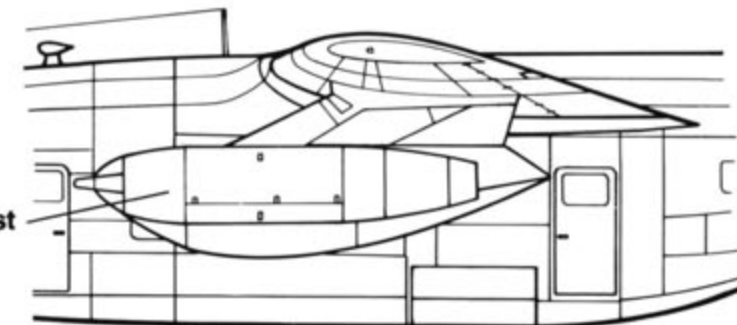
XC-123

Pratt & Whitney
R-2800-CB-15
2,900 hp Air-Cooled
Radial

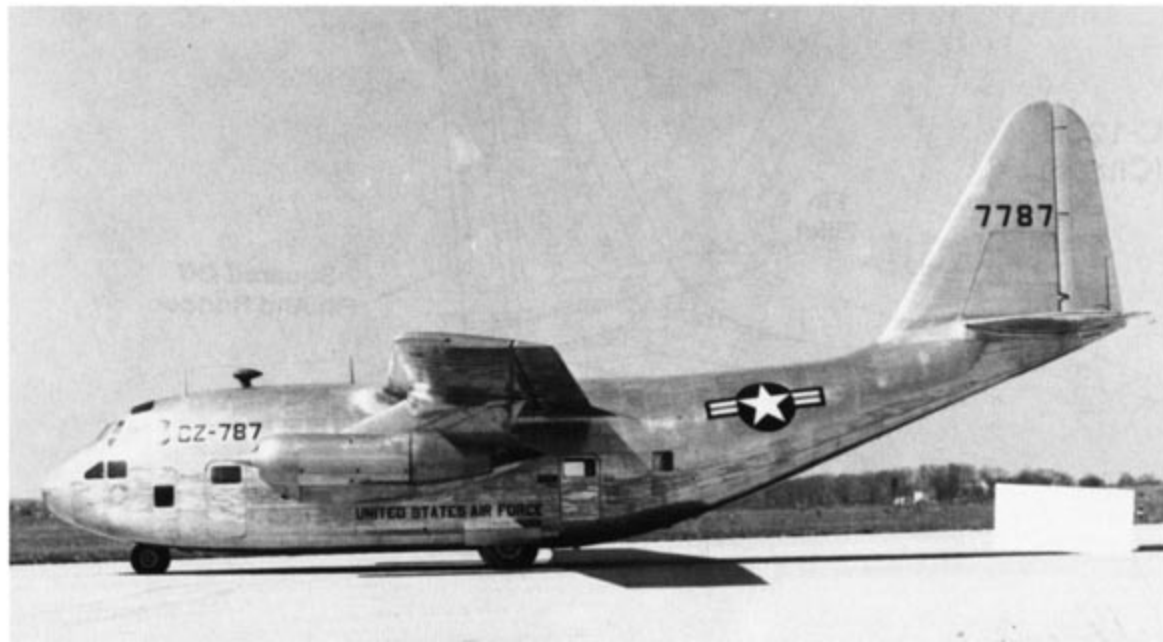


XC-123A

Two 5,300 lbst
J47-GE-11
Turbojets



The jet pods on the XC-123A were mounted low and tended to ingest foreign objects (FOD) into the engines, damaging the turbines. This FOD problem led to a directive that restricted the aircraft to prepared hard surfaced runways. (National Archives)



C-123B Provider

Once the service test flights of the prototype XC-123 were successfully completed the Air Force awarded Chase Aircraft of East Trenton, New Jersey, a contract for five production aircraft under the designation C-123B (serials 52-1627 through 52-1631).

The C-123B differed very little from the XC-123, with the exception of the vertical stabilizer. The rounded shape of the XC-123 was replaced by a taller more square shape on the C-123B.

The power plants used on the XC-123, the 1,900 hp Pratt and Whitney R-2800 CB-15s, were replaced by 2,500 hp Pratt and Whitney R2800-99W. The installation of these engines made it necessary to relocate the engine oil cooler from under the engine nacelle to an internal location inside the nacelle.

The first production Chase C-123B (52-1627) took to the air during early 1953 and in May of 1953, Henry J. Kaiser purchased a minority interest in the Chase Aircraft Company, due in part to the fact that Chase had just received a contract from the USAF for 300 C-123Bs. Kaiser had been building the Fairchild C-119 Flying Boxcar under contract at his Willow Run, Michigan facility. Kaiser eventually purchased a majority interest in Chase Aircraft and thought he had the 300 aircraft contract locked up. During the Second World War, Kaiser had made a number of enemies in the various war procurement departments and on 24 June 1953 the U.S. Air Force notified Kaiser that once the C-119 contract was filled, no further contracts with Kaiser would be honored. This meant that the 300 aircraft contract that he assumed would be his once he bought Chase Aircraft was now useless.

The contract was put up for bid and the Fairchild Engine and Airplane Corporation of Hagerston, Maryland won the contract. Fairchild took over the five Chase-built C-123Bs and responsibility for further development and production. During flight tests of the C-123B, a directional stability problem was uncovered that resulted in the installation of a large dorsal fin extension to the front of the vertical stabilizer. This became a standard production and recognition feature on the Fairchild C-123B.

The first production Fairchild C-123B aircraft differed very little from the Chase C-123Bs and the first Fairchild C-123B (54-552) made its first flight on 1 September 1954 from Hagerston, Maryland. One early C-123B (54-565) was used as a test aircraft to test a refinement in the nose gear and its associated gear retraction system and gear doors. A change was also made to the shape of the rear cockpit windows with the rounded windows being replaced by windows with a trapezoid shape. Early C-123Bs had pilot and co-pilot side windows that opened outward, but this feature was eliminated on later aircraft (Block 4 production aircraft, serial 54-576 onward). Additionally, later C-123Bs had the shape of the troop and crew entrance doors changed with the rounded shape being replaced by a squared off design. The Fairchild C-123B had a wing span of 110 feet, an overall length of 75 feet 9 inches and a height of 34 feet 1 inch. The cargo hold had a length of 35 feet and a total capacity of 3,570 cubic feet.

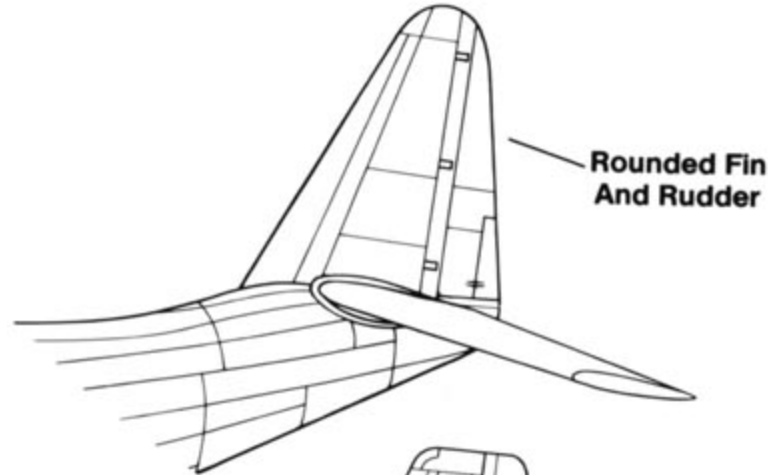
The C-123B could accommodate up to sixty fully equipped troops or fifty stretcher patients. The cargo was loaded via a hydraulically operated rear fuselage ramp. For parachute missions, troops could exit through troop doors on either side of the rear fuselage.



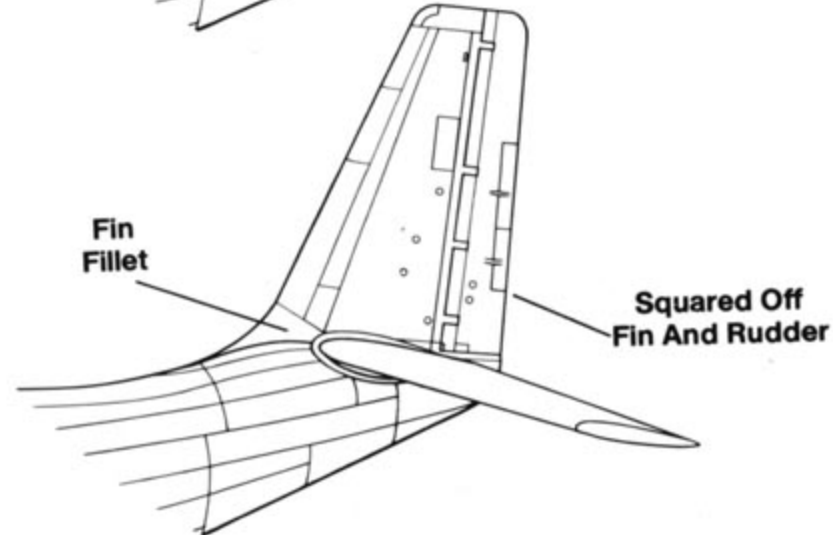
The success of the XC-123 led the USAF to award Chase a contract for five production aircraft under the designation C-123B. 52-1627 was the first production aircraft and it was followed by four others from the Chase Aircraft's Trenton, New Jersey plant during 1953. (Balogh via Menard)

Tail Development

XC-123



C-123B (Chase)





The C-123B was powered by two 2,500 hp Pratt & Whitney R-2800-99W air cooled radial engines. In May of 1953, after five C-123Bs had been produced, Chase Aircraft was purchased by Henry J. Kaiser and the USAF promptly cancelled the 300 aircraft production contract. (Balogh via Menard)

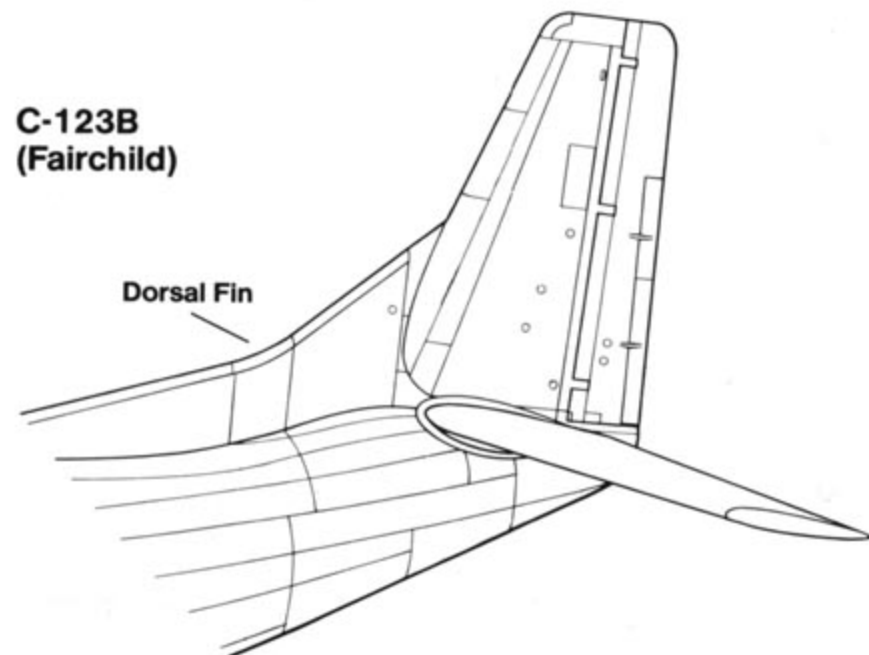
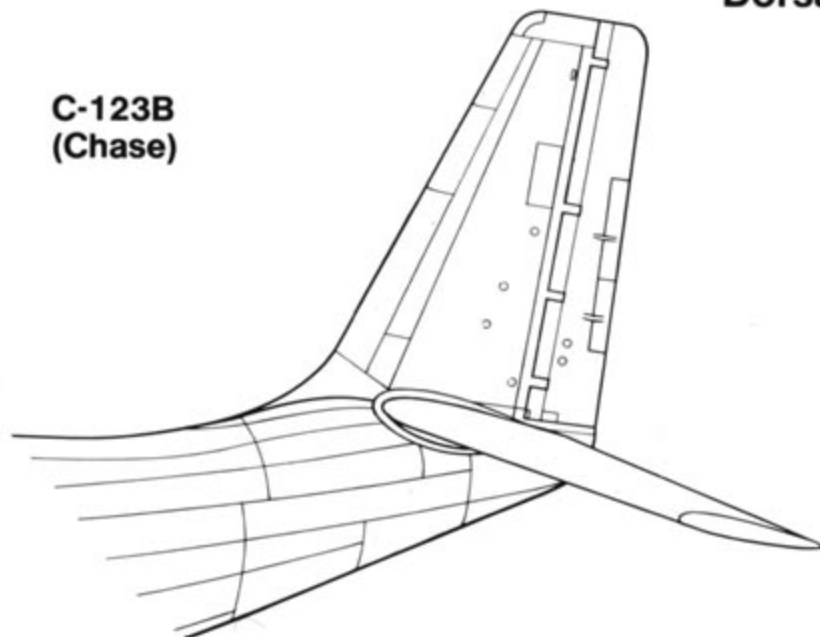


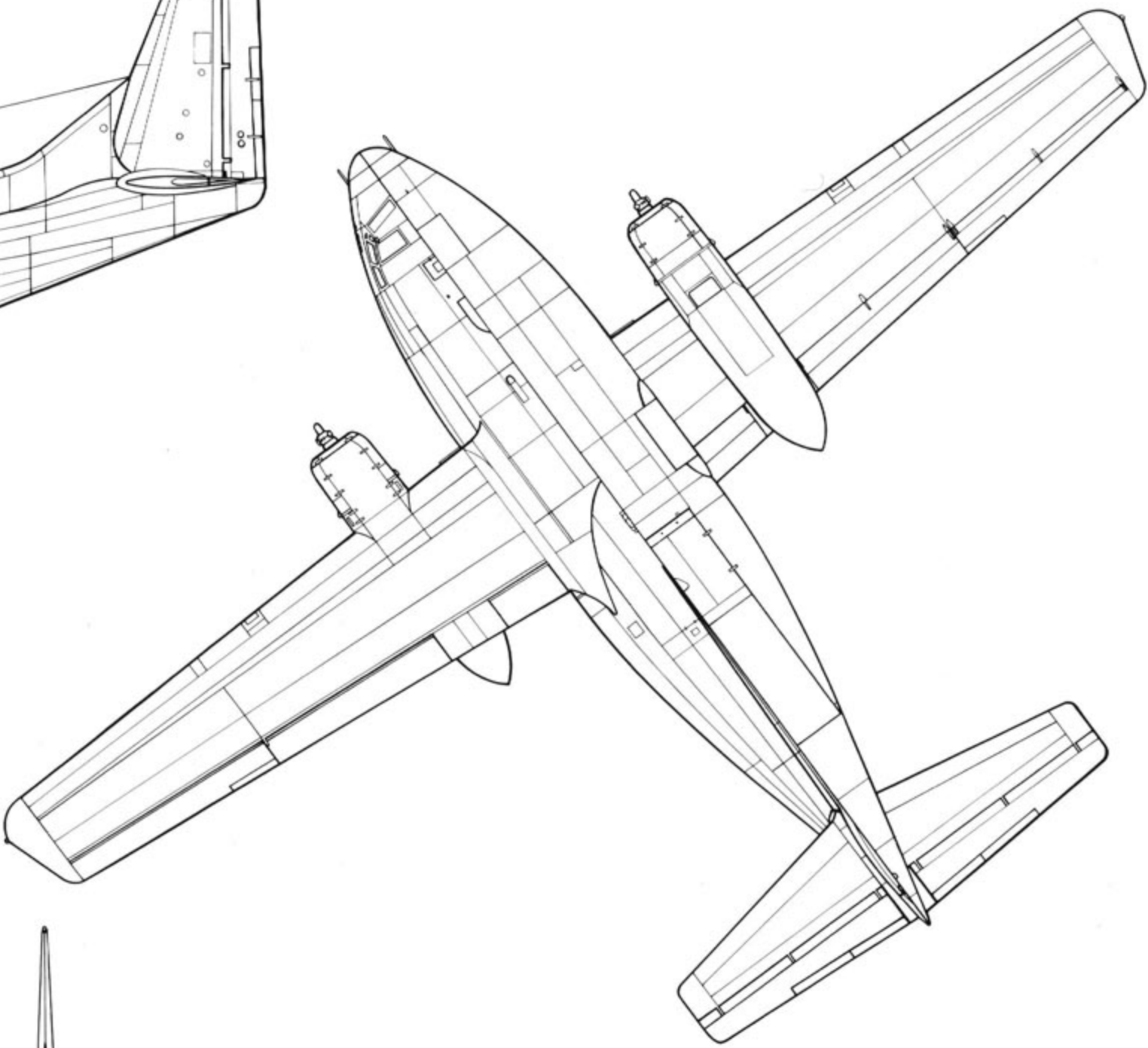
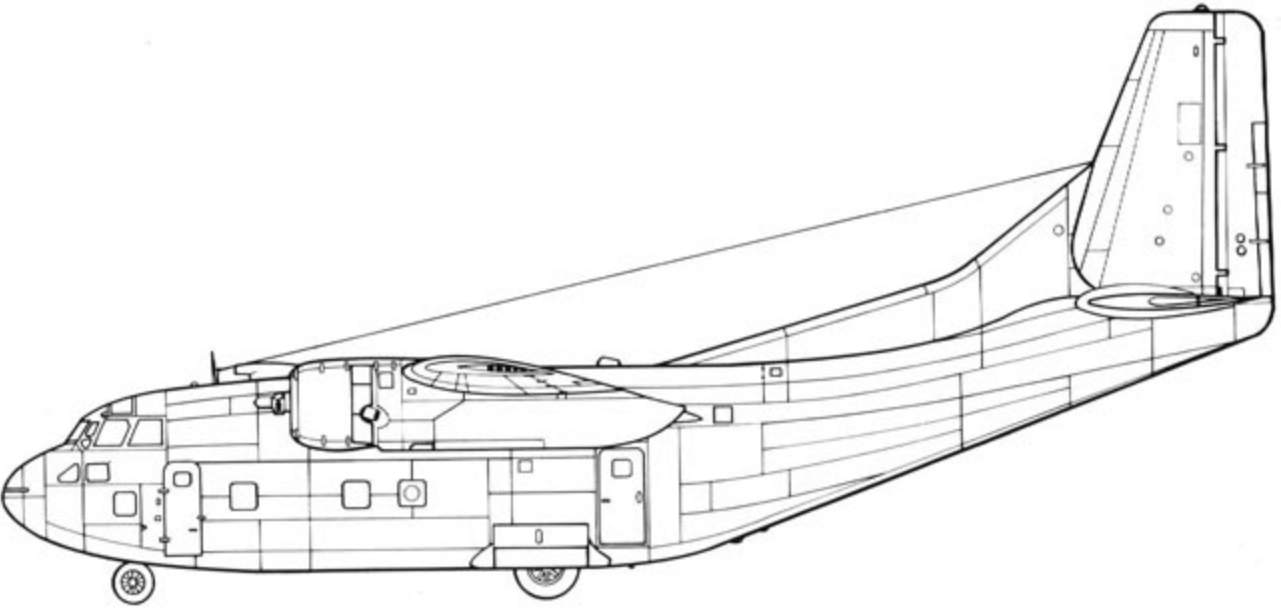
The first Fairchild C-123B made its first flight on 1 September 1954, piloted by E.R. (Dutch) Gelvin. The Fairchild C-123B differed from the Chase aircraft in the addition of a dorsal fin. The fin was added to correct a lateral control problem found in the Chase C-123 aircraft. (Fairchild)

During early 1955 Fairchild, in a private venture, fitted Fairchild J-44 jet engines to the wing tips of the first production Chase-built C-123B (52-1627). The 1,000 lbst J-44 jet engines were being used on target drones and guided missiles and were intended to boost the C-123Bs rate of climb and to add a margin of safety in the event of an engine failure

on takeoff. The modified aircraft first flew on 7 February 1955 and tests showed that the rate of climb was increased from 150 to 500 feet per minute with one engine feathered (on takeoff) at a fully loaded gross weight.

Dorsal Fin





Specifications

Fairchild C-123B Provider

Wingspan 110 feet
Length 75 feet 9 inches
Height 34 feet 1 inch
Empty Weight 29,900 pounds
Maximum Weight 60,000 pounds
Powerplants Two 2,300 hp Pratt & Whitney R2800-99W radial engines

Armament None

Performance

Maximum Speed 245 mph
Service ceiling 29,000 feet
Range 1,470 miles
Crew Three





The first Fairchild C-123B (54-552) on the ramp at Edwards AFB, California during early 1955. The rear portion of each engine nacelle contained the primary engine fuel and could be jettisoned in an emergency. The aircraft could also carry two 400 gallon underwing fuel tanks. (USAF via Cheryl Gumm)

The fifth production C-123B (54-556) sits on the ramp at Edwards AFB, California during September of 1955. As with all aircraft intended for USAF service use, the C-123 was put through extensive flight tests and evaluations before it entered active service. (USAF)

In 1955, the first Chase production C-123B (52-1627) was fitted with wingtip mounted 1,000 lbst Fairchild J-44 jet engines. The use of these jet engines was later fitted to production aircraft to give them added thrust at higher gross weights. (USAF via Cheryl Gumm)



Into Service

The C-123B began active USAF service with the 309th Troop Carrier Group, based at Pope Air Force Base, North Carolina during July of 1955. Once in active service the Chase assigned name, Avitruk, was replaced by the USAF assigned name, Provider. This was mainly to differentiate between the Chase and Fairchild-built aircraft and also to identify its actual use as a "provider" of cargo to the troops in the field.

The Civil Aeronautics Authority (CAA), the forerunner of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), purchased one C-123B (55-4558) from the Air Force in June of 1957. The purchase price of \$877,000 included ground support equipment and some spares. The CAA sent the C-123B to Alaska and used it to test navigational aids and Instrument Landing Systems (ILS) at various airports throughout the state. The CAA assigned the civil registration N123 to the C-123B.

The 5039th Air Transport Squadron also operated the C-123B in Alaska, flying out of Elmendorf Air Force Base. These aircraft were used to resupply the remote Distant Early Warning (DEW) radar sites scattered across northern Alaska and the Arctic regions. The Alaskan Air Command would operate the C-123B and other models in Alaska and the Arctic until 1975.

During 1958, the U.S. Coast Guard acquired six C-123Bs (this number gradually increasing to eleven by 1965) fitted with an AN/APN-158 search radar in a bulbous nose radome under the designation HC-123B. The aircraft were affectionately called *Thunder Pigs* by the aircrews because of the shape of the nose and the noise of the Pratt and Whitney R2800s engines. The HC-123B were utilized both in the transport and search and rescue roles from air stations in Naples, Italy; Kodiak, Alaska; Barbers Point, Hawaii and Miami, Florida. The HC-123B was used by the Coast Guard as an interim aircraft until the arrival of the Lockheed HC-130H. The HC-123B was gradually phased out of service and by 1971 none remained on active service with the USCG. One HC-123B (56-4357) was presented to the government of Thailand during the Vietnam war and was later converted to turboprop power during 1980.

The USAF aerial demonstration team, the Thunderbirds, used five C-123Bs in the 1958-1961 time frame. Three of these aircraft (54-671, 54-672 and 54-683) were painted in the Red, White and Blue Thunderbird paint scheme, while the other two support aircraft remained in the standard natural metal scheme. One Thunderbird C-123B (54-671) was lost in September of 1961 due to the combination of a possible in flight fire in the auxiliary power unit (APU) and a stall on takeoff.

In 1961, in an attempt to aid the government of South Vietnam in its fight against the guerrilla forces of the Viet Cong, a contingent of C-123Bs were dispatched to South Viet Nam under project *Mule Train*. The aircraft came from the 346th Troop Carrier Squadron and flew from Pope AFB, North Carolina to Saigon's, Tan Son Nhut Air Base, arriving in-country on 2 January 1962.

The *Mule Train* C-123s were not the first to deploy to South Vietnam; that distinction belonged to the USAF Special Aerial Spray Flight. These aircraft, known by their Project name, *Ranch Hand*, were part of Operation PINK ROSE and were attached to the 315th Troop Carrier Wing. The spray flights operated specially equipped UC-123Bs. The aircraft were modified with a chemical tank and pressure equipment in the cargo bay and spray booms mounted on the wing undersurface and under the rear fuselage. Six aircraft began operating along the Ho Chi Minh Trail that separated South Viet Nam from Cambodia and Laos during November of 1961.

During one of the early spray flights, on 2 February 1962, the USAF lost its first C-123 (and its crew of three) in Vietnam. This event marked the first of some fifty-four C-123s



This C-123B (54-569) was used by the Airborne Telemetry Station at Holloman AFB, New Mexico during 1960. The aircraft was overall Natural Metal with a White upper fuselage and Blue cheat line. The fuselage band, wingtips and nose were painted Orange and the aircraft carried the Air Research and Development Center (ARDC) badge on the forward fuselage. (USAF)

A C-123B (54-634) of the Alaskan Air Command sits on the frozen tundra at Sparrevohn, Alaska. Sparrevohn was the site of a Ground Control Intercept (GCI) station which was part of the DEW line. The C-123B proved invaluable in Alaska bringing much needed supplies to the remote bases. (Norm Taylor)



lost in both combat and on routine operations. The spray flights continued until 1972 when Project *Ranch Hand* was disbanded. One of the best known *Ranch Hand* aircraft was a UC-123B (56-4362) named *Patches*. The aircraft was so named because it received over 1,000 hits in combat operations over South Viet Nam.

A few C-123Bs were converted to NC-123B standards (the N stood for Permanent Special Test). The NC-123Bs were fitted with Forward Looking Infrared Detectors in the nose and some aircraft were also fitted with a radome above the cockpit area. The NC-123Bs were used along the Ho Chi Minh Trail to locate truck traffic for strike aircraft. The NC-123Bs were flown by mixed crews consisting of USAF personnel as well as members of the Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) and Nationalist Chinese airmen. This clandestine operation eventually became known as Operation DUCK HOOK.

Another C-123B was fitted with banks of high intensity lamps mounted on a moveable housing in the cargo bay. Although it lighted a two and one half mile area, it was discovered that the installation had a few drawbacks in combat that caused it to be removed from service. Since the lights were attached to the aircraft, unlike a flare, enemy anti-aircraft (AA) gunners could easily track the lamps. Secondly, the heat from the lamps made it necessary to install large blowers on the sides of the fuselage. As a result of these problems, the project was cancelled and the aircraft was withdrawn from combat.

Steam rises from the heating units used to warm the engines of this C-123B during Exercise *Polar Strike* held in 1965. In freezing weather, the engine oil had to be heated before attempting to start the engines. (USAF)



One C-123B (54-683) was experimentally fitted with the Fulton Recovery Device, an apparatus consisting of two booms protruding from the nose of the aircraft at a 45° angle. The booms were designed to engage a wire cable suspended from a balloon, with a stranded pilot on the other end of the cable. The C-123B was used to determine the feasibility of the design before it was fitted to USAF HC-130 Search and Rescue aircraft.

During the war in Vietnam, one C-123B was converted for use by GEN William Westmoreland, commander of U.S. forces in Vietnam, under the designation VC-123B. The aircraft featured a roll-in interior, consisting of airliner type seats and air conditioning. The VC-123B also had greatly upgraded radios and a complete kitchen for use by the VIP (Very Important Person) passengers.

The C-123B was also flown by a number of foreign nations. In 1956, the Venezuelan Air Force (FAV) ordered eighteen C-123Bs under a Military Assistance Program (MAP) contract. The C-123B, called *Pando* by the FAV, operated with the 6th Transport Squadron out of Maracay until replaced by the Italian Aeritalia G222 in 1983.

The Royal Saudi Air Force (RSAF) operated six C-123Bs with No 4 Squadron. These aircraft were provided to the RSAF under MAP assistance and operated out of Jeddah until 1967 when they were replaced by Lockheed C-130s.

Air America (CIA), Laos, Cambodia, South Korea, the Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand and South Vietnam all operated the C-123B. A total of 302 C-123B were produced by Fairchild and five were built by Chase. Of these, only a few remain in operation today.

This C-123B (54-650) served with the 464th Troop Carrier Wing at Pope AFB, North Carolina. The nose cone was Green with a four pointed White star and the tail and outer wing panels were Red. The aircraft carried the role designation "Troop Carrier" on the nose in Black. (Jim Sullivan)





A C-123B (55-4564) of the 5039th Air Transport Squadron based at Elmendorf Air Force Base, Alaska, was used to resupply the Distant Early Warning (DEW) radar and communication sites in Alaska. The C-123 served in Alaska until 1975. (USAF via John Cloe)



A Natural Metal and White C-123B (54-569) on the ramp at Elmendorf AFB, Alaska in July of 1969. This C-123 served with the 21st Operations Squadron, 21st Composite Wing. The aircraft carries a 400 gallon drop tank that came from a camouflaged aircraft. (Norm Taylor)

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) used this C-123B (55-4558/N123) from the late 1950s until the early 1970s in Alaska to check Instrument Landing Systems (ILS) and other aids to navigation. The aircraft was later converted to C-123J standard. (Balogh via Menard)



In 1969, the USAF ordered all non-tactical transport aircraft to be painted an overall Light Gull Gray. This C-123B (54-567) served with the 21st Composite Wing in Alaska in April of 1970. The aircraft also carried Red Arctic markings on the nose, wing tips and horizontal and vertical stabilizer. (Norm Taylor)





This C-123B (57-6289) was assigned to the Military Air Transport Service (MATS), renamed the Military Airlift Command (MAC) on 1 January 1966. The aircraft is overall natural metal with a White upper fuselage and an Orange nose and fuselage band. (Ostrowski via Menard)



In 1958, the USAF Thunderbirds aerial demonstration team acquired two C-123Bs (54-683 and 54-671) to replace their Fairchild C-119F Flying Boxcars. The aircraft were painted in the same Red, White and Blue color scheme used by the Thunderbirds' F-100 Super Sabers. (Ostrowski via Menard)

A C-123B (55-4516) Provider awaits its turn to takeoff from Nha Trang Air Base, South Vietnam during early 1964. The overall Natural Metal aircraft carries the emblem of the Thirteenth Air Force on the tail. This C-123B was later lost to enemy action. (Author)

During late 1961, sixteen C-123Bs were sent to South Vietnam under Project *Mule Train*. The aircraft began airlift operations out of Saigon's Tan Son Nhut Air Base on 3 January 1962. The aircraft were eventually dispersed to Nha Trang and Danang. (Earl Caudell)





With one engine running, a C-123B (57-6291) waits to be loaded at Ban Me Thout, South Vietnam during early 1964. The C-123 was capable of landing on unimproved fields as short as 1,500 feet (and sometimes less). This C-123B was Overall Natural Metal with a Black nose and White numbers. (Author)



The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) operated its own airline known as Air America. Its fleet of transport aircraft included a number of C-123B Providers that provided transport support to forces loyal to the U. S. all over Southeast Asia. This C-123B (54-576) was operating out of Udorn, Thailand during 1966 and was later converted to C-123K standards. (Smithwick via N. Taylor)

The White Whale prepares to taxi out of its revetment during July of 1967. The aircraft was a VC-135B (56-4375) conversion and served as the personal aircraft for GEN Westmoreland, commander of U. S. Forces in Vietnam. (Terry Love)



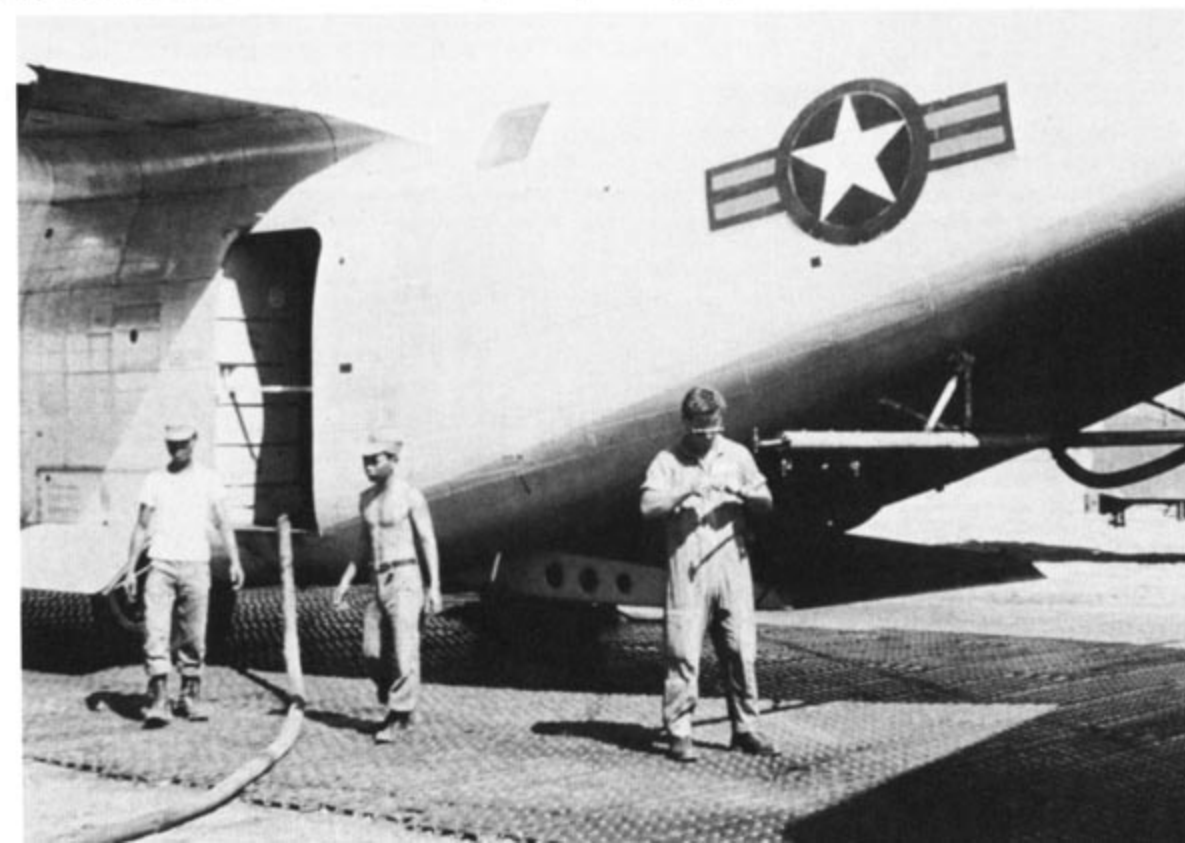


The first C-123 aircraft to arrive in South Vietnam were units assigned to Operation RANCH HAND. The UC-123Bs were responsible for applying various aerial spray agents ranging from mosquito killer to defoliants. This aircraft (56-4362) was later known as *Patches* because of the number of bullet holes that had to be patched in its airframe. (Via Earl Caudell)



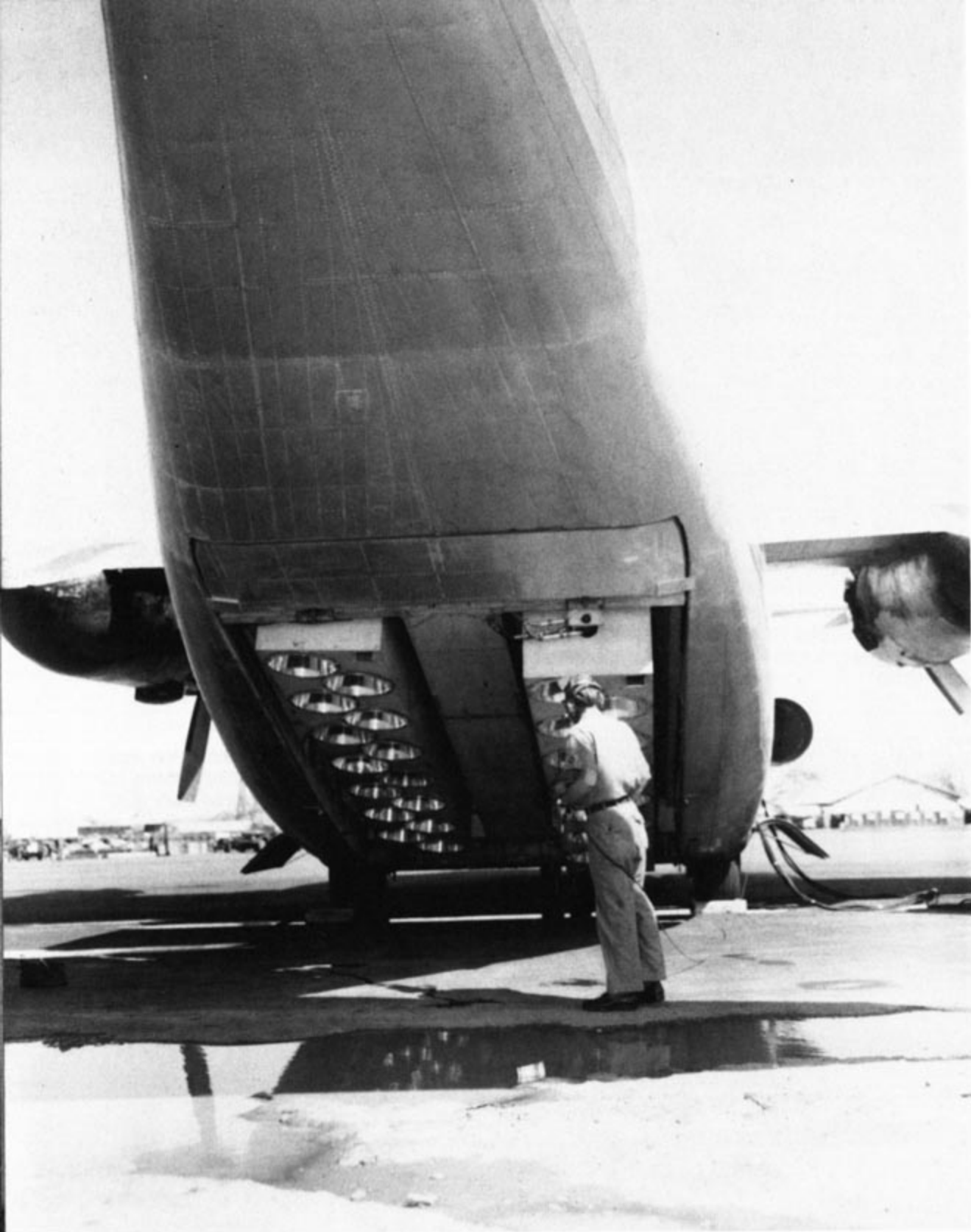
UC-123B (54-4362) was named *Patches* because of the number of bullet hole patches on its airframe. By the time its tour of duty in South Vietnam was over, more than 1,000 holes had been patched. She was the only UC-123B to fly spray missions in South Vietnam in overall Natural Metal since she was used as a mosquito bomber as well as an defoliant aircraft. (Hansen via Mutza)

Members of the Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) load another tank full of "Agent Orange" aboard a UC-123B spray aircraft. Most UC-123B aircraft applying "Agent Orange" or other agents flew in Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) markings. (Via Earl Caudell)



The first "anti-trail" aircraft to operate over the Ho Chi Minh Trail was this NC-123B which was fitted with a nose mounted infrared sensor. 54-652 was passing through the City Airstrip at Ban Me Thout, South Vietnam during 1964. The aircraft was painted in an overall Dark Gull Gray and carried VNAF insignia in a placard holder. (Author)



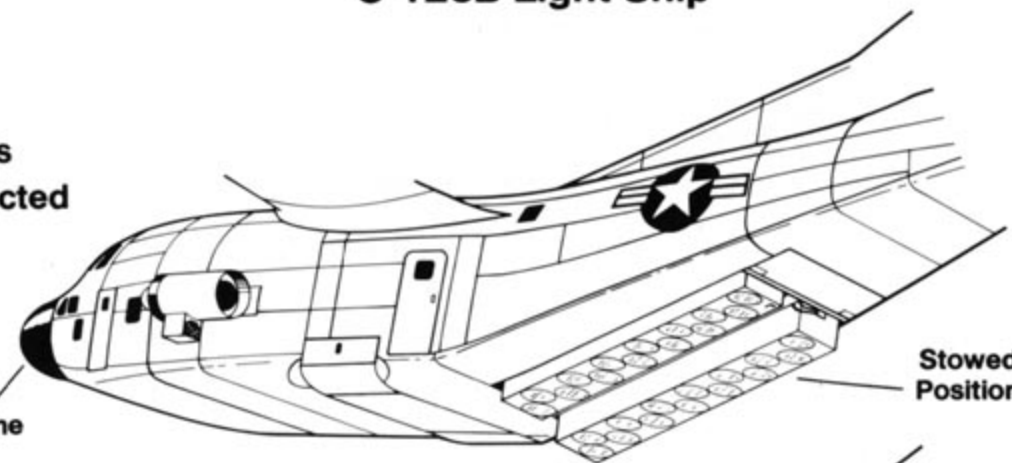


In 1966, a single C-123B was fitted with a special movable housing containing high intensity lamps carried on the lower tailgate. These lamps provided a long lasting constant light source capable of lighting a two mile diameter when the aircraft was at 12,000 foot altitude. The disadvantage over flares was the lights were affixed to the aircraft making it easy to track by enemy anti aircraft gunners. (USAF)

C-123B Light Ship

Lights Retracted

Radome



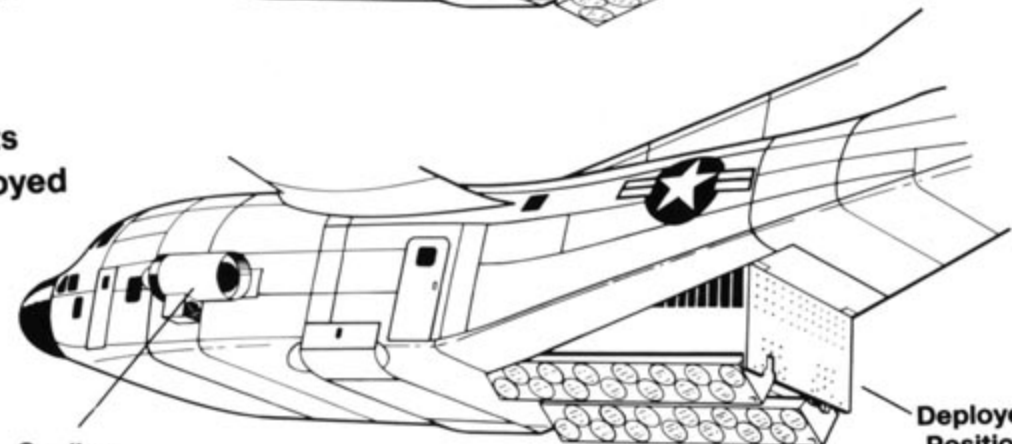
Stowed Position

Lights Deployed

Cooling Blower

High Intensity Lights

Deployed Position



Another NC-123B had a radome installed above the cockpit and infrared sensors mounted under the fuselage and tail. This NC-123B (55-4528) was used over the Ho Chi Minh Trail to detect enemy trucks and then to direct strikes on them by fighter-bombers. The aircraft was camouflaged Green, Brown and Tan over a two-tone Gray undersurface. (Tom Hansen)





HC-123B aircraft were used by the USCG in the search and rescue role, as well as the support transport role. The aircraft were overall Natural Metal with the nose, wing tips and tail in Yellow. The nose and wings had the Yellow outlined in Black. This HC-123B was assigned to Honolulu, Hawaii. (USCG via R.L. Scheina)



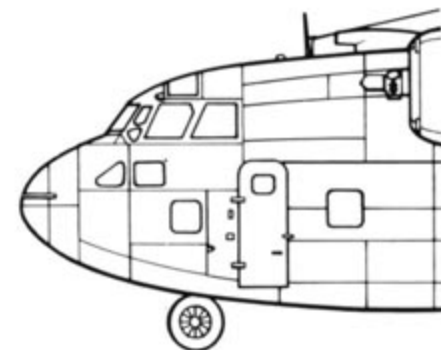
During 1958, the United States Coast Guard (USCG) began receiving the HC-123B. The HC-123B was simply a C-123B airframe modified with an AN/APN-158 search radar and radome in the nose. This HC-123B (55-4540) was assigned to the USCG base at Naples, Italy. (USCG via R.L. Scheina)

In 1958, the USCG began changing the high visibility markings from Yellow to International Orange, a high visibility fluorescent paint. This HC-123B (55-4505) was serving in the search role out of Naples, Italy, during late 1967. (Peltz via Taylor)



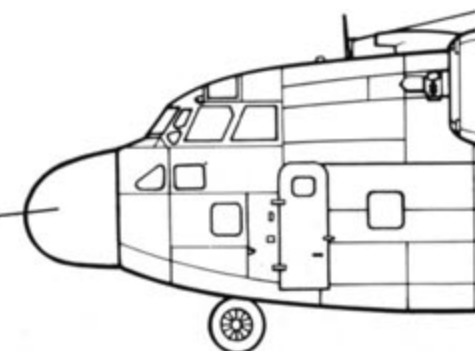
Nose Development

C-123B



HC-123B

Radome For The
AN/APN-158 Search
Radar





A modified C-123B (54-683) comes in for a landing at Shaw AFB, South Carolina on 26 September 1968. The aircraft was test fitted with the "Fulton Device" mounted on the nose. It was designed to snag a balloon lifted cable to rescue downed airmen. The aircraft was assigned to 4410th Special Operations Training Group, Hurlbert Field, Florida. (Jim Sullivan)



The USAF began painting all of their tactical aircraft in a three-tone camouflage during 1965. A USAF ground controller directs a camouflaged C-123B at Dau Tieng, South Vietnam during a resupply mission. The C-123 was able to land at most forward airstrips in South Vietnam. (USAF via Taylor)

A C-123B (56-4387) loads troops from the 18th Infantry, 1st Division at Bien Hoa, South Vietnam for a flight to Dau Tieng in January of 1967. The C-123 could accommodate some sixty fully equipped troops. The aircraft in the background is a USAF North American F-100 fighter-bomber. (USAF)

A heavy duty forklift loads a C-123B (57-6290) on an airfield in South Vietnam during 1967. 57-6290 was later converted to C-123K standards in 1969. The C-123 hauled everything from troops to palletized cargo. Southeast Asia camouflage consisted of two-tone Green and Tan uppersurfaces over Light Gray undersurfaces. (USAF via Taylor)





A C-123B (54-561) of the Royal Thai Air Force takes off from Yakota Air Base, Japan, on 7 December 1974. The C-123B had been assigned to a United Nations Detachment in South Korea. This aircraft was the tenth Fairchild-built C-123B. (S. Ohtaki via Taylor)

A C-123B from the Royal Saudi Air Force creates a dust storm as it taxis out for another mission. The RSAF procured six C-123Bs from USAF stocks during 1957, all aircraft serving with No 4 Squadron at Jeddah. (USAF)

A Venezuelan Air Force (FAV) C-123B (ex-USAF 57-6190). Venezuela received eighteen C-123Bs during 1958 under the Military Assistance Program. The C-123s remained in service until 1983 when they were replaced by Aeritalia G222s. The C-123 was called the "Pando" by the FAV pilots. (Col. Cesar Rincon, FAV)



YC-123D

There was no C-123C production variant since the proposed VC-123C staff transport was canceled when the USAF decided to purchase the Convair VC-131D.

The YC-123D was a re-engined Chase XC-123A, modified by Stroukoff Aircraft of Trenton, New Jersey. The four podded jet engines on the XC-123A were replaced by two Pratt and Whitney R-2800 air cooled radial engines and in this new configuration the aircraft, redesignated the YC-123D, made its first flight on 7 December 1954.

The engine change also brought about a change in the serial number from 47-787 (XC-123A) to 53-8068 (YC-123D). This change came about because the XC-123A was produced by Chase Aircraft and the YC-123D was extensively modified by Stroukoff Aircraft, becoming basically a new aircraft.

Fitted with a Boundary Layer Control (BLC) system, the YC-123D exhibited far greater low speed control and a greatly reduced takeoff and landing distance. The Boundary Layer Control system featured air under high pressure being blown over the wing upper-surface and the control surfaces. This made the wing and controls act as if the aircraft was flying at a much higher airspeed. Tests at the Wright Air Development Center at Dayton, Ohio showed that the YC-123D (at 50,000 pounds gross weight) had a takeoff distance of 850 feet, compared to 1,950 feet for a standard C-123B. The landing distance was also reduced from 1,200 feet to 755 feet.

The success of these tests prompted the USAF to issue a contract to Stroukoff for six additional YC-123Ds. In the event, the contract was short lived, due in part to another development by Stroukoff of the basic C-123 airframe, the YC-123E. This aircraft was fitted not only with BLC equipment, but also with *Pantobase* equipment which would enable the C-123 to land on any surface. As a result, no further orders were issued for YC-123Ds.



The sole YC-123D (53-8068) was the re-engined XC-123A. The jet pods used on the XC-123A were replaced with Pratt & Whitney R2800 radial engines and the vertical stabilizer was altered to the early C-123B configuration. The YC-123D was fitted with a Boundary Layer Control (BLC) system. (David Menard)

The YC-123D carried the Stroukoff Avitruk emblem on the nose, a special B L C marking (in Black) behind the cockpit windows and the Wright Air Development Center insignia on the fuselage behind the propeller warning stripe. The aircraft made its first flight on 7 December 1954. (David Menard)



YC-123E

Following the success of the Stroukoff YC-123D, a follow-on contract was issued for a new airframe that would employ not only the Boundary Layer Control (BLC) system but also the new *Pantobase* equipment. The *Pantobase* system consisted of a sealed fuselage, a pair of highly stressed water/snow skis and a pair of wing mounted floats. Using this system, a land based aircraft could be modified to operate from land, water, snow or ice.

The entirely new airframe (55-4031) was built at the West Trenton, New Jersey facility and first flown on 28 July 1955 from Mercer Airport. The YC-123E was powered by two Pratt and Whitney R-2800-99 radial engines driving four blade Hamilton Standard constant speed fully feathering and reversible propellers instead of the normal three blade Hamilton Standard units used on the C-123B.

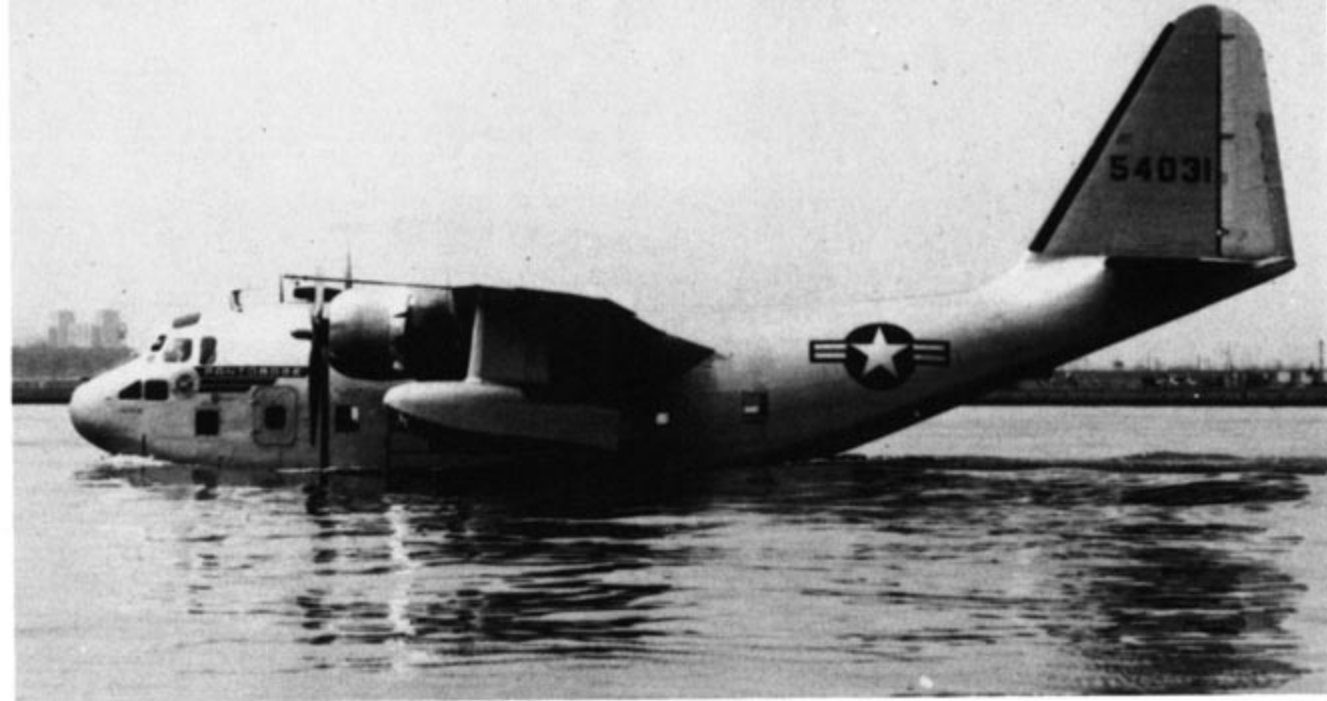
In addition to the *Pantobase* equipment, the crew escape doors were also modified. The doors were sealed and shortened, requiring the crew to enter and exit from the rear cargo door. Additionally, a sump pump was installed in the fuselage to keep any water leaks from sinking the aircraft.

After the initial builders trials, the aircraft was flown to the Mustin Naval Air Station located near the Philadelphia Navy Yard for water trials on the Delaware River. Takeoff from the water was accomplished by lowering the skis at about 20 miles per hour. The pilot gently eased back on the control column and the skis would act like a hydro-foil and raise the aircraft off the surface.

The performance of the YC-123E was reduced by about 2% due to the added drag of the wing mounted floats and the underbody skis. Empty weight increased from 31,058 pounds to 33,558 pounds and cruising speed was reduced from 190 mph (C-123B) to 179 mph (YC-123E).

The YC-123E proved to be completely amphibious and was tested extensively at Palm Beach AFB and Lake Okeechobee, Florida. Following these tests, the aircraft was flown to Bemidji, Minnesota for cold weather testing where it established a record for ski operations.

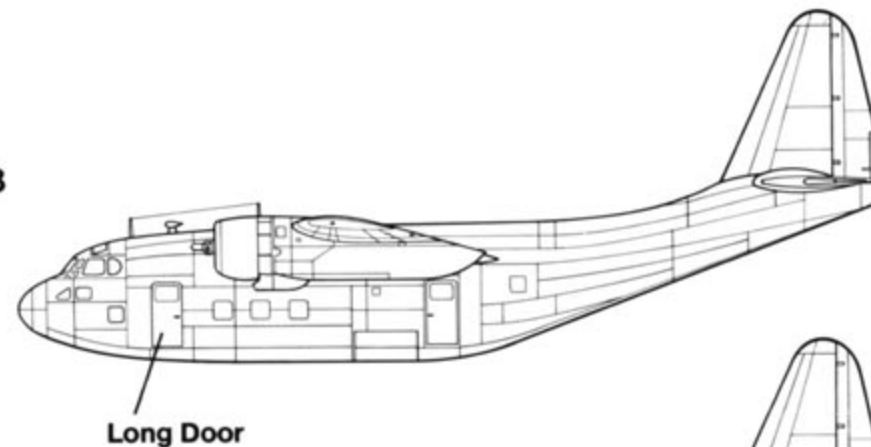
The Stroukoff YC-123E (55-4031) was designed to be operated from any surface: land, snow, ice, sand or water. It was fitted with underfuselage skis and wing mounted pontoons for water operations. The aircraft was built in the same basic configuration of XC-123 with Pratt and Whitney R2800 engines driving four blade propellers instead of the normal three blade units. (Balogh via Menard)



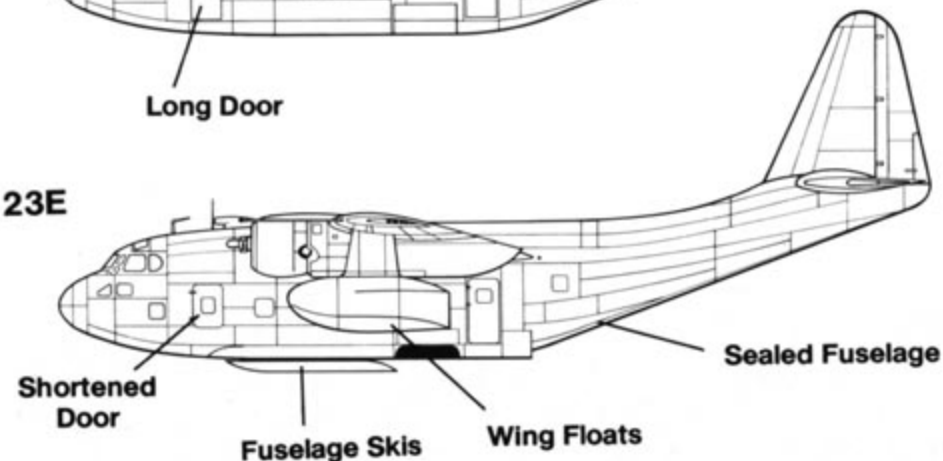
The Stroukoff YC-123E (55-4031) undergoes taxi tests in the Delaware River near the Philadelphia Navy Yard. The aircraft made its first flight from water on 28 July 1955. Designed by Michael Stroukoff, the YC-123E was a single prototype only and did not go into production. (USAF)

The YC-123E was then flown to the Wright Air Development Center, Dayton, Ohio for further testing during 1956. Following these tests the aircraft was placed into storage. Later, it was returned to Stroukoff Aircraft for further company tests relating to Boundary Layer Control on the Stroukoff XC-134.

XC-123



YC-123E





The sole YC-123E taxis out to the active runway at NAS Mustin Philadelphia, Pennsylvania during an air show in September of 1955. The *PANTOBASE* idea never quite caught on in USAF circles and no contracts were issued for the aircraft. (USAF)

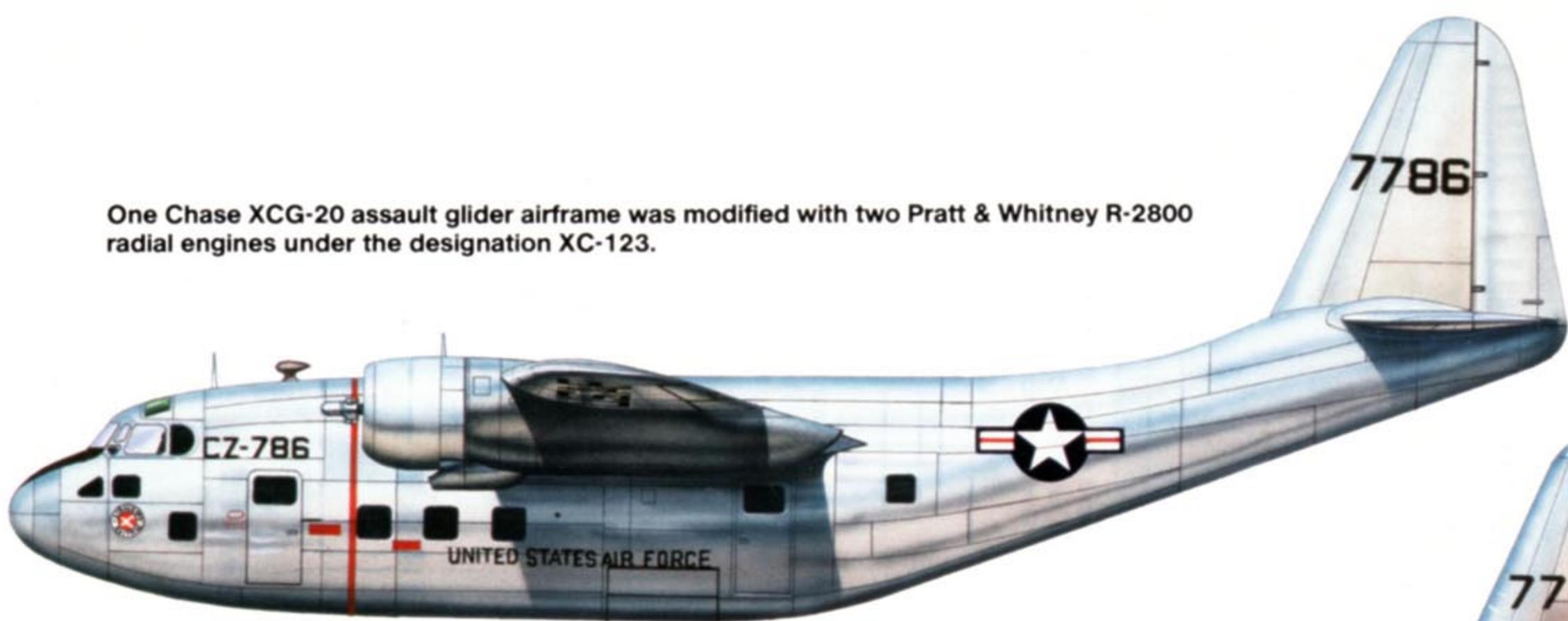
With its skis extended, the YC-123E lifts off from the Delaware River during flight tests at the Philadelphia Navy Yard in 1955. The underfuselage skis acted like a hydro-foil, lifting the aircraft off the water at a speed of some twenty knots. (USAF)



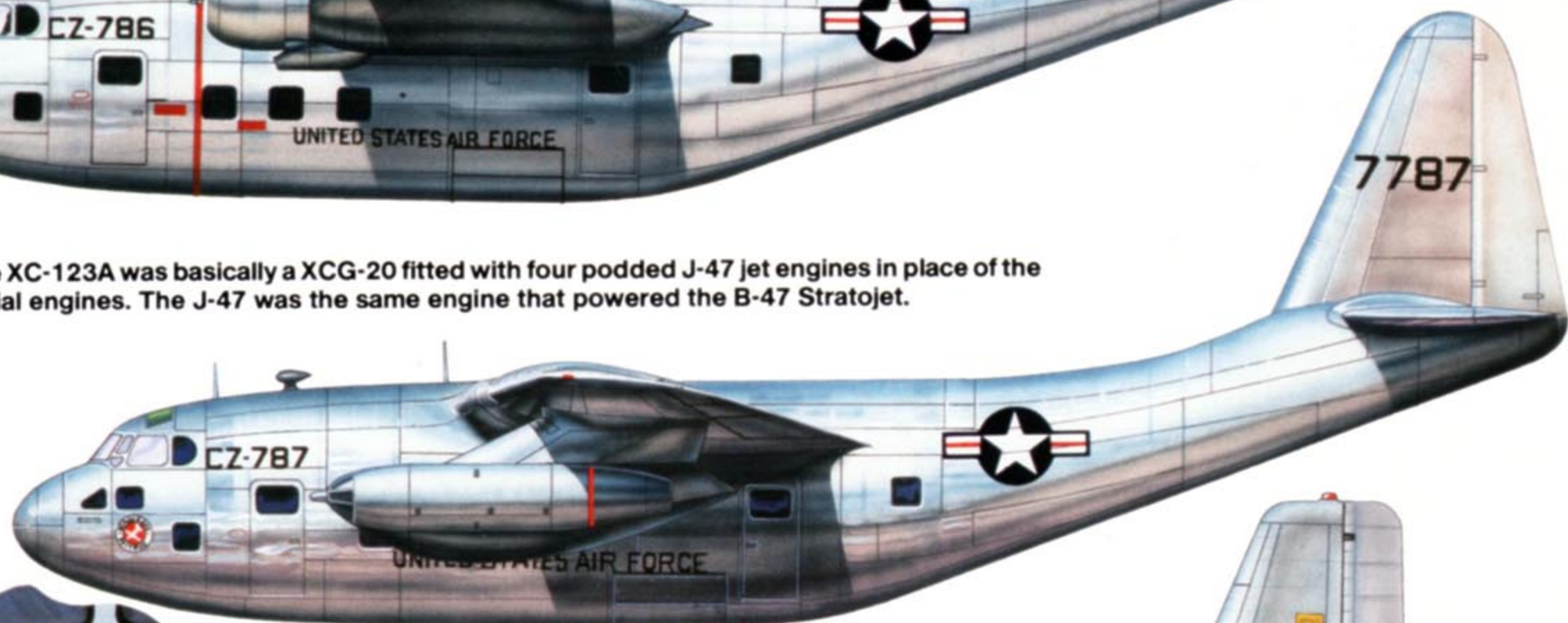
With its skis extended, the YC-123E flies over Pennsylvania during 1955. The YC-123E was basically an XC-123 airframe sealed for water landings. The aircraft was overall Natural Metal with standard USAF Markings and the *PANTOBASE* logo on the nose under the cockpit. (USAF)



One Chase XCG-20 assault glider airframe was modified with two Pratt & Whitney R-2800 radial engines under the designation XC-123.



The XC-123A was basically a XCG-20 fitted with four podded J-47 jet engines in place of the radial engines. The J-47 was the same engine that powered the B-47 Stratojet.

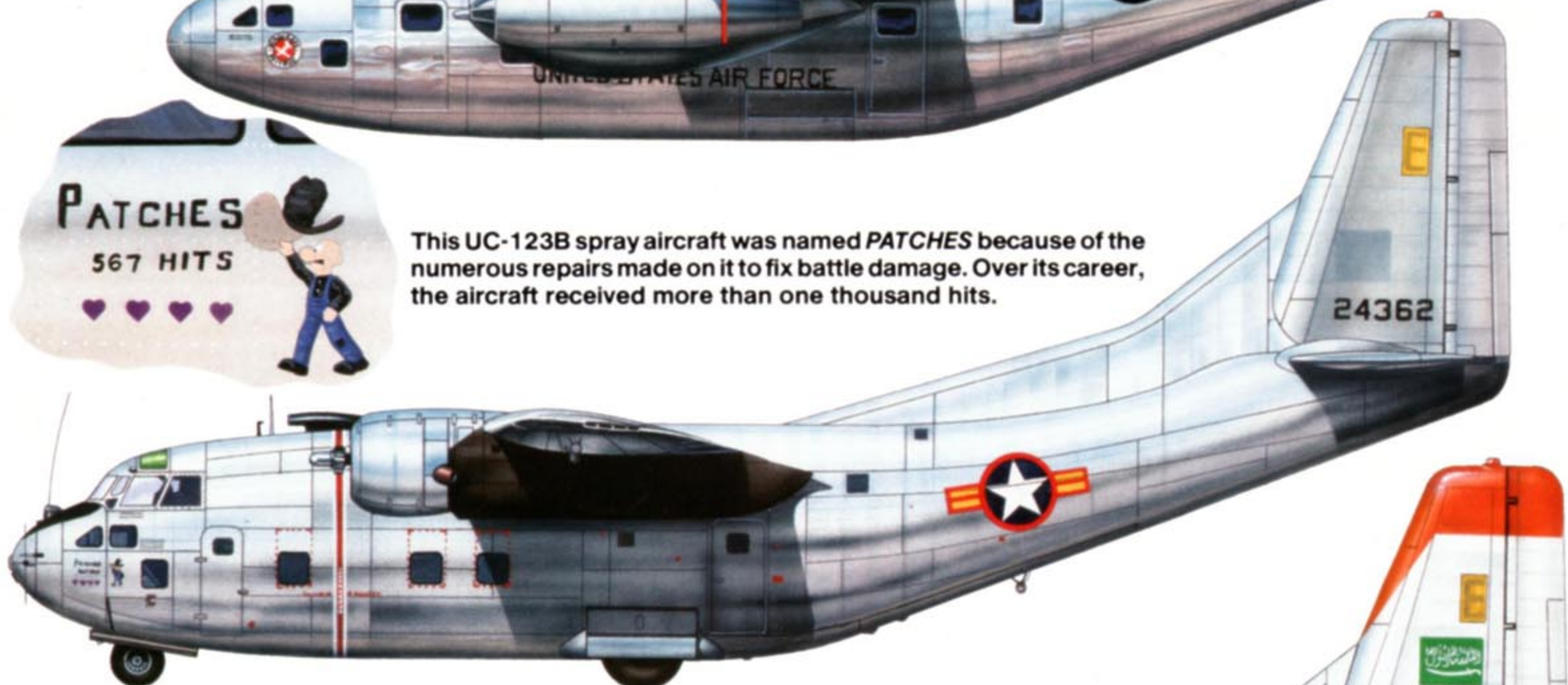


PATCHES

567 HITS



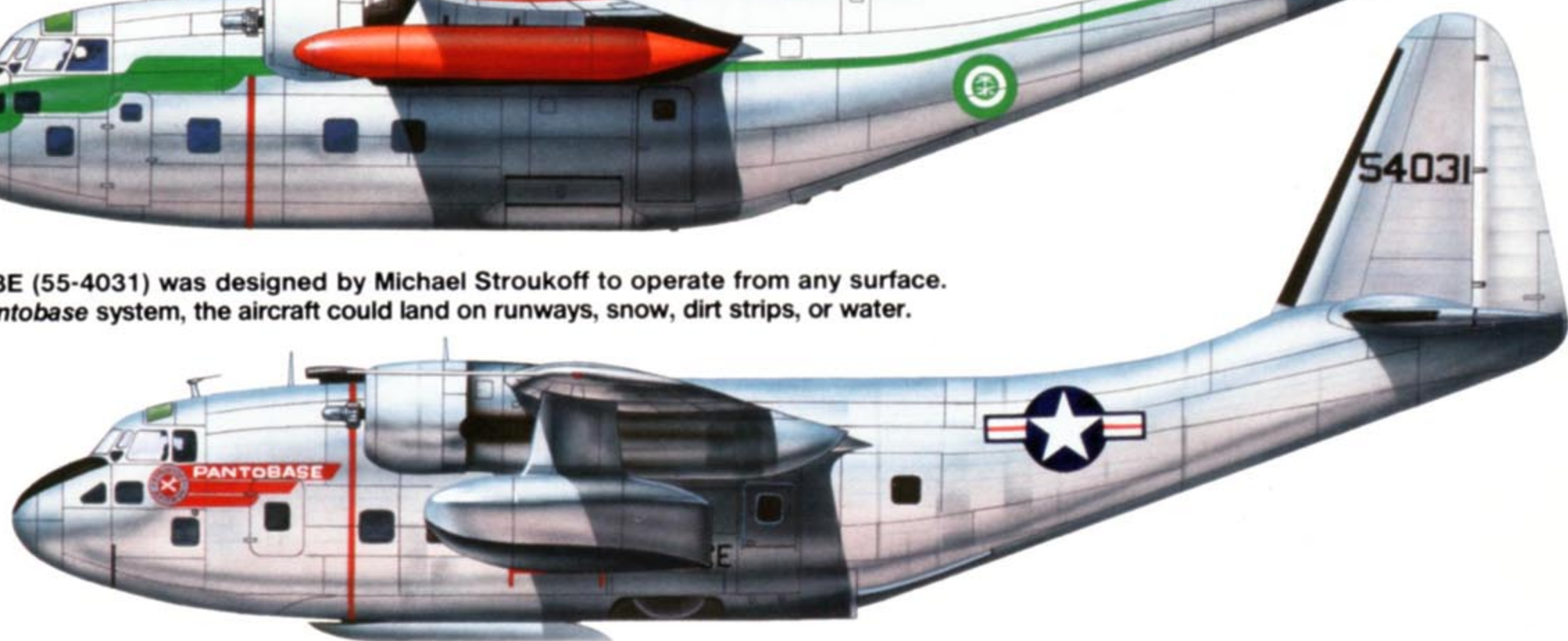
This UC-123B spray aircraft was named *PATCHES* because of the numerous repairs made on it to fix battle damage. Over its career, the aircraft received more than one thousand hits.



A C-123B of No 4 Squadron, Royal Saudi Air Force based at Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The RSAF received a total of six C-123Bs.



The YC-123E (55-4031) was designed by Michael Stroukoff to operate from any surface. With the *Pantobase* system, the aircraft could land on runways, snow, dirt strips, or water.



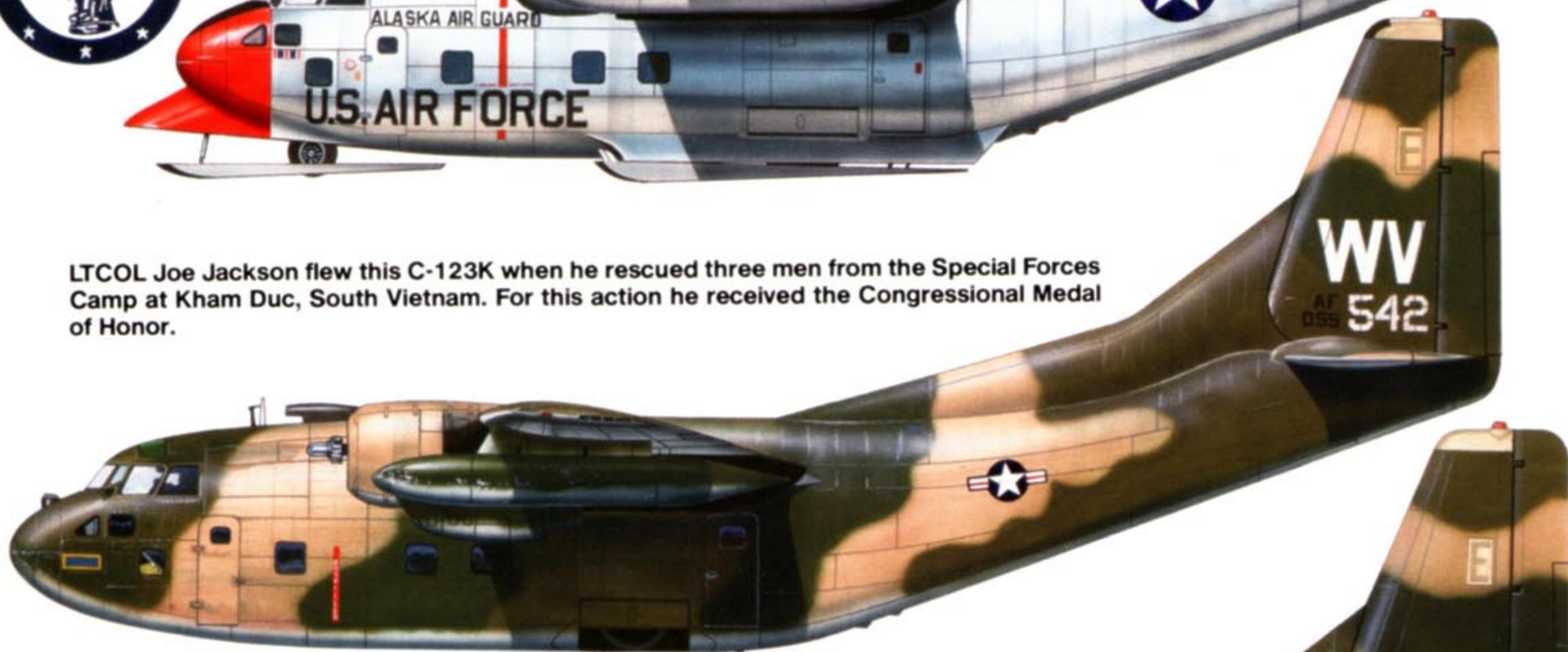
The YC-123H was a one of a kind aircraft developed by Fairchild to improve the C-123's short field performance. Experience gained with it led to the C-123K.



This C-123J (56-4394) of the 144th MAS, Alaska Air National Guard carried an Air Force Outstanding Unit Award ribbon painted on the nose.



LTCOL Joe Jackson flew this C-123K when he rescued three men from the Special Forces Camp at Kham Duc, South Vietnam. For this action he received the Congressional Medal of Honor.



One HC-123B from the Royal Thai Air Force was modified with Allison T56-A-07 turboprop engines under the designation C-123T.



This C-123B (54-698) was one of the NC/AC-123 Blackspot aircraft that was stripped of all the special gear, returned to the standard cargo configuration and flown as a transport.



YC-123H

During 1956, in the middle of the C-123B production run, Fairchild pulled one aircraft (company serial 20165) from the assembly line and began a modification program that would eventually lead to the YC-123H.

Completed in early 1957, the YC-123H (54-2956) featured a new wide track main landing gear taken from a Lockheed C-130A Hercules transport. The landing gear track was increased by 5.5 feet resulting in a thirty-four percent reduction in turning radius. The new gear also allowed for an increase in gross weight to 67,000 pounds. The prototype landing gear was tested under all types of conditions and on all types of terrain.

After the success of the earlier Fairchild C-123B jet augmentation program in 1955, the USAF let a contract to Fairchild in May of 1962 to further modify the YC-123H by installing two underwing mounted podded jet engines and a deceleration parachute system. These modifications were completed in July, less than 90 days following the signing of the contract. Following a series of taxi tests, the YC-123H took to the air for the first time on 30 July 1962.

Following company flight tests, the YC-123H was flown to Elgin AFB, Florida for evaluation against the C-130B, a YC-130B (an improved C-130), a BLC equipped NC-130 and a production C-123B. The evaluations took place during October of 1962 and, later, the YC-123H was sent to Vietnam for tests in the counter-insurgency support role (January through April of 1963).

The wing mounted General Electric CJ-610-1 (J-85-15) engines installed on the YC-123H produced 2,850 lbst while using standard 115/145 aviation gasoline. The increased thrust of the jet engines enabled the YC-123H to increase its payload to 20,165 pounds (10,572 pounds for a C-123B). Takeoff distance was also reduced from 940 feet (C-123B) to 750 feet (YC-123H).

During the tests conducted in South Vietnam, the YC-123H flew a total of 180 missions (360 flight hours) at an average gross weight of 65,000 pounds. The YC-123H flew into fields as short as 880 feet, while the average field length was only 1,500 feet.

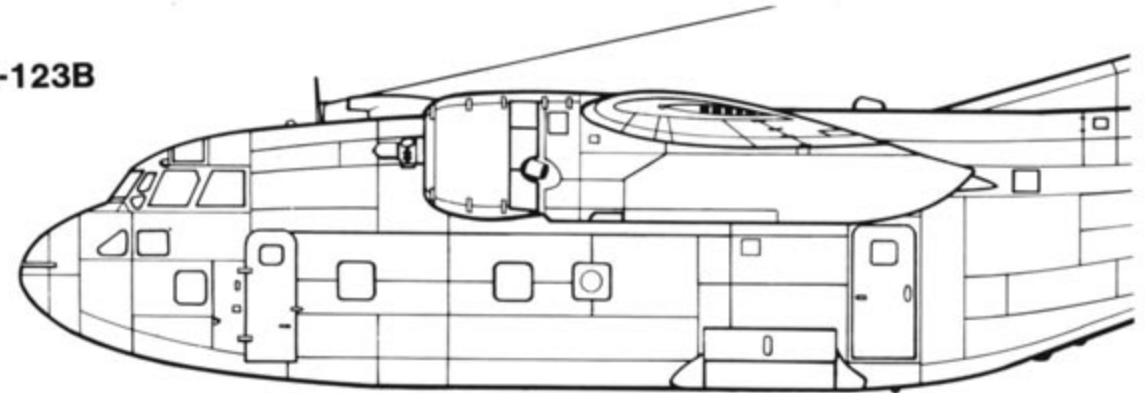
During the evaluation, the YC-123H was flown by the 315th Group. Upon completion of the tests in Vietnam, the YC-123H was returned to the United States. Additional testing took place during the balance of 1963 until the aircraft was destroyed in an accident in late 1963.

The flight testing of the YC-123H proved successful and the knowledge gained with this aircraft was carried over to the C-123K. In effect, the YC-123H served as the prototype for the C-123K.

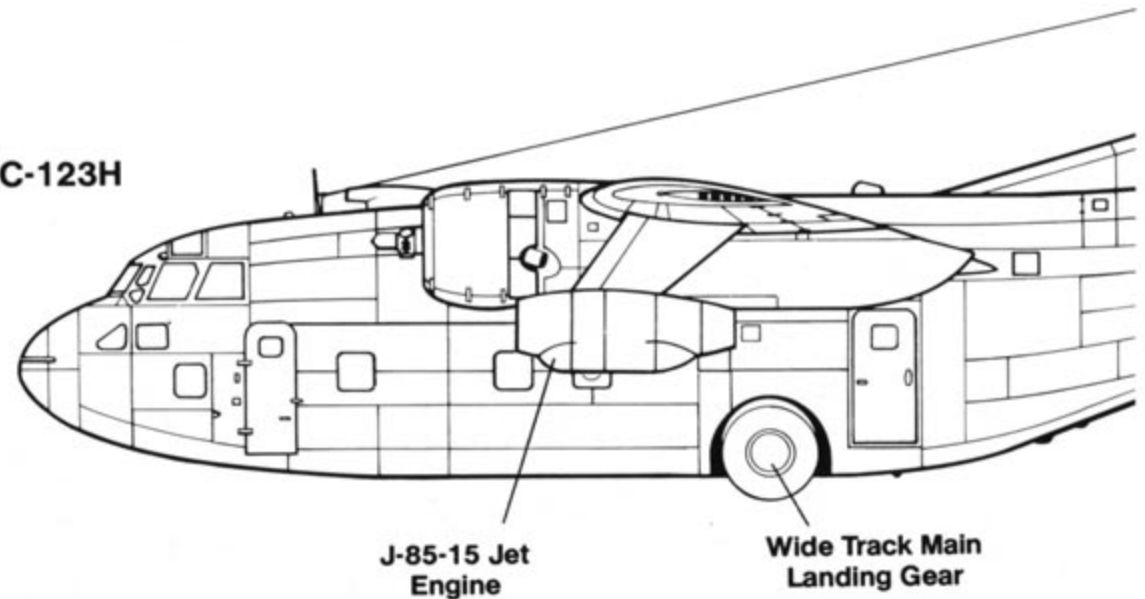


The pilot of the YC-123H has opened the braking parachute door (on the lower rear fuselage) in preparation for landing. The aircraft was overall Natural Metal with Orange bands on the nose, fuselage and wings. The wide track landing gear components were from a Lockheed C-130. (Fairchild)

C-123B



YC-123H





The YC-123H (54-2956) was also evaluated under desert conditions during 1963. The wide track landing gear system increased stability on the ground and the auxiliary jet pods proved invaluable for both safety and performance. (NASM)



The YC-123H was evaluated in South Vietnam in the Counter Insurgency (COIN) support role during the early months of 1963. The aircraft flew over 180 missions and flew over 500 flight hours during the evaluation. During the evaluation, the YC-123H was flown at an average gross weight of 65,000 pounds. (NASM)

The YC-123H deploys its twenty-eight foot deceleration parachute as it prepares to land. The parachute enabled the YC-123H to make a far steeper angled approach which decreased the time the aircraft was exposed to enemy small arms fire. (NASM)



C-123J

Once the U. S. began operating the Distant Early Warning (DEW) line in Alaska during the mid-1950s, the Air Force realized it needed an aircraft that could deliver supplies and other materials to the crews manning the remote radar sites that made up the line. The USAF found that the Douglas C-47 was not capable of a full gross weight takeoff from a snow runway and sought a replacement aircraft.

During 1955, Fairchild had experimented with mounting Fairchild 1,000 lbst J44 R-3 jet engines on the wingtips of the prototype Chase C-123B (52-1627). These engines were small expendable turbojets used on target drones, such as the Ryan Firebee. The J44s not only provided additional thrust for takeoff, they also provided a margin of safety in the event of an engine failure on takeoff, often disastrous in a C-123B.

In 1957, the 5040th Operations Squadron of the Alaskan Air Command began receiving Fairchild C-123Bs for use in supplying the extensive communications and DEW line sites spread all over Alaska. Pilots soon found that, like the C47, the C-123B was a little underpowered and could not take off from snow at full gross weight.

Remembering Fairchild's tests with jet augmentation, the USAF requested that Fairchild modify ten production C-123Bs with J44 jet engines under the designation C-123J (serials 54-647 and 56-4388 through 56-4396).

The first C-123B aircraft modified to the C-123J standards was also equipped with a retractable ski system attached to the landing gear. The first flight of a ski equipped C-123J

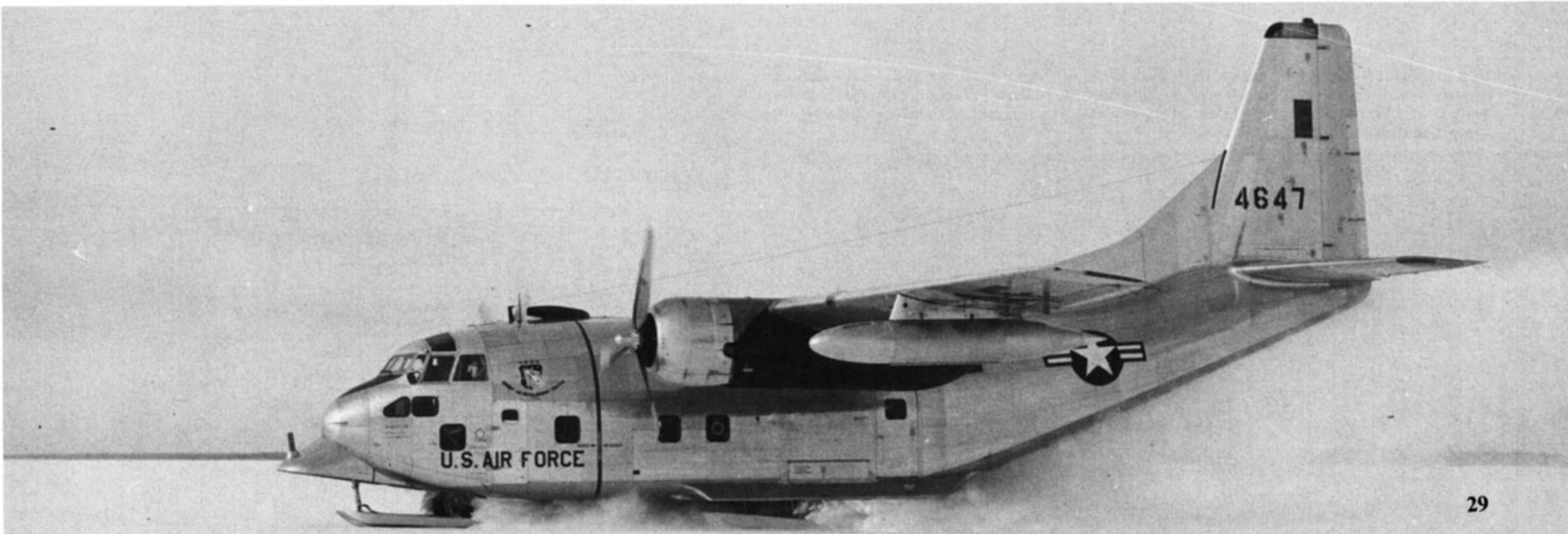
was on 23 October 1957. The skis extended and retracted along with the landing gear and the nose gear ski was fitted with a housing that faired the ski into the nose. Following the success of the ski equipped C-123J, three other aircraft were also modified with ski landing gear. (56-4391, 56-4394 and 4395).

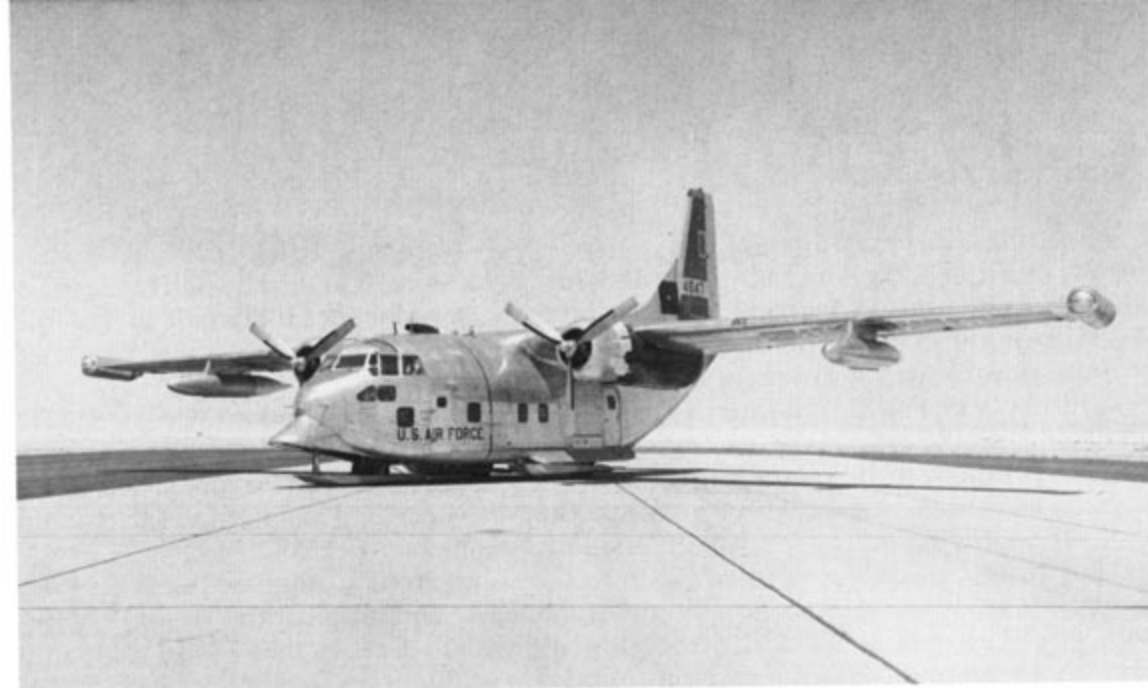
The C-123Js were assigned to the 4083rd Strategic Wing, Strategic Air Command, at Harmon Air Base, Newfoundland. Later they were transferred to the 144th Medium Air Transport Squadron, Alaskan Air National Guard. The unit began operating the C-123J during 1958 and the pilots found the C-123J far superior to the C-123B, due in part to the increased power from the J-44 jet engines.

While in Alaska, the C-123Js were used for all sorts of missions, from assisting in search and rescue operations to supporting Harvard University in glacier research. The ski-equipped C-123Js were used to fly teams out to Taku Glacier near Juneau. The ski equipped C-123Js were affectionately called "Ski-Birds," since they could land virtually anywhere in Alaska. The C-123Js flew with the 144th Transport Squadron until 1973 when they were replaced by Lockheed C-130s.

One C-123B (55-4558/N123) was operated by the Federal Aviation Authority (FAA) for flight checks of navigational aids and Instrument Landing Systems (ILS) throughout Alaska. This aircraft was also modified to C-123J standards. A few C-123Js remain, mainly in museums. The Alaskan Aviation Heritage Museum in Anchorage, Alaska has a C-123J (56-4390) on display, although it is in civilian markings and colors. The Alaskan Air National Guard, also in Anchorage, has a C-123J (56-4395) on display in a Natural Metal finish with the Red-Orange identification panels.

The Air Force tested a ski landing gear on this C-123B (54-647) which was later re-designated as the C-123J. The ski equipped C-123Js were used in Alaska to resupply the remote Distant Early Warning line radar and communications sites. (Fairchild)





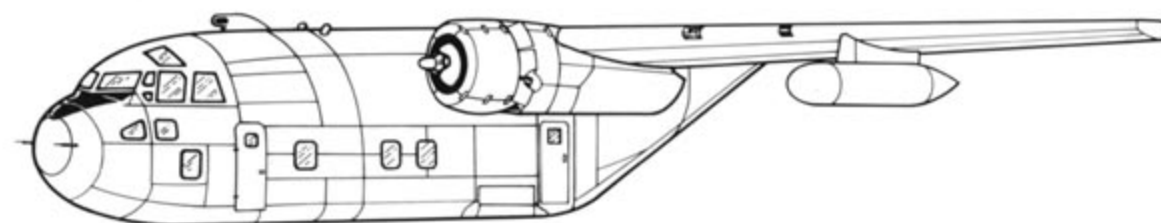
The C-123J also featured wingtip mounted 1,000 lbst Fairchild J44 jet engines. These engines were normally used to power Ryan Firebee target drones. The jet engines were intended to provide the C-123J with the additional thrust needed to make full gross weight takeoffs from snow runways. (USAF via Cheryl Gumm)

The nose ski on the C-123J was faired into the fuselage underside with a large streamlined fairing. The ski landing gear was fully retractable and at least three C-123J aircraft were configured with the skis for service in Alaska.

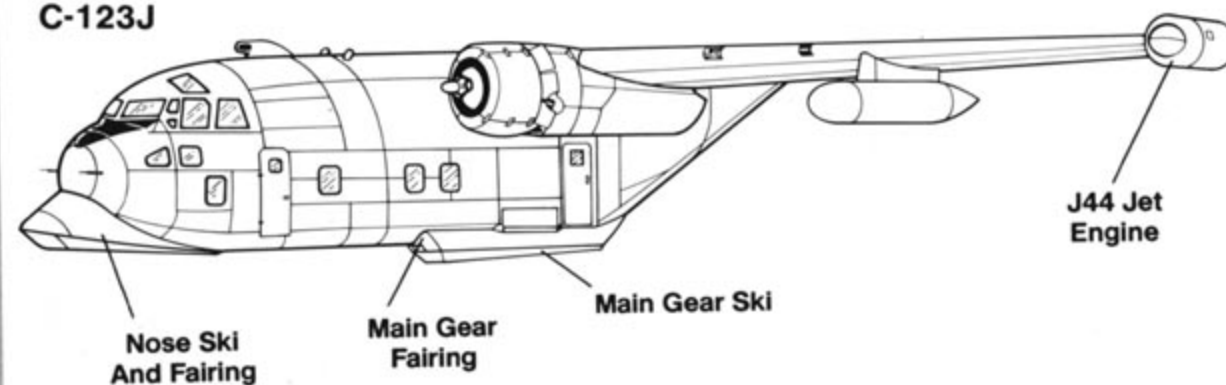
This C-123J (56-4391) was assigned to the Alaska Air National Guard at Kulis Air National Guard Base, Anchorage, Alaska during early 1968. The 144th Air Transport Squadron began flying C-123Js in 1960 and flew them for some sixteen years until they were replaced by the larger Lockheed C-130. (Norm Taylor)

Ski Landing Gear

C-123B



C-123J



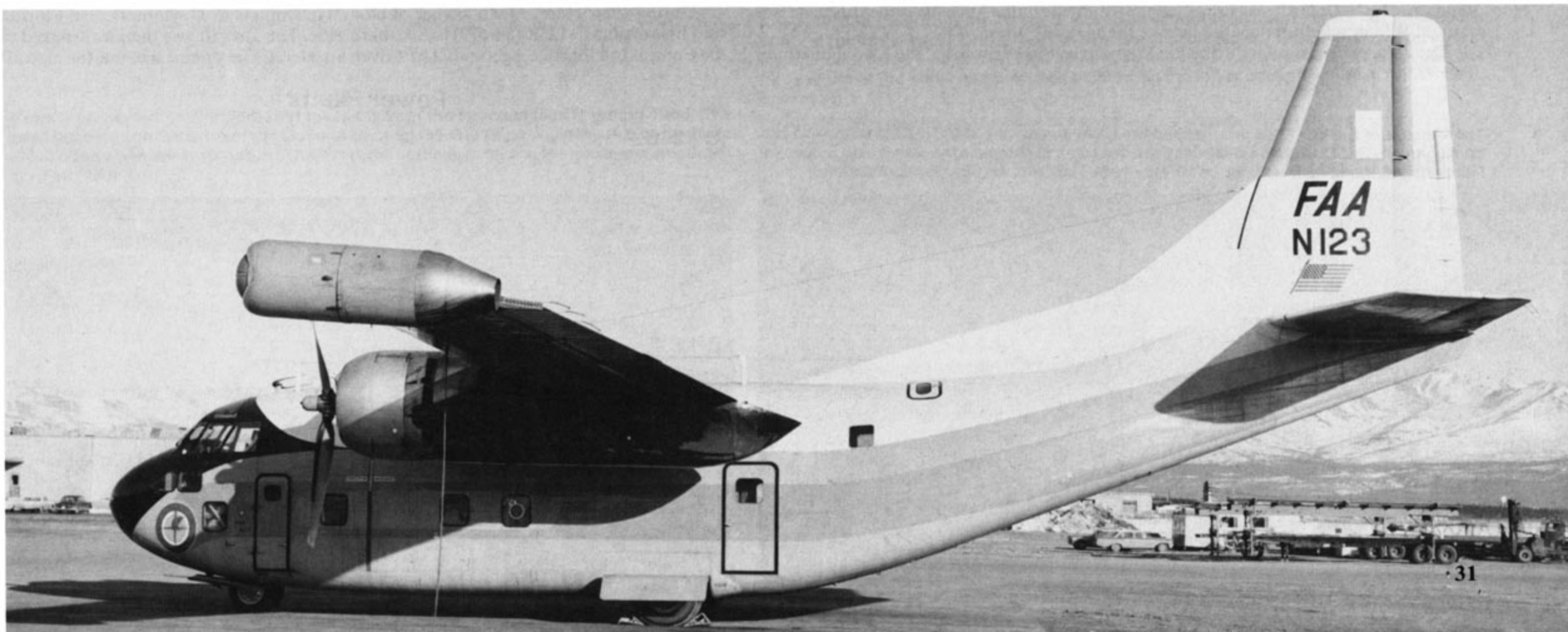


The Alaskan Air Guard was supplied ten C-123Js for resupply mission to the remote radar sites in Alaska and the Arctic. This C-123J (56-4390) was not equipped with ski landing gear, the aircraft overall Natural Metal with Red nose and tail Arctic markings. (Norm Taylor)



A ski equipped C-123J (56-4394) of the Alaskan ANG sits on the rain soaked ramp at Anchorage, Alaska during March of 1970. The wheel landing gear protruded through the skis allowing the C-123J to land on hard surface runways as well as snow. (Norm Taylor)

The FAA used one C-123J (55-4558) that carried the U.S. civil registration number N123. The aircraft was used to check navigational aids and Instrument Landing Systems (ILS) in Alaska. (Norm Taylor)



C-123K

Following the success of the YC-123H tests in South Vietnam during 1962, the USAF issued Fairchild a contract to modify 183 C-123B aircraft with auxiliary jet engines mounted under the wings under the designation C-123K. These aircraft would be sent to Vietnam for use in the intra-theater transport role.

The contract called for the installation of an underwing pylon mounted 2,850 lbst General Electric J85-GE-17 auxiliary turbojet engine under each wing. The main landing gear was also fitted with the Goodyear high capacity wheels, brakes and anti-skid units. A stall warning system was also installed, which consisted of a computer unit, an angle of attack transmitter on the starboard wing and a stall warning stick shaker.

The first C-123K (54-581) flew from Hagerstown, Maryland on 27 May 1966 and the last C-123K was delivered in September of 1969. As soon as all testing had been certified and aircrew training completed, the first C-123Ks were deployed to South Vietnam to replace the aging C-123Bs. The C-123Ks were initially assigned to the 315th Tactical Airlift Wing at Phan Rang Air Base. The UC-123B aircraft serving with the 12th Air Commando Squadron were also modified to C-123K standards and a total of thirty-four UC-123Bs were converted to UC-123Ks.

With the exception of the jet engine pods, the C-123K was externally identical to the earlier C-123B. Empty weight rose from 31,058 (C-123B) to 35,366 pounds (C-123K). Maximum takeoff weight remained the same for both aircraft at 60,000 pounds and the maximum speed rose to 228 mph.

The single VC-123B (56-4375) used by GEN Westmoreland as his personal transport was also converted to C-123K standards during 1968 and promptly returned to South Vietnam. The VC-123K was christened the "White Whale" since the upper fuselage was painted White to help reflect the heat of the tropical sun.

The only transport pilot during the Vietnam war to be awarded the Medal of Honor

The success of the YC-123H program led the USAF to convert 183 C-123Bs to the C-123K configuration. This C-123B (54-581) was the first aircraft to complete the conversion process at Fairchild and made its first flight on 27 May 1966 Hagerstown, Maryland. (Fairchild)



was LTCOL Joe M. Jackson of the 311th Air Commando Squadron (ACS). A C-123K pilot, LTCOL Jackson was on a check ride with MAJ Jessie Campbell when they received a radio call for help from the U.S. Special Forces Camp at Kham Duc. With total disregard for his own safety, he landed at the besieged airfield and rescued the remaining members of the Combat Control team from death or capture at the hands of the North Vietnamese Army (NVA). For his gallantry, he was awarded the Medal of Honor. MAJ Campbell received the Air Force Cross and the rest of the crew was awarded the Silver Star.

The last USAF C-123K mission in South Vietnam was flown on 14 June 1972. On landing, the aircraft was turned over to the South Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF). Training for VNAF C-123 crews had begun in 1970. VNAF C-123 pilots began their training at Lockbourne AFB, Ohio, qualifying as copilots. Upon return to South Vietnam, the Vietnamese pilots flew with the 315th Troop Carrier Wing alongside USAF pilots.

The first all Vietnamese C-123K unit, the 421st Transport Squadron (421st TS) was formed in April of 1971. Following the success of the 421st TS, two other squadrons were formed, the 423rd and 425th, all serving under the 53rd Tactical Wing, at Tan Son Nhut Air Base, Saigon.

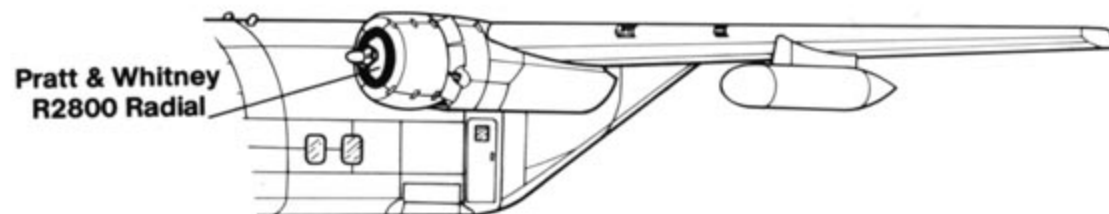
The C-123K was also used by the 606th Special Operation Squadron stationed at Nakhon Phanom Air Base, Thailand, not only in the transport role but also in the flare ship mission. This role, called "Candlestick," had C-123Ks dropping flares in support of friendly troops in Cambodia and Laos.

The USAF also supplied a number of allied air forces with C-123Ks from their inventory in South Vietnam. Thailand, Cambodia and the Philippines all received C-123Ks, the majority being taken from the 315th Strategic Operations Wing. Upon the U. S. withdrawal from South Vietnam in 1973, all C-123s in the USAF were turned over to the USAF Reserves.

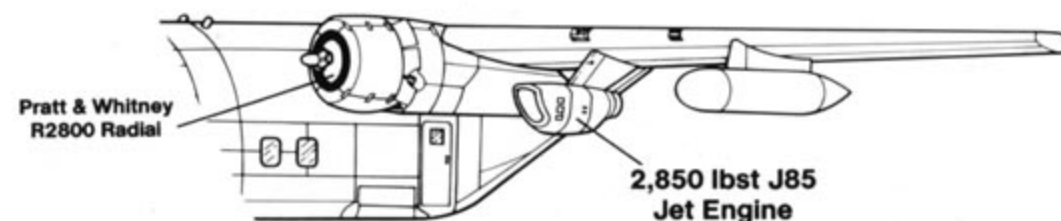
During 1986, Harry Doan, owner of Doan Helicopters in Daytona Beach, Florida sold his surplus C-123K (54-679) to Southern Aire. The aircraft was then transferred to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Given an overall Gray paint scheme, the aircraft

Power Plants

C-123B



C-123K



was given the civil registration N4410F and deployed to Central America. The aircraft was shot down over Nicaragua and the only survivor was Eugene Hassenfus, an American working for the CIA supplying arms to the Contras who were engaged in a guerrilla war with the Sandanistas of Nicaragua.

The U. S. State Department operates four C-123Ks to carry supplies for the Narcotics Assistance Units in the northern South American area, especially the Huallaga Valley of Peru. The aircraft are painted overall Gray and have a radome installed on the nose. The radar appears to be similar to the type employed by the Sikorsky HH-3F Pelican. During 1989, one of the C-123Ks was sabotaged while it sat on the ramp at Bogota, Columbia, a victim of the long and ongoing drug war with the Medellin Cartel.

A few countries are expected to retain their C-123Ks well into the 1990s, including El Salvador, South Korea, Laos, Taiwan, Thailand and the Philippines.

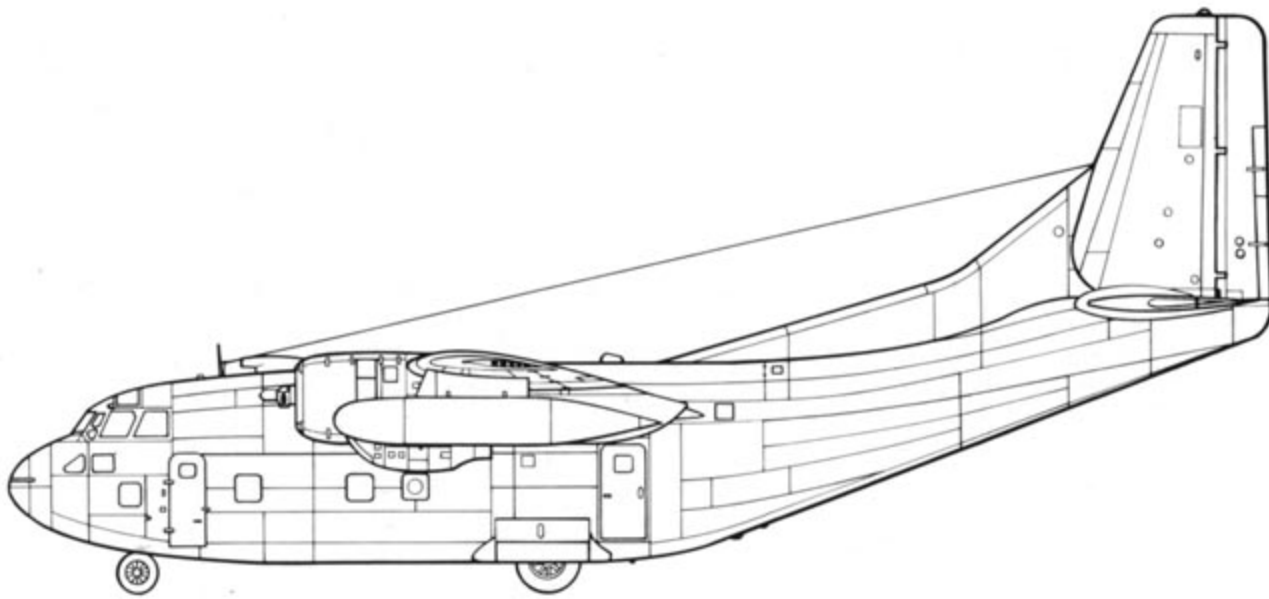


This C-123K (54-683) served with the 4408th Combat Crew Training Squadron at Eglin Air Force Base, Florida. C-123 crews were trained in short field operations at Eglin. This particular C-123K had been previously fitted with a Fulton Recovery System on the nose. (USAF via R. Bankston)

A C-123K (54-692) from the 319th Special Operations Squadron (SOS), 1st Operations Wing, at Hurlburt Field, Florida, flies out over the Gulf of Mexico. The aircraft was painted in the standard three tone camouflage authorized in 1965 for use in South Vietnam. The last three digits of the serial number were painted on the lower cockpit window. (USAF via R. Bankston)

A newly converted C-123K (54-581) takes off from the Fairchild facility during 1966. The small openings on the sides of the General Electric J85-GE-17 jet engines are blow in doors which open when the engines are at high throttle settings to take in the maximum amount of air. (Fairchild)





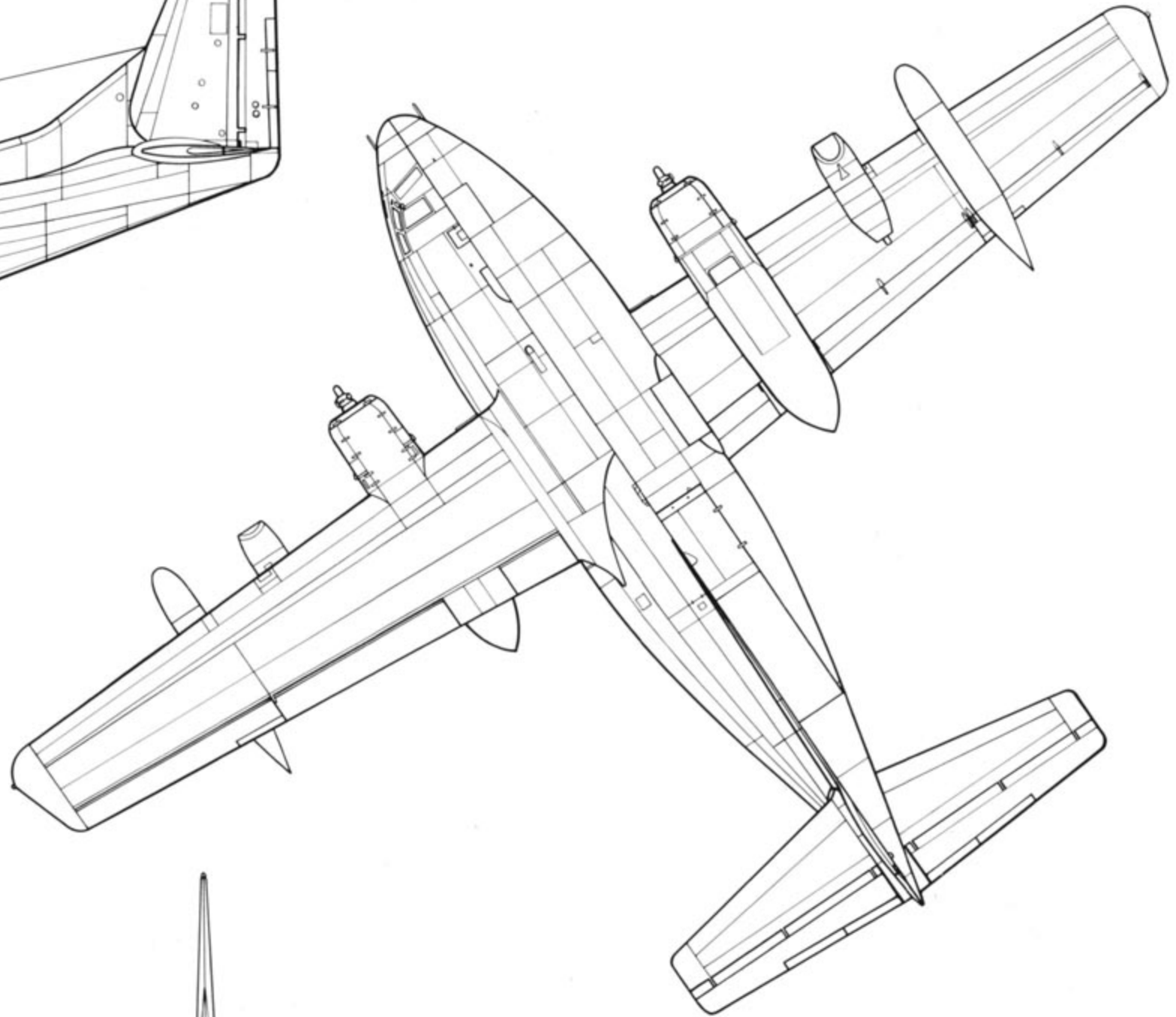
Specifications

Fairchild C-123K Provider

Wingspan110 feet
Length75 feet 9 inches
Height34 feet 1 inch
Empty Weight 36,116 pounds
Maximum Weight72,500 pounds
Powerplant.....Two 2,300 hp pratt & Whitney R2800-99W radial engines and two General Electric 2,850 lbst J85-GE-17 turbojets

Armament.....None

Performance
Maximum Speed228 mph
Service ceiling32,000 feet
Range1,470 miles
CrewThree





A C-123K (54-694) makes a stopover at Elmendorf AFB, Alaska, while enroute to South Vietnam during October of 1967. C-123Bs in Vietnam were rotated back to the U.S. for conversion to the C-123K standard. All C-123Ks serving in Vietnam in the tactical transport role were painted in the three-tone SEA camouflage. (Norm Taylor)



A C-123K (54-612) of the 319th Special Operations Squadron flies over the North Florida countryside on a crew training flight. This aircraft has an FM radio whip antenna mounted on the nose. FM radios were used to contact ground forces. (USAF via R. Bankston)

This C-123K (54-692), on the ramp at Edwards AFB, California, carries the AG tail code of the 319th Special Operations Squadron (SOS). Former C-123B crews re-trained in the use of the jet assist before being sent to Vietnam. (USAF)



This C-123K (54-700) served with the 319th Special Operations Squadron, 1st Special Operations Wing (SOW) and was based at Hurlburt Field, Florida, during July of 1971. The insignia of the 1st SOW was carried on the nose and the Tactical Air Command badge was carried on the fin. (Norm Taylor)





A C-123K 54-696 from the 315th Special Operations Wing flies a paradrop mission over the Mekong Delta in South Vietnam during March of 1969. The main landing gear doors have been removed, a common practice in Vietnam because mud from remote airstrips would build up within the wheel well, clogging the well. (USAF)

U.S. Navy Seabees wait to board a C-123K (55-4509) at An Tho, South Vietnam. 55-4509 was an ex-Coast Guard HC-123B with the search radar radome removed and the C-123K conversion. The C-123K was used extensively for the movement of men and supplies throughout Vietnam. (USAF)



A C-123K (54-654) taxis past a makeshift control tower at Fire Base Phout Vinh, South Vietnam in October of 1970. The C-123K was from the 19th Special Operations Squadron, 315th Strategic Operations Wing based at Phan Rang, Vietnam. (USAF)

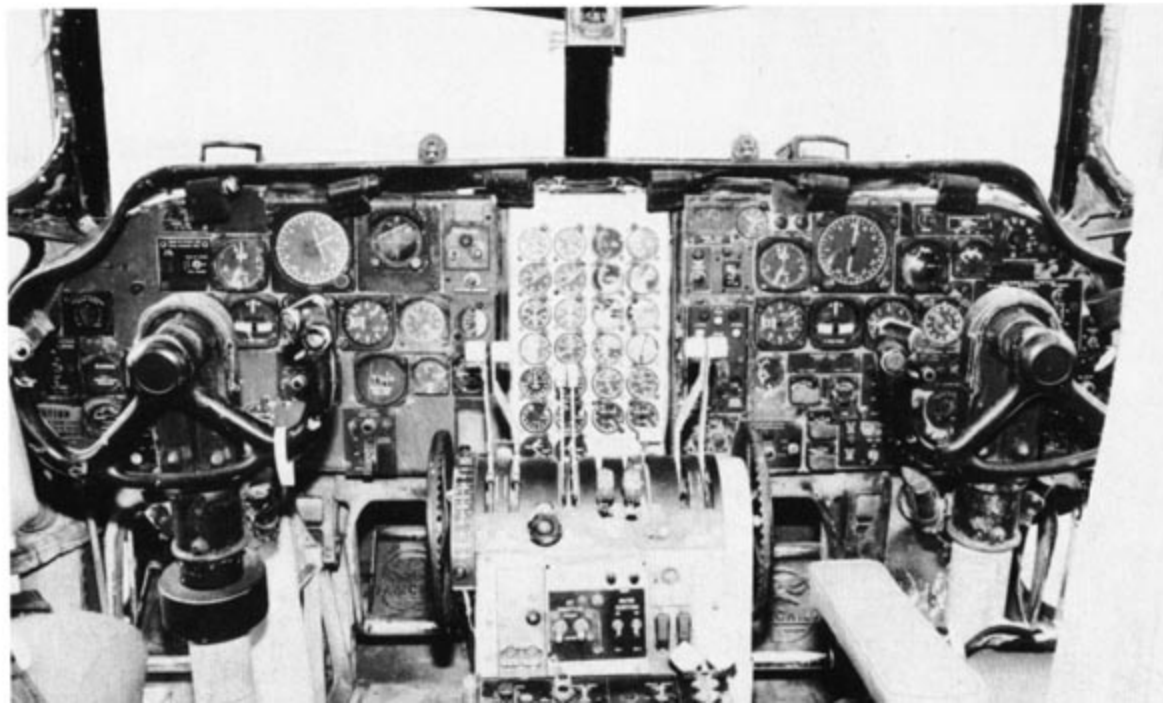




Some of the Tactical Transports Operating in the forward control zones of Vietnam, such as this C-123K (54-493), had a portion of the upper wing surface and stabilizers painted White as a recognition aid. This aircraft was assigned to the 315th SOW, Phan Rang. (USAF)

General Westmoreland's VC-123B was converted to C-123K standards, becoming the sole VC-123K. The aircraft featured a slide in module containing airline seats and airconditioning for passenger comfort. The aircraft had the upper fuselage painted White which led to its name, the *White Whale*. (Norm Taylor)

The instrument panel layout of the C-123K was typical of most transport aircraft produced during the immediate post Second World War years. The pilot's control column was equipped with a stick shaker as a stall warning system. (Harry Doan)





This C-123K (54-5698) of the 310th Tactical Airlift Squadron is parked on the ramp at Phu Cat Air Base, Vietnam during January of 1971, with the loading ramp down. The 310th, like the 311th, painted the outer wing panels and horizontal stabilizers White. (Norm Taylor)



A C-123K (54-626) from the 311th Tactical Airlift Squadron leaves the revetment area at Phu Cat Air Base, Vietnam, during April of 1971. The aircraft has the outer wing panels and horizontal stabilizers painted White, as is the aircraft number, 626, on the nose window. (Norm Taylor)

The most famous UC-123B, *Patches* was also converted to UC-123K standards. The aircraft was hit and repaired (patched) over 1,000 times during its use as an aerial spray application plane. *Patches* was used not only to spray defoliant (Agent Orange) but also as a mosquito sprayer as well. (Norm Taylor)

This C-123K (55-4542) was flown by LTCOL Joe Jackson when he rescued the three Americans at the Special Forces Camp at Kham Duc, South Vietnam on 12 May 1968. For this heroic rescue he was awarded the Medal of Honor, the only transport pilot decorated with America's highest honor during the Vietnam war. (USAF)





A UC-123K makes a spray run over a Vietnamese jungle. The defoliant would cause the leaves to fall, denying the Viet Cong hiding places. UC-123K spray planes flew at altitudes as low as 100-150 feet and speeds of 120 knots, making them easy targets for anti-aircraft fire. (Via Jack Spey)



Smoke billows from the number one engine as a C-123K (56-4359) gets the thumbs up signal from the ground crewman. 56-4359 was assigned to the 311th Tactical Airlift Squadron at Binh Thuy, South Vietnam during July of 1970. The flat bed truck in the background is loaded with palletized supplies to load on the next aircraft. (USAF)

A C-123K (54-637) of the 310th Tactical Airlift Squadron on the active runway at Phu Cat Air base, South Vietnam in July of 1971. The flaps are in the fully deployed position in preparation to takeoff as the pilot goes through his check list. (Norm Taylor)

A C-123K (55-4544) runs up its engine in an aircraft revetment at Da Nang, South Vietnam. 55-4544 carries the standard SEA three-tone camouflage scheme authorized in 1965. The tail code, WM, indicates this aircraft was serving with the 310th Air Commando Squadron based at Phan Rang, South Vietnam. (Hansen via Mutza)





A C-123K (55-4550) undergoes refurbishment at Davis-Monthan AFB, Arizona on 25 March 1971. The aircraft would later be repainted in SEA camouflage and sent to Vietnam. It appears that the aircraft was undergoing a landing gear retraction test. (Lock via N. Taylor)

This C-123K (57-6294) was the last C-123B built by Fairchild and was converted to C-123K standards. 6294 served with the 356th Tactical Airlift Squadron at Lockbourne AFB, Ohio. C-123s served with USAF Reserve Squadrons into the mid-1980s. (Norm Taylor)



This C-123K (54-650) served with the 355th Tactical Airlift Squadron, Air Force Reserve based at Pease AFB, New Hampshire during 1972. This same aircraft presently serves with the U.S. State Department in South America in the drug interdiction role. (Jim Sullivan)

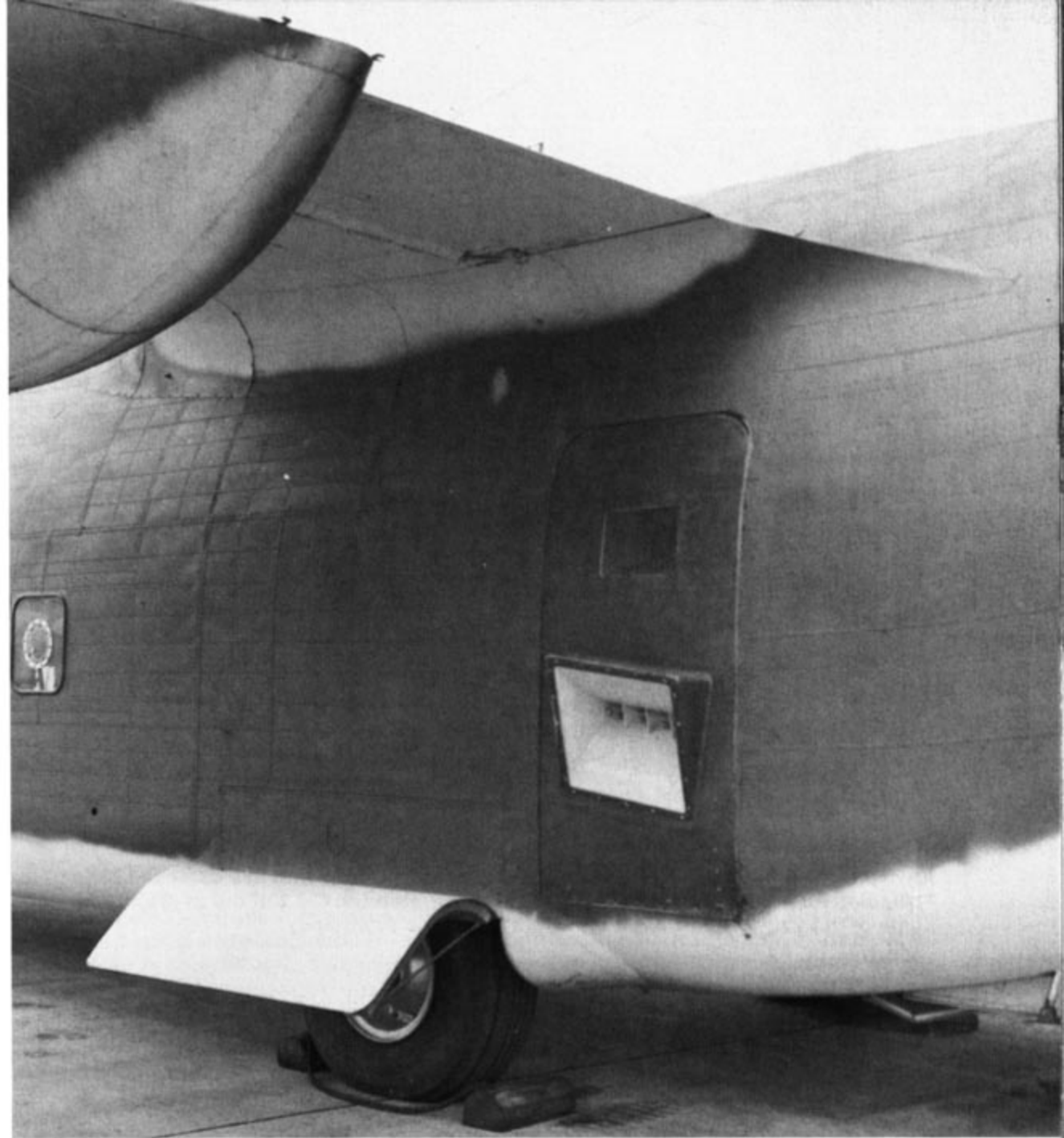
Hanscom Field, Westover Air Force Base, Massachusetts was home base for this C-123K (54-629) during July of 1974. The tail code WX indicated that this aircraft was assigned to the 731st Tactical Airlift Squadron, 901st Tactical Airlift Group, USAF Reserves. (Hildreth via Norm Taylor)





A UC-123K (54-701) sprays for mosquitos at Fort Stewart, Georgia during March of 1976. By 1976, Air Force and USAF Reserve transport aircraft were being painted in overall Light Gray. The 0 preceding the serial number on the fin indicated that the aircraft is over ten years old. (USAF)

This overall Light Gray C-123K (54-605) served with the 907th Tactical Airlift Group, USAF Reserves. The Yellow and Blue tail stripe carried the logo AFRES (Air Force Reserves) in White. (Terry Love)



The UC-123K was able to spray tear gas for riot control. The speaker mounted in the left rear troop door of this C-123 of the 24th Special Operations Squadron, Howard AFB, Panama, was used to warn crowds to disperse or be sprayed. (USAF)



This C-123K (54-698) continued to serve in Southeast Asia even after the conflict in Vietnam was over. 698 served with the Military Assistance Command (MAC) Thailand at Udorn, Royal Thai Air Force Base, during 1975. (Norm Taylor Collection)



C-123Ks of the Philippine Air Force also carried the standard SEA three-tone camouflage. This aircraft was assigned to the 221st Airlift Squadron, 220th Heavy Airlift Wing based at Mactan. (COL George P. Aquino)

An overall Natural Metal C-123K (55-4506) shares the ramp with five other C-123Ks of the Philippine Air Force. The Philippine Air Force operated the C-123K out of Mactan Air Base, home of the 220th Heavy Airlift Wing. (COL George P. Aquino)

The Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) began operating C-123Ks, including 56-4360, during April of 1971. The VNAF 421st Transport Squadron's pilots had been trained in the U.S. at Lockbourne AFB, Ohio and received combat training with the 315th Troop Carrier Wing. (USAF)





Still carrying the markings of the 19th Tactical Airlift Squadron, this C-123K (54-686) was being turned over to the Royal Thai Air Force during 1970. The aircraft carried Thai markings on the starboard side of the fuselage and English markings on the port side. (Norm Taylor)



The USAF provided a number of C-123Ks to the Royal Lao Air Force. This aircraft (55-4546) was one of the first of C-123K's to serve with the RLAF and it retained its standard USAF SEA camouflage scheme. The Lao insignia was Red and White. (Muir via T. Love)

One Surplus C-123K (54-679) was purchased by Mr. Harry Doan of Daytona Beach, Florida. The aircraft was later sold to Barry Seal who flew for the CIA. It was subsequently repurchased by Mr. Doan and sold to Southern Aire (CIA) with the civil registration N4410F. It was shot down over Nicaragua on 9 October 1986. (Harry Doan)

The U.S. State Department operates four (possibly more) C-123K to carry supplies to the Narcotics Assistance Unit stationed in north-western South American (mainly in the Huallaga Valley of Peru). This C-123K, marked PNC-220, is overall Light Gull Gray and has a radome on the nose. The aircraft are registered to INM (International Narcotics Mission). (via Jack Spey)



NC/AC-123K

In December of 1965, the USAF began Project Black Spot. This project was designed to give the USAF a self-contained night attack capability to seek out and destroy targets on the Ho Chi Minh trail at night. The concept was approved by the DOD and two C-123Ks (54-691 and 54-698) were modified by E-Systems of Greenville, Texas to the NC/AC-123K configuration.

The aircraft were modified with a long nose fairing that housed a Forward Looking Radar. Under the nose, a revolving ball turret was installed which housed a Forward Looking Infrared sensor (FLIR), a Low-Light-Level TV (LLTV) and a laser range finder. The aircraft was also fitted with an advanced navigational system and passive IR detectors.

Two rectangular aluminum weapons dispensers (for CBU bomblets) were stacked within the fuselage. The container housed twelve cells each containing three Cluster Bomb Units (CBUs) (thirty-six total). Depending on the type of CBU installed, the containers had a capacity of between 2,664 and 6,372 one pound bomblets. The bomblets were released through twelve openings in the cargo floor that aligned with the cells in the weapons dispenser. The lower fuselage contained twelve inward opening doors that aligned with the openings in the cargo floor forming a chute. Bomblet release was controlled by a weapons panel in the forward fuselage. In the event of an emergency, the entire load could be jettisoned manually.

To supply the electrical power needed to operate the sensors and armament system, the engine generators were replaced by alternators. To cool the alternators, air scoops were added to the top of each engine nacelle.

Prior to deploying to Vietnam, the two aircraft were sent to Osan Air Base, South Korea to be evaluated against the high speed infiltration boats used by North Korea to send agents into South Korea. The unit remained in Korea from 19 August 1968 until 23 October 1968, and were scheduled for a total of fifty-seven missions. Upon completion of their Korean assignment, the unit was deployed to South Vietnam for a combat evaluation of the Black Spot weapons system.

In South Vietnam the aircraft were operated under the project name and received the call sign — Black Spot. Black Spot aircraft began operations on 15 November 1968, flying from Phan Rang Air Base, South Vietnam, with mission staging areas at Binh Thuy and Pleiku. During the combat evaluation period (November 1968-January 1969) a total of sixty-nine sorties were flown. The target areas consisted of the Mekong Delta and the Ho Chi Minh trail. Operating as armed night surveillance units, the two aircraft destroyed 151 boats/vehicles, damaged another 108 and noted secondary explosions on 261 targets. The two aircraft completed seventy-seven percent of all missions and had an in-commission rate of eighty-four percent; not bad for an aircraft that was developed as a test bed and *never intended to be used operationally!*.

Two C-123K aircraft were highly modified under Project Black Spot and given the designation NC/AC-123K. The aircraft carried sensors to detect enemy movement on the Ho Chi Minh trail and CBUs (Cluster Bomb Units) to attack these targets. (Larry Davis)





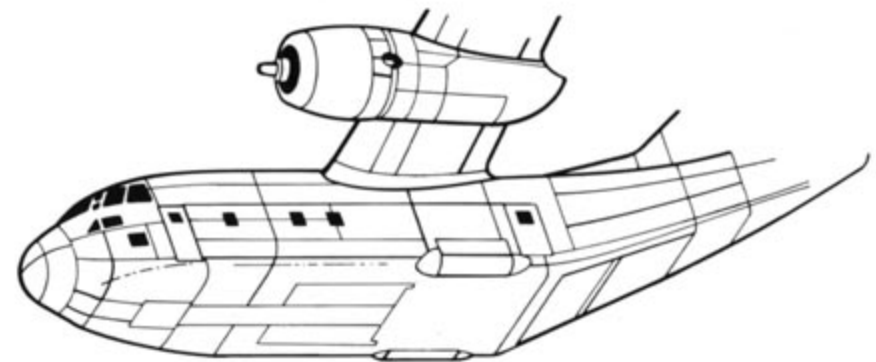
An NC-123K (54-691) of the 1st Combat Applications Group makes a stop over at Elmendorf AFB, Alaska on its way to South Vietnam during November 1969. The NC-123K carried an unusual wrap around camouflage. (Norm Taylor)

NC/AC-123K (54-691) was later fitted with a chin turret containing a Low-Light-Level Television (LLLTV), laser range finder and infrared scanner. The combination of the infrared scanner, LLLTV and bomblets enabled the two NC/AC-123Ks to destroy a large number of North Vietnamese trucks during the 1969-70 period. (Norm Taylor)

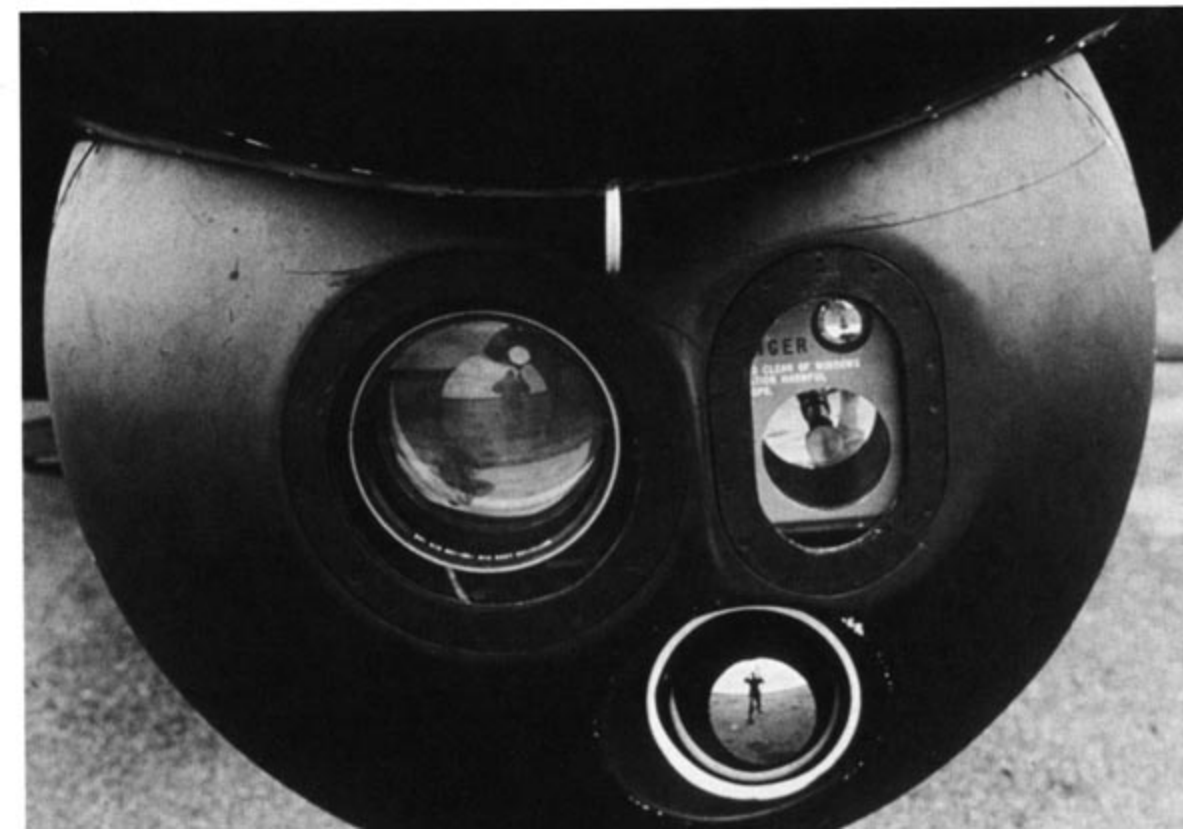
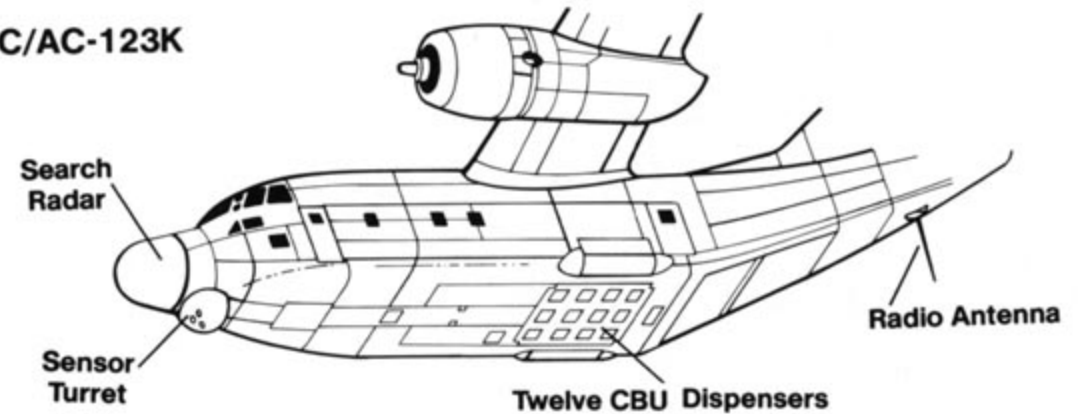
The turret housed three sensors: a LLLTV lens (upper left), a laser range finder (upper right) and an Infrared scanner (lower center). The turret was free to rotate in both azimuth and elevation giving the sensor operator the ability to track targets off the aircraft's line of flight.

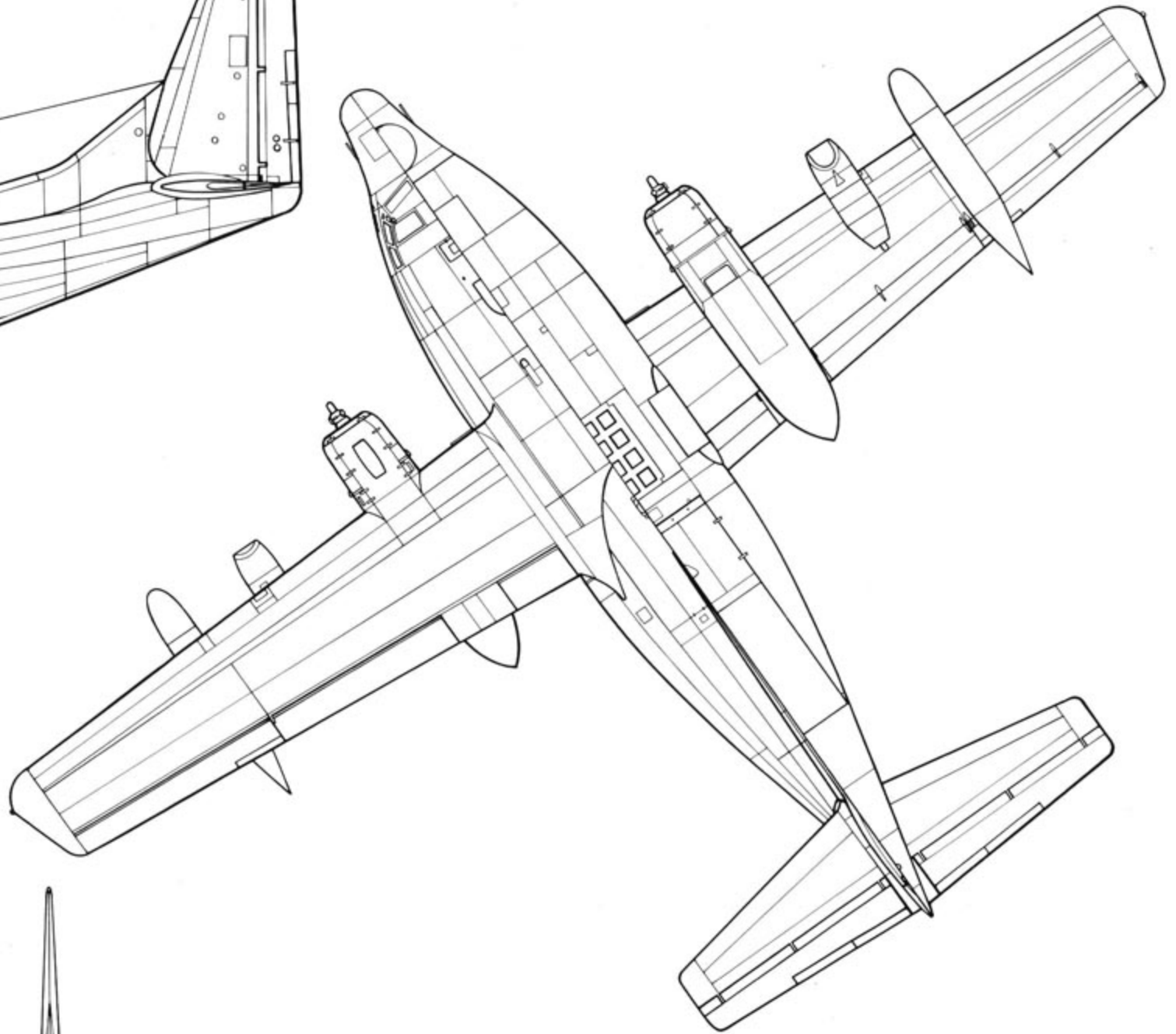
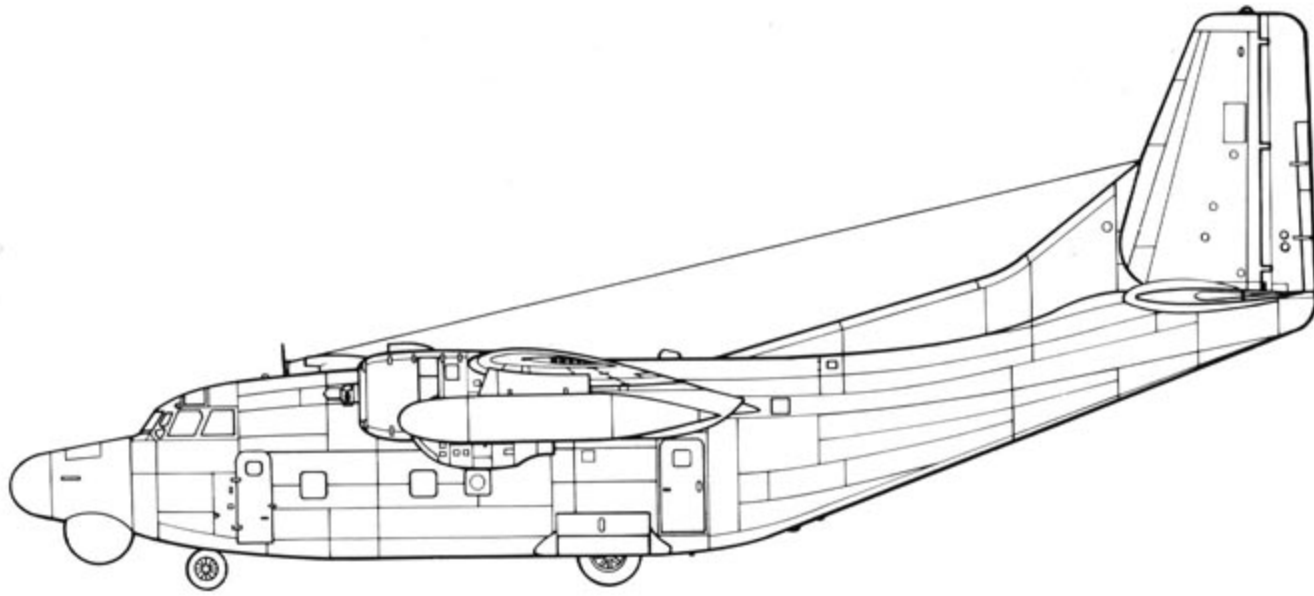
Fuselage Development

C-123K



NC/AC-123K





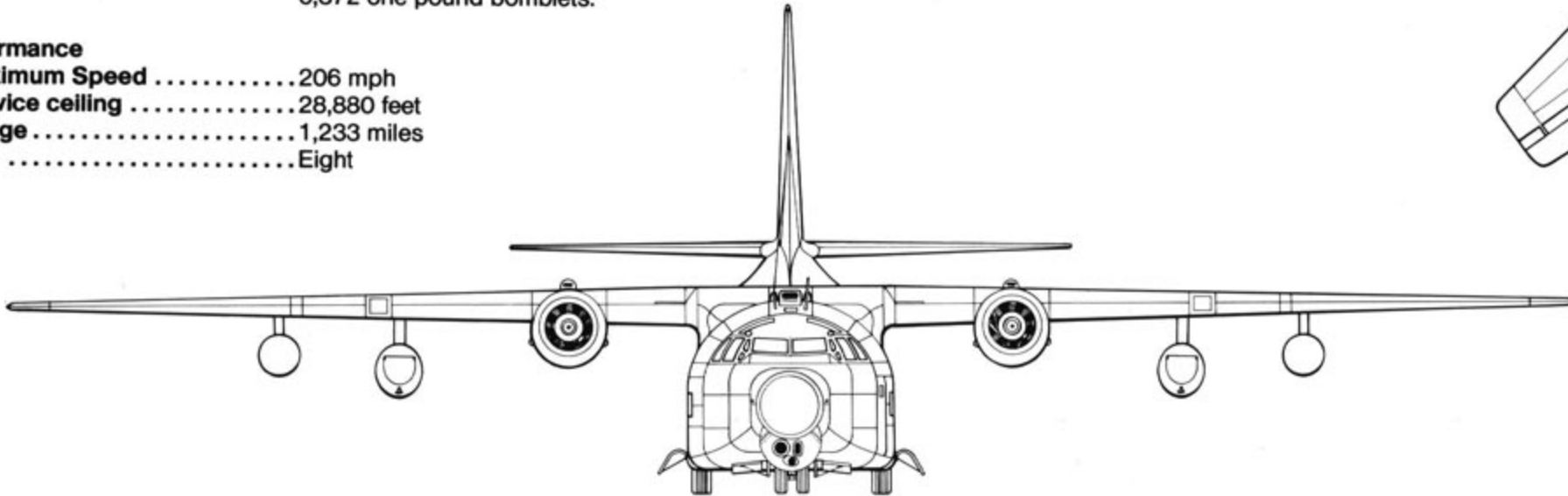
Specifications

Fairchild NC/AC-123K Black Spot

- Wingspan**110 feet
- Length**81 feet
- Height**34 feet 1 inch
- Maximum Weight**60,000 pounds
- Powerplants**.....Two 2,300 hp Pratt & Whitney R2800-99W radials and two General Electric 2,850 lbst J85-GE-17 turbojets.

- Armament**.....36 CBU cannisters with up to 6,372 one pound bomblets.

- Performance**
- Maximum Speed**206 mph
- Service ceiling**28,880 feet
- Range**1,233 miles
- Crew**Eight





The chin sensor turret is rotated to look to the starboard side of the aircraft. The thimble nose radar housed a surface search radar with a Moving Target Indicator (MTI) function. Often initial contact with a target was made with the radar, then further tracking was done with the sensor turret. (Larry Davis)



There were two aircraft modified under Project Black Spot and the highly modified C-123Ks were, at various times, designated either as AC-123Ks or NC-123Ks. 54-691 was outfitted with an extended nose radar housing and infrared sensors. (Via Wayne Mutza)

This NC-123K (54-698) was the second NC/AC-123K aircraft converted. The aircraft returned to Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona and was returned to stock C-123K standards. The code, CPO 24, on the nose in White was the aircraft's storage area code. (Kasulka via N. Taylor)

Following their Vietnam evaluation, the two aircraft were stripped of their electronics equipment and armament. They were returned to the standard cargo fuselage configuration and used as transports. 54-691 on the ramp at Clark Air Base, Philippines during 1974, retained its unique wrap-around camouflage scheme. (Menard via N. Taylor)



C-123T

In the mid-1960s, Fairchild made a proposal to the USAF to re-engine the entire fleet of C-123B aircraft with 3,420 shp Allison T56 turboprop engines. The intention was to use the experience gained with the YC-123H with its wide spaced main landing gear and auxiliary jet engines mated with the proven turboprop power plants from the Lockheed C-130 assault transport. This proposal would have given the C-123, with its airframe life (in 1960) estimated to at least another 20 years, — a new lease on life. The USAF, however, had placed most of its available money in C-130 development and no contracts were forthcoming.

During the latter part of the U.S. involvement in South Vietnam, the USAF began turning over C-123B and C-123Ks to allied air forces in the region. Thailand received a number of C-123Bs and C-123Ks along with one HC-123B (56-4357). The Royal Thai Air Force became aware early on that the supply of new and good used Pratt and Whitney R2800 radial engines was limited and began a research project aimed at finding an alternate power plant for their fleet of aging C-123s.

That project led to a contract being placed with the Mancro Aircraft Company of Paramount, California. Mancro, in cooperation with the USAF (which supported the project by the loan of engines, propellers and associated equipment), began a conversion of the C-123 to turboprop power.

The conversion did not end with simply replacing the Pratt and Whitney piston engines with turboprop Allison engines. The work included wetting the wing (turning the wing into a fuel tank), the installation of a gas turbine Auxiliary Power Unit (APU), installation of hydraulic boost units to provide power steering for the rudder, aileron and elevators and bleed air was channeled from the engines to provide heat for the cockpit, cargo compartment, wing leading edges as well as horizontal and vertical stabilizer leading edges (to act as deicers).

The turboprop engines chosen for the project were 3,420 shp Allison T56-A-7 turboprop engines driving four blade Hamilton Standard 56H60-91 propellers. Mancro intended to use the later Allison T56-A-15 engine once full scale conversions of the Thai C-123 fleet began.

Wetting the wing was necessary since installation of the turboprop engine made it necessary to remove the engine nacelle fuel tanks on the C-123B. The wings were sealed and plumbed, becoming a fuel tank with a capacity of some 3,290 gallons, far surpassing the C-123B's original capacity of 1,462 gallons. Empty weight rose to 32,500 pounds (C-123T) from 31,058 pounds (C-123B) while maximum takeoff weight remained at 60,000 pounds.

The first flight of the C-123T took place from the Compton, California airport on 24 October 1980. After initial flight tests the C-123T was flown to the Dallas Naval Air Station, Dallas, Texas during November of 1980 for further tests. These tests revealed a rate of climb of 1,550 feet per minute (bettering the C-123B by 400 fpm), a service ceiling of 32,000 feet (29,000 feet for a C-123B) and a range of 2,737 nautical miles, far surpassing the C-123B which had a range of 1,470 miles.

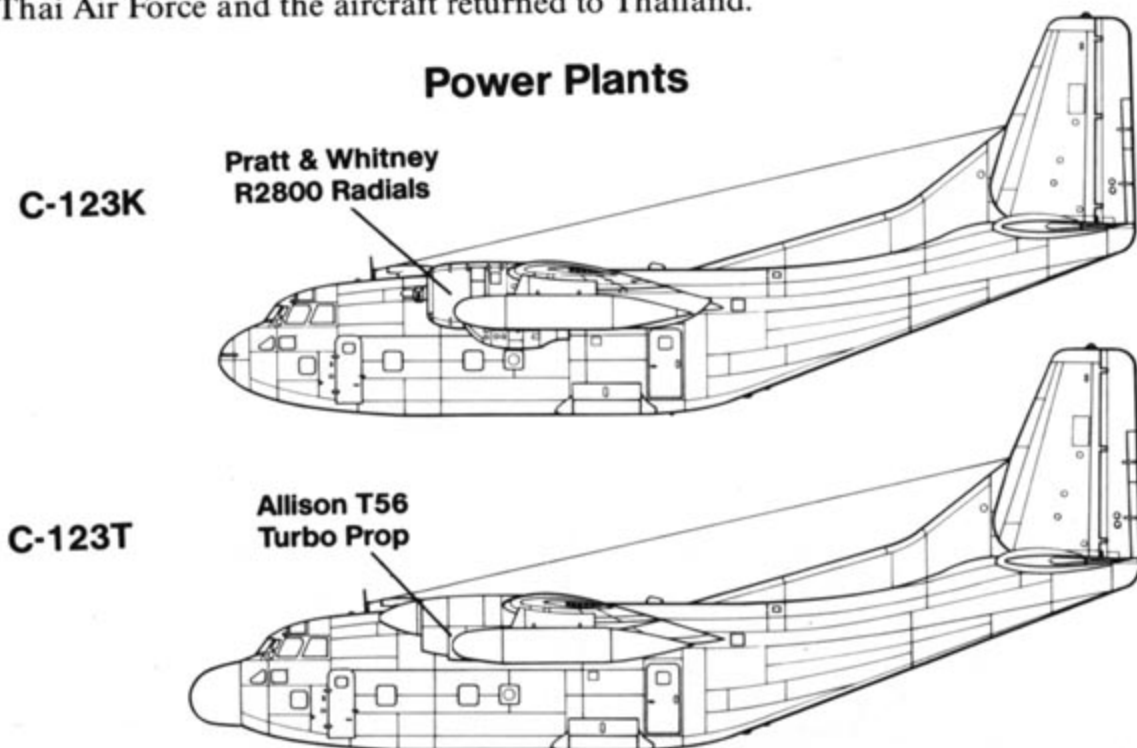
When the C-123T made its first flight, it also made history. The C-123 airframe had now flown in four modes: glider, pure jet, piston and turboprop. No other airframe built has ever flown in these four modes.



The C-123T had the Pratt & Whitney R2800S radial engines replaced with Allison T56-A-7B turboprop engines. The conversion work was done by Mancro Aircraft of Paramount, California during 1980. The aircraft was to feature a "wet" wing for additional fuel. (David Menard)

During 1981, the Royal Thai Air Force was forced to withdraw from the project due to budgetary restrictions and, since no other air force flying the C-123B was interested in converting their fleet to turboprop power, the whole project was dropped by Mancro and the Thai Government. Of course, by 1981 most C-123 airframes were approaching a service life of some twenty-five years. Additionally, there were many new tactical transports on the market, so no further effort was made to convert the C-123.

After all tests were completed the C-123T was returned to the custody of the Royal Thai Air Force and the aircraft returned to Thailand.



YC-134

Under a USAF contract, the prototype Chase C-123B-CN (52-1627) was modified by the Stroukoff Aircraft Corporation during 1956 under the designation YC-134-SA.

The modification included the installation of a Boundary Layer Control (BLC) system for increased wing lift, re-engining the aircraft with 3,500 hp Wright Turbo Compound R3350-89A radial engines and replacing the propellers with four blade thirteen foot, six inch Aeroproducts fully feathering constant speed units. The horizontal stabilizers were given end plates to aid in directional stability, the main landing gear was extensively modified with the addition of an extra set of wheels, giving the YC-134 a dual main landing gear (the dual nosewheel from the C-123B was retained). The first flight of the modified aircraft occurred on 19 December 1956 from Stroukoff's West Trenton, New Jersey facility.

The internal fuel capacity was increased by the addition of two center section tanks in the wing, each with a total capacity of 1,100 gallons. Fuel was no longer carried in the rear of the engine nacelles as in the earlier C-123Bs. 550 gallon under wing drop tanks could also be carried, bringing the total fuel capacity to some 3,300 gallons. This gave the YC-134 a range, with a 24,000 pound payload, of 1,600 miles.

Empty weight increased to 37,965 pounds compared to the 31,058 on the C-123B, and maximum loaded weight increased to 74,700 pounds, an increase of 12,400 pounds over the C-123B (60,000 pounds maximum gross takeoff weight). The aircraft's performance was greatly improved, with the cruising speed being increased from 190 mph (C-123B) to 219 mph for the YC-134. Takeoff distance was reduced to 750 feet compared to 1,850 feet for the C-123B.

The original USAF contract had called for three YC-134 aircraft: one prototype and two production aircraft. But since the YC-134 offered no real improvement over the C-123B, the last two examples were cancelled by the USAF. The two production aircraft were to have included the *Pantobase* equipment pioneered on the Stroukoff YC-123E. In the event, the USAF had decided that a piston engine amphibious assault transport would not fit their transportation needs and opted for the Lockheed C-130.

The prototype YC-134 (52-1627) closely resembled an early C-123B. The aircraft carried the Stroukoff Avitruk emblem on the nose and the BLC logo. The YC-134 was basically a modified version of the YC-123D BLC test aircraft with larger more powerful engines. (NASM)



This C-123B (54-672) was used by the U. S. Air Force Aerial Demonstration Team, the Thunderbirds, as a support aircraft from 1958 until 1961.



The U.S. Coast Guard used this HC-123B as a search and rescue aircraft flying out of Naples, Italy. The HC-123B was a modified C-123B fitted with a nose mounted search radar.



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