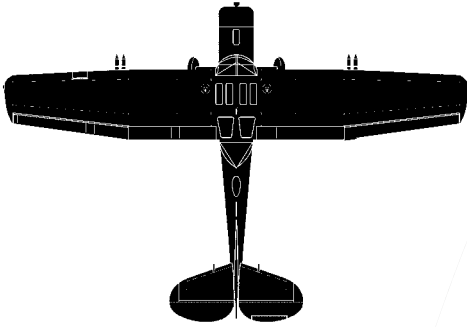


Airpower Classics

Artwork by Zaur Eylanbekov

O-1 Bird Dog



The O-1 Bird Dog was a superb forward air control aircraft for the war in Southeast Asia. Used by the Air Force, Army, Marine Corps, and various allied air forces, it always seemed to turn up in the thick of the action. The O-1 was small, slow, and vulnerable to enemy fire, but it could take fire and keep going. FAC pilots, flying low and slow, gained intimate knowledge of terrain and turned it to American advantage.

The O-1 began with a 1949 redesign of the Cessna 170, called L-19, which won a 1950 Army-Air Force competition for a new liaison airplane. This variant was used by Army and Marine Corps pilots in the Korean War. Its USAF career, however, did not begin until 1962, when USAF revived its "observation" category. All Air Force O-1s, in fact, were

acquired from the Army. It was the standard aircraft for five Air Force tactical air support squadrons and one clandestine Raven unit. In 1965, USAF took control of all fixed-wing observation craft, although the Army and Marine Corps continued operating O-1s.

The O-1 provided low-level reconnaissance and air strike control over the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos and close support to American and allied ground forces in South Vietnam. Its pilots marked enemy positions with white phosphorous rockets and directed tactical aircraft, calling in aiming corrections. The O-1 also could serve as bait; a pilot's mission, some jokingly said, was to "fly around until you get shot at, then call in an air strike." The last one was built in 1962.

—Walter J. Boyne

This aircraft: USAF O-1E—#56-2635—as it looked shortly before it was lost in a June 14, 1968 operational accident in Sa Dec Province, South Vietnam. It had been attached to the 22nd TASS at Binh Thuy, South Vietnam.



In Brief

Designed, built by Cessna Aircraft ★ first flight Dec. 8, 1949 ★ crew of one ★ number built 3,431 ★ single 6-cylinder engine ★ armament eight white phosphorous rockets ★ **Specific to O-1E:** 213 hp Continental O-470 engine ★ max speed 151 mph ★ cruise speed 104 mph ★ max range 530 miles ★ weight (loaded) 2,400 lb ★ span 36 ft ★ length 25 ft 9 in ★ height 7 ft 3.5 in.

Famous Fliers

USAF Capt. Hilliard A. Wilbanks, Medal of Honor ★ at least 14 Air Force Cross recipients, including Lt. Col. Allan R. Baer, Maj. John L. Carroll, Capt. Charles E. Engle, Lt. Col. Karl T. Feuerriegel, Capt. Delbert W. Fleener, Col. James K. Gibson, Maj. James C. Harding, Lt. Col. Ramon A. Horinek, Maj. Joseph B. Madden, Maj. William W. McAllister, Capt. Kenneth H. Sellers, Capt. Donald D. Stevens, Lt. Col. Ronald E. Storz, and Capt. Richard L. Whitesides.

Interesting Facts

Often called a "Jeep with wings" ★ name "Bird Dog" bestowed by US Army Gen. Mark Clark, the Korean War commander ★ South Vietnamese Air Force Maj. Bung Ly, fleeing Saigon with his family, landed an O-1 on carrier USS *Midway* ★ used by US Army for 24 years ★ training given in Hue, South Vietnam, at what was colloquially known as "FAC U" ★ built under license in Japan, to military specifications ★ in the Vietnam War, 108 USAF O-1 pilots were killed in action.



An O-1 Bird Dog searches the Vietnamese countryside.