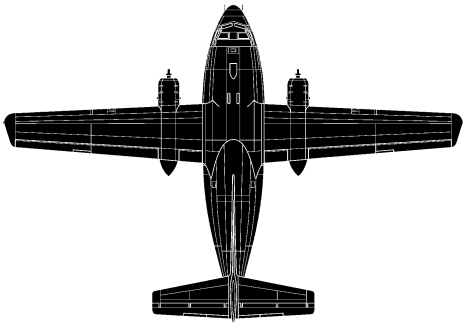


# Airpower Classics

Artwork by Zaur Eylanbekov

## C-123 Provider



The rugged C-123 Provider, one of USAF's most-used tactical transports, was a workhorse of the long US war in Southeast Asia. The Fairchild airlifter many times proved its worth in Vietnam, where it carried troops and supplies into combat zones as hot as the encircled US Marine base at Khe Sanh in 1968 and provided the capability for Operation Ranch Hand, the US program of defoliant-spraying to eliminate jungle cover and thus unmask enemy troop movements.

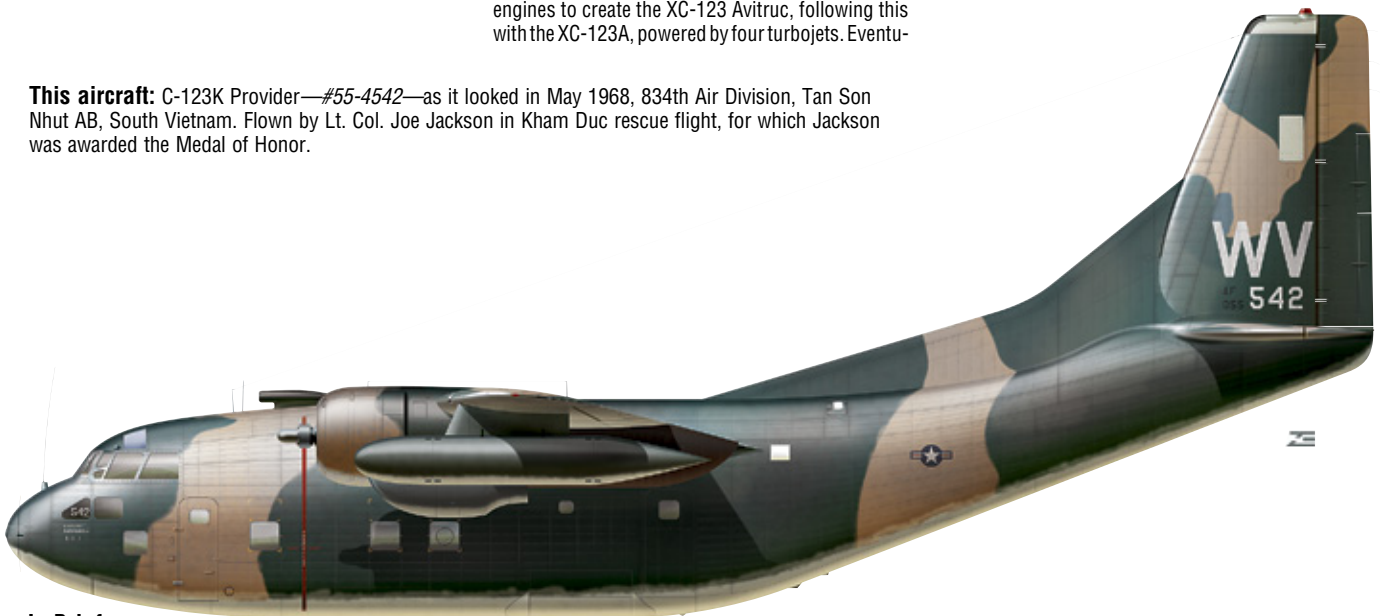
Strangely enough, the C-123 began life as a glider, although designers drew it up with every expectation that, eventually, it would be powered. Russian expatriate engineer Michael Stroukoff, who had built a series of wooden gliders, shifted to metal in 1946, ultimately building the XG-20A. He added two radial engines to create the XC-123 Avitric, following this with the XC-123A, powered by four turbojets. Eventu-

ally, Fairchild wound up with a contract to build 300 production aircraft. A small number were delivered to Saudi Arabia, Taiwan, Venezuela, the Philippines, and, of course, South Vietnam.

These C-123s went on to fight harder, longer, and better than anyone could have imagined in the early 1950s. C-123s contributed a great deal of in-country airlift in Vietnam and Cambodia. They carried out combat airdrops of troops, supplies, and ammunition, search and rescue teams, and special forces. Even now, one can find old C-123s hauling freight in South America.

—Walter J. Boyne

**This aircraft:** C-123K Provider—#55-4542—as it looked in May 1968, 834th Air Division, Tan Son Nhut AB, South Vietnam. Flown by Lt. Col. Joe Jackson in Kham Duc rescue flight, for which Jackson was awarded the Medal of Honor.



### In Brief

Designed by Stroukoff, built by Fairchild ★ first flight Sept. 1, 1954  
★ number built 304 ★ crew of four (two pilots, flight engineer, navigator) ★ no armament ★ capacity 61 troops or 50 stretchers, six seated patients, six medics. **Specific to C-123B:** two Pratt & Whitney R-2800 engines ★ max speed 245 mph ★ cruise speed 205 mph ★ max range 1,450 mi ★ weight (loaded) 60,000 lb ★ span 110 ft ★ length 75 ft 9 in ★ height 34 ft 9 in.

### Famous Fliers

**Medal of Honor:** Joe Jackson. **Air Force Cross:** Jesse Campbell, Richard Nagel Jr. **Other notables:** Rollen "Buck" Anthis, Claudius Watts III, Vernon Kondra, Anthony Burshnick, Bruce Fister.

### Interesting Facts

Nicknamed "Bookie Bird" ★ operated from land, water, ice, snow, sand ★ flown by Air America, CIA proprietary airline ★ used for night bombing of Ho Chi Minh Trail ★ sometimes capsized when taxiing in strong crosswinds ★ used as personal transport by Gen. William Westmoreland, MACV commander ★ featured in films "Air America" (1990), "Operation Dumbo Drop" (1995), and "Con Air" (1997) ★ displayed motto, "Only we can prevent forests" (defoliation aircraft).



A Provider on the ramp in Southeast Asia.