

History of EC-130E

62-1857

C/N 3821

EC-130E 62-1857 was delivered to the USAF as a C-130E in August 1963. In 1965, during a Low Altitude Parachute Extraction System (LAPES) flight, the aircraft was damaged in a gear-up landing at Eglin AFB. As a result of this accident, LAPES procedures were re-written to require the landing gear to be down prior to the drop. Temporary repairs were made and the aircraft was flown to Warner-Robbins for permanent repair.



In June 1967, the aircraft was modified to carry the Airborne Battlefield Command and Control Center (ABCCC). This modification was accomplished by LTV Electro-systems in Greenville, Texas. At this time the aircraft, along with nine other airframes, was re-designated as a C-130E-II. It was then assigned to the 7th Airborne Command and Control Squadron (ACCS) at Udorn Royal Thai Air Force Base, Thailand. Eventually, the aircraft moved with the unit to Korat RTAFB, Clark AFB, and finally to Keesler AFB, MS in 1975. During the Vietnam War, two ABCCC aircraft were airborne 24 hours a day. By the time 1857 was 10 years old, it had flown almost 20,000 hours.

In 1977 the aircraft was modified with -15 engines, generator disconnects, in-flight refueling, and was re-designated as an EC-130E. This was the first ABCCC aircraft to receive the in-flight refueling modification and was one of the first C-130's in the Air Force to be modified (MC-130E 64-0564 has the distinction of being the first air refuelable C-130). This work was performed by LAS Ontario, California.

In the spring of 1980, the 8th SOS took temporary possession of 1857 for use in Operation EAGLE CLAW. This was the attempt to rescue the American hostages being held in the embassy in Iran. At the time, 1857 had the South-East Asia paint scheme, which featured white lower surfaces. These areas and the propellers were quickly painted black for the mission. Two other ABCCC aircraft (along with 3 Combat Talons) were used in the operation: 62-1818 and 62-1809 (which was destroyed when an RH-53D helicopter collided with it at DESERT ONE).

The 3 EC-130's were tasked to carry fuel bladders for the helicopters used in the mission. At the time, they were the only air-refuelable C-130's that (without the ABCCC capsule) had an empty cargo compartment capable of hauling two large fuel bladders and their associated equipment. 1857 was the first EC-130 "borrowed" by the 8th SOS one month prior to the mission and was utilized in several dress rehearsals.

Aircraft 1857 was flown to DESERT ONE by Russ Tharp and used the call sign Republic 5 for the mission. It took off at a gross weight of approximately 190,000 pounds (some crew members have reported that it weighed over 200,000 pounds). During the hurried departure from DESERT ONE, 1857 was heavily damaged when it hit a sand dune just prior to becoming airborne. Maintenance records show the aircraft having vertical beam and spar damage after the mission (all the aircraft were damaged to some extent).

The following is from Col James Kyle's book on the mission called "The Guts To Try":

"As Tharps aircraft accelerated down the runway, we were watching through night vision goggles. The blown fuel truck at the far end had pretty well burned itself out – there were only stars and moonlight.

Then, as the C-130 reached the 3,000-foot point, my heart leaped into my throat. The aircraft hit the sand piled up along the shoulder of the road. There was a giant shower of dust and sand.



My God! We've lost 'em!

Then, out of the other side of the billowing mass, the struggling Hercules appeared, straining to recapture its lost airspeed. Another 1,000 feet and the big bird staggered into the air".

On its flight out of Iran, Tharp had to shut down one of the engines when it lost oil pressure. As a result, 1857 was the last of the mission aircraft out of Iranian airspace and the last to land back at Masirah Island.

A plaque, obtained for the plane by the flight-crew, was mounted in the flight deck above the navigator's station and reads as follows:

EC-130 62-1857

**This aircraft and the personnel who maintained it
performed admirably on April 24, 1980.**

The aircrew will forever be indebted to the personnel involved.

1857 was deployed to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia for Operation DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM. In the 1990's, the aircraft was continually rotated during a six-year period to Aviano AB, Italy and supported numerous operations involving the former Yugoslavia. In one stretch, 1857 remained deployed for over eight months and suffered a nose gear drag strut failure while being towed. Temporary repairs were made in Aviano and the aircraft was permanently repaired at the depot facility in Brindisi, Italy.

In 1994 the 7th ACCS moved from Keesler to Davis-Monthan AFB and became the 42nd ACCS. In September 2002, after 37 years of ABCCC operations, the 42nd ACCS deactivated at Davis-Monthan. With over 30,000 flying hours, 62-1857 was put into temporary storage as excess.

In August 2003 the aircraft was removed from storage to fly a test mission with AFSOC. In April 2005, the aircraft was on display at the 25th anniversary of Operation EAGLE CLAW and was the "star of the show".

62-1857 is now retired with over 35,000 hours.