



# FACT SHEET

USAF Fact Sheet

## RC-135S – COBRA BALL

### **Mission**

The RC-135S "Cobra Ball" aircraft are flown and maintained by the 45th Reconnaissance Squadron (45 RS) and controlled by the 55<sup>th</sup> Wing, Offutt AFB, Neb. The 45 RS flies Joint Chiefs of Staff-directed missions of national priority to collect optical and electronic data on ballistic missiles and their associated reentry vehicles. This data is critical to the assessment of foreign ballistic missile technology, verification of arms treaty compliance, and development of U.S. strategic defense and theater missile defense concepts.

### **Features**

Circular optical ports, specialized antennae, and a distinctive black wing on the right side characterize the RC-135S models. The aircraft's excellent airspeed, range, and air refueling capability enable 45 RS crews to respond to events anywhere in the world within hours of notification and to remain on station for long periods of time. With in-flight refueling missions can be extended almost indefinitely. The flight crew consists of two pilots and one navigator, while the mission crew is made up of three electronic warfare officers, who operate the aircraft's reconnaissance systems, one in-flight maintenance technician, and six other mission specialists. Seating is available for six additional crewmembers and missions are normally flown with augmented crews.

### **Background**

The RC-135S, equipped with a sophisticated array of optical and electronic sensors, recording media, and communications equipment, is a national asset uniquely suited to provide America's leaders and defense community with vital information that cannot be obtained by any other source. Three years in a row, 1995-1997, a 55th Wing's RC-135 Cobra Ball aircrew earned the Air Force Association's O'Malley Award, recognizing the top reconnaissance aircrew in the Air Force. The O'Malley Award, named in honor of Gen. Jerome O'Malley, the first SR-71 pilot to make general, is presented annually to the best overall reconnaissance crew in the Air Force. The RC-135 Cobra Ball crew provided readings from ballistic missile testing and theater defense missile testing. The crew flies over areas where countries test missiles and takes readings for their customers who pass this information on to the intelligence communities, theater commanders, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The criteria for this award include significant achievement in aerial reconnaissance; innovative accomplishment in reconnaissance employment; and operations or instruction, which contribute significantly to increased combat readiness of reconnaissance forces.

### **General Characteristics**

**Contractor:** Boeing Company

**Power Plant:** Four Pratt & Whitney TF-33-P-5 turbofan engines

**Thrust:** 16,050 pounds per engine

**Length:** 139 ft., 11 inches

**Height:** 41 ft., 8 inches

**Wingspan:** 130 ft., 10 inches

**Speed:** 500 mph

**Ceiling:** Above 40,000 ft.

**Maximum Takeoff Weight:** 299,000 pounds

**Range:** Approximately 4,000 miles (unlimited with air refueling)

**Crew:** 17 including two pilots, two navigators, five electronic warfare officers, two in-flight maintenance technicians, and six mission specialists.

**Number in Air Force Inventory:** Two plus one in depot

### **Point of Contact**

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