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Boeing's Final C-17 Has Left the Factory

The last Buddha ever built will go to the Qatar air force.



By Eric Tegler Dec 2, 2015 @ 9:49 AM Military C-17

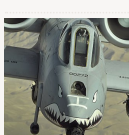


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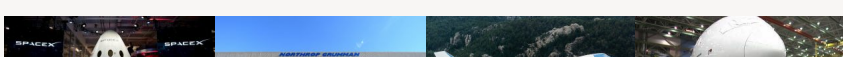
While many of us were still chomping Thanksgiving leftovers on Sunday, the last of 279 C-17 Globemaster III airlifters built at Boeing's long-lived Long Beach factory took off for delivery to Qatar's air force, ending an era of large-scale aircraft manufacturing in southern California.



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The mighty C-17 ("Buddha" or "Moose," as U.S. Air Force crews call it) traces its origins to the need to replace the Air Force's aging C-141 Starlifter in the late 1970s. The service wanted a larger transport that could be refueled in flight and use rough forward fields. McDonnell Douglas' C-17 won the contract in 1981 thanks to the big plane's ability to use runways at 19,000 airfields worldwide, even dirt ones. While landings/takeoffs on such strips aren't exactly routine, C-17s continue to operate from forward bases in places like Afghanistan.

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The first C-17 took flight in 1991, but it wasn't smooth sailing. The airplane suffered wing structure deficiencies and other problems in development, running over budget and behind schedule. By 1995 those problems were largely resolved and the first Air Force squadron became operational. In the meantime, McDonnell Douglas was subsumed by Boeing, which eventually delivered 223 C-17s to the USAF.

The Buddha can carry more than 80 tons of troops, cargo, and vehicles including the M1 Abrams tank. Operated by a crew of three (pilot/co-pilot/loadmaster), the airlifter is powered by four Pratt & Whitney F-117-PW-100 turbopfans making 40,000 pounds of thrust each. The engines' thrust reversers direct exhaust upwards and forward on landing, reducing the chances of ingesting runway debris.

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American C-17s have flown troops and equipment to support peacekeeping in Bosnia and Kosovo. They've supplied U.S. forces in Iraq and Afghanistan at forward airstrips and large logistics bases. A Globemaster typically travels with the President when he flies on Air Force One, carrying vehicles, personnel, and equipment. The air forces of Kuwait, Australia, Canada, India, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, the UK and NATO also operate the Globemaster.

Now that it has made this final delivery, Boeing's Long Beach plant is expected to close late this year or early next, eliminating about 500 jobs. The 25-acre facility is part of a complex that manufactured B-17s in WWII, as well as DC-10

airliners. Boeing was southern California's largest employer at one time but has cut its workforce significantly since the late 1990s. Still, the site may have life yet as Virgin Galactic has announced plans to build satellite launch vehicles there, and SpaceX is considering the area as well.

The last Buddha to leave Long Beach had it easy. Years before, the C-17 set a record during flight testing, taking off with a 44,000-pound payload in less than 1,400 feet. In 2012, a C-17 from the 305th Air Mobility Wing inadvertently proved its short-field prowess when it mistakenly landed at Peter O. Knight Airport, a small civilian airport in Tampa, FL instead of nearby MacDill AFB. But the Moose got out, lifting off two-thirds of the way down the 3,580-foot runway. Not bad for a big bird.



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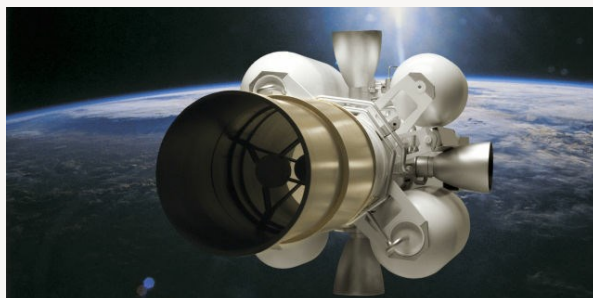


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