A C-17 from Charleston AFB, S.C., banks to the right.

The C-17 Globemaster III, USAF's newest airlifter, joined the active fleet in 1993 and soon went into near-constant operational use. The flexible McDonnell Douglas (and then Boeing) airplane carries out strategic airlift, tactical airlift, combat airdrop, and aeromedical evacuation duties. In many cases, it delivers troops and cargo straight to forward bases in combat areas.

C-17 development was long and hard, filled with setbacks and threats of cancellation, but the lifter proved superb. This high-wing, four-engine, T-tailed transport could use small, austere airfields because its powerful engines allowed it to take off quickly and its thrust reversers permitted landing on runways as short as 3,500 feet.

The C-17 could back up and turn around using a three-point star turn. Airmen loaded cargo through an aft door and ramp large enough for military vehicles and palletized cargo.

The C-17 was first used in a major operation in 1995, when it carried NATO peacekeepers into Bosnia. It anchored USAF's airlift operations in Serbia, Afghanistan, and Iraq and was employed for humanitarian purposes. The C-17 was acquired by nine air arms of eight nations—US, Australia, Britain, Canada, India, Kuwait, Qatar, and United Arab Emirates—plus the multinational, Europe-based Heavy Airlift Wing. Production ended on Nov. 28, 2015.

—in Robert S. Dudney with Walter J. Boyne

**In Brief**

Designed and built by McDonnell Douglas (now Boeing) ⋆ main purpose, strategic airlift ⋆ first flight Sept. 15, 1991 ⋆ number built 279 (224 USAF) ⋆ crew of three (two pilots, one loadmaster) ⋆ four Pratt & Whitney F117-PW-100 turbofan engines ⋆ armament, none ⋆ max payload, 170,900 lb ⋆ cargo capacity (notional), one M1 Abrams tank, three Strykers, or six M1117 armored vehicles ⋆ seating, 134 troops ⋆ max speed 570 mph ⋆ cruise speed 515 mph ⋆ max range (unrefueled) 2,785 mi ⋆ weight (max T/O) 585,000 lb ⋆ span 169 ft 10 in ⋆ length 174 ft ⋆ height 55 ft 1 in ⋆ service ceiling, 45,000 ft.

**Famous Fliers**


**Interesting Facts**

Awarded Collier Trophy for 1994 ⋆ carried forward name of two airlifters—C-74 Globemaster, C-124 Globemaster II ⋆ broke 22 records for oversize-load flight ⋆ nicknamed “Moose,” “Buddha,” “Barney,” “Mighty Mouse” ⋆ designed to airdrop 102 paratroopers and gear ⋆ suffered landing gear collapse delivering whale to Iceland ⋆ survived inadvertent “wheels up” landing in Afghanistan ⋆ has crashed only once—in 2010 in Alaska.