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# United Retires McDonnell DC-10 Fleet

AFTER 30 YEARS of service, the DC-10 has retired. United Airlines operated the last DC-10 passenger service on two segments simultaneously on February 14, 2001. United has been slowly phasing out the DC-10-10s and -30s for several years. By the beginning of 2001, the fleet had been reduced to only three long-range DC-10-30s, all originally ordered by World Airways. United placed an order for 30 DC-10s on April 25, 1968, with an option for 30 additional aircraft. The first (N1902U) was delivered on July 29, 1971, and made the first revenue flight on August 14, 1971, from San Francisco to Washington Dulles

airport. United has since operated a total of 59 DC-10s, with a fleet peak of 49 aircraft in service at the same time.

Since 1971, the fleet has progressively consisted of 49 DC-10-10s fitted with the General Electric 40,000lb thrust CF6-6 engines and eleven long-range DC-10-30s fitted with 52,000lb thrust engines. All except one of the DC-10-10s were purchased new from Douglas. Of the eleven long-range DC-10-30s, three were leased from CP Air in Canada, three purchased from Laker Airways in the UK, four were received from World Airways, and one came from Pan Am with the United Pacific route

acquisition.

The wings of the extended range DC-10-30, -30CF and -30F are ten feet (3m) longer than the -10 model and the aircraft is equipped with an additional centre landing gear to support the additional weight. These incredible aircraft are 58ft (17.7m) high with a wing span of 165ft (50.3m) and a length of 182ft (55.5m). They have a maximum take-off weight of 572,000lb (259,460kg), cruise at 564mph and have a range of 7,490 miles (12,000km). Over the years, the United DC-10 has had three paint schemes. Only one United DC-10 was given a Mainliner name – N1804U, named Curtis Barkes, after United's chief financial officer for many years. Four of the DC-10-30s were converted to freighters, and these United operated from Anchorage to Asia from 1997 until December 2000. A total of eight of the retired -10s and -30s are currently stored at Las Vegas McCarran International Airport. Although the DC-10 aircraft are being retired as United upgrades the fleet, they will not remain idle. FedEx has purchased 36 of the passenger DC-10s, and these are being

converted to the two-man crew MD-10Fs, giving them a new life as cargo liners.

The last two flights, UA 700 (N1858U) from Las Vegas to Chicago and UA 44 (N1857U) from Honolulu to Chicago, were planned as a quiet passing. Extra cases of Champagne were loaded, but there were no crowds or VIPs to wish them a last goodbye.

United's staff at Las Vegas have seen the DC-10 daily for many years, and given Las Vegas' reputation as a 'party town', felt they could not let the last DC-10 departure pass without marking it in some way. The airport's fire trucks were requested to stand by for a water cannon salute. N1858U taxied out. Captain J. Harvey was in command of flight 700, assisted by First Officer J. Garthus, and Second Officer L. Paulin. The crew were surprised to see the operations manager, office staff, ramp and gate agents form a line in front of the aircraft after push back for a farewell salute.

At 14:55 Pacific Standard Time, Las Vegas waved goodbye. Captain Harvey taxied through the water cannon spray, turned onto the runway and took off. A small crowd watched until it climbed out of sight.

The last two United DC-10s have both been delivered to their current owner, Finova Capital. A few days after their arrival, N1853U, one of the four United DC-10-30F freighters retired in December 2000, was pulled from storage at Pinal Air Park, north of Tucson. The aircraft operated an earthquake relief supply flight to India and was returned to storage on February 21, 2001.



**Top • N1858U passes through the water cannon salute.** (All photos Author)  
Above • N1858U turns onto the taxiway, leaving the United ramp for the last time.  
Below • Next to last colour scheme seen on N1836U. The aircraft is now being converted to an MD-10F.

