

**Aviation Safety Investigation Report
198702606**

Boeing 747 SP

27 March 1987

Readers are advised that the Australian Transport Safety Bureau investigates for the sole purpose of enhancing transport safety. Consequently, Bureau reports are confined to matters of safety significance and may be misleading if used for any other purposes.

Investigations commenced on or before 30 June 2003, including the publication of reports as a result of those investigations, are authorised by the CEO of the Bureau in accordance with Part 2A of the Air Navigation Act 1920.

Investigations commenced after 1 July 2003, including the publication of reports as a result of those investigations, are authorised by the CEO of the Bureau in accordance with the Transport Safety Investigation Act 2003 (TSI Act). Reports released under the TSI Act are not admissible as evidence in any civil or criminal proceedings.

NOTE: All air safety occurrences reported to the ATSB are categorised and recorded. For a detailed explanation on Category definitions please refer to the ATSB website at www.atsb.gov.au.

carry an additional 30 minutes fuel endurance to allow for the thunderstorms at Sydney. However, the particular storm took over 2 hours to cross the Sydney Airport airspace. The Airport was closed from 1900 to 1918 hours, and from 1924 to 1952. It was evident that the 30 minutes fuel requirement was inadequate under the existing circumstances. United Airlines is one of three overseas based carriers which has been approved by the Department of Aviation to be responsible for its own operational control. This control is exercised from Chicago, USA. For aircraft on the Los Angeles - Sydney route, approval to proceed past a point located to the east of Norfolk Island is dependent on the fuel state of the aircraft and the expected weather conditions at Sydney. The necessary clearance had been obtained in this case. However, by subsequently closing Sydney Airport to all aircraft and denying the United flight the opportunity to conduct an approach, Sydney ATC over-ruled the operational control which the airline had been approved to exercise. When remaining fuel endurance is requested, Australian pilots are taught to provide a figure which relates to the total fuel on board. However, the United Airlines policy is for the pilot to give a figure based on the remaining flight fuel only i.e., the figure given does not include the 30 minutes mandatory reserve. This anomaly needs to be explored and resolved in order that pilots and ATC are aware of the actual fuel situation, so that priorities can be accurately established. The fuel policy of United Airlines provides for a minimum of 17000 pounds (7710 kilograms) to be available on arrival at Sydney. This is sufficient to allow the aircraft to go around from the landing approach in the event of the preceding aircraft blocking the intended runway, proceed to a suitable emergency alternate aerodrome (Williamtown), and land with the mandatory reserve fuel intact. The pilot in command had elected to divert to Williamtown before the last possible time for such a diversion. His decision was probably related to the advice given by ATC that Sydney was closed because of a stationary thunderstorm over the aerodrome.

Reccomendations:

As a result of the investigation of this incident, the Bureau makes the following recommendations.

1. The question of whether overseas carriers should abide by the fuel policy of the state of registry or the fuel policy of Australia should be resolved.
2. The right of ATC to deny approaches and otherwise impose operational control on overseas carriers which have been approved to exercise this control themselves should be examined.
3. The current policy of requiring 30 minutes extra fuel be carried when thunderstorms are forecast to affect aerodromes for periods of up to 30 minutes should be reviewed, in the light of the difficulty of accurately assessing the speed and duration of such storms.
4. That ATC ensure, that information regarding the change in status of an aerodrome has been received by all aircraft affected by that change.