

California State Military Department
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California State Militia and National Guard Unit Histories

144th Fighter Wing

The Fresno Air National Guard Base in California is home to the 144th Fighter Wing. The 144th Fighter Wing's mission is to provide air defense protection for California from the Mexican border to Ukiah utilizing the F-16 Fighting Falcon jet fighter aircraft. The 144th also supports the nation's Counterdrug Program and responds to state emergencies when requested by the Governor of California. The wing's current inventory of aircraft includes 18 F-16Cs, one F-16D, a two place fighter trainer, and one C-26A transport.

The origin of the 144th Fighter Wing dates back to 4 April 1948, barely six months after the formation of the Air National Guard in September of 1947. On that date, the 61st Fighter Wing received federal recognition at Alameda, CA, followed by activation of the 194th Fighter Squadron on 25 June 1948. The 61st Fighter Wing was redesignated as the 144th Fighter Bomber Wing on 1 November 1950.

The first aircraft assigned as of June 1948 included two T-6s, one B-26, one C-47, one L-17, and two borrowed P-51s. The P-51D and later the P-51H were flown from 1948 until 31 October 1954. During its early years with the P-51D/H, the unit earned prominence as one of the Air Force's most respected aerial gunnery competitors. In June, 1953, while still flying the P-51, the unit qualified for the first all-jet, worldwide gunnery meet. Using borrowed F-86A Sabre jets, the 144th, which represented the Air National Guard, placed fifth in competition.

On 7 July 1955, the Wing was redesignated as the 144th Fighter Interceptor Wing, with the 194th becoming the 194th Fighter Interceptor Squadron. On 1 November 1954, the 194th accomplished the transition from the piston-engined, propeller driven P-51 to its first jet aircraft, the F-86A. At the same time, the 194th relocated to Fresno, followed by the wing in 1957. The site of the Fresno Air National Guard Base has been used for military aviation since World War II, when it was known as Hammer Field.

The 144th continued to fly the F-86A from 1954 to 31 March 1958. On 1 April 1958, the transition was made to the F-86L, which was flown until 30 June 1964. On 1 July 1964, the 144th began flying the F-102 and continued flying this aircraft until 24 July 1974. On 25

July 1974, the 144th brought the F-106 into service, and continued to fly this aircraft until 31 December 1983. On the first of January 1984, the F-4D became the wing's new aircraft, and was flown until 30 September 1989.

In 1979, the 144th Fighter Interceptor Wing was reassigned from the Air Defense Command to the Tactical Air Command. On 1 October 1989, the wing began a new era by completing the transition to the air defense version of the F-16A Fighting Falcon, the Air Force's most advanced tactical fighter. 144 FW continued to fly this aircraft until September 1995, when the transition to the newer F-16C became complete. New engines and upgraded avionics make the F-16C among the most potent air defense weapons in the world.

In 1992, the 144th FW was reassigned to Air Combat Command. Effective 16 March 1992, the 144th Fighter Interceptor Wing was redesignated as the 144th Fighter Wing (144th FW), with all related Fighter Interceptor Groups and Squadrons becoming Fighter Groups and Fighter Squadrons.

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The 144th Fighter Wing is comprised of the headquarters unit and four subordinate units: Logistics Group, which consists of the 144th Aircraft Generation Squadron, 144th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, 144th Logistics Squadron, and 144th Support Flight; Operations Group, which consists of the 144th Fighter Squadron and 144th Operations Flight; Support Group, which consists of 144th Civil Engineer Squadron, 144th Security Forces Squadron, 144th Communications Flight, 144th Mission Support Flight, and 144th Services Flight; and the 144th Medical Squadron.

Throughout its history the 144th has earned a number of honors and distinctions. The wing received the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award in 1967, 1973, 1978, 1988 and 1994. Other honors include winning the William Tell Air-to-Air Weapons meet at Tyndall AFB in Florida, and numerous maintenance and safety awards.

The 144th Fighter Wing was the busiest dedicated air defense wing in the country during 1999, with deployments to eight countries and more than a half-dozen states. Combat training had many highlights throughout the year. Fifty wing members deployed five F-16s to Fallon Naval Air Station, Nevada, to participate in the Navy's annual joint combat training exercise. Members of the unit also traveled to Tyndall AFB, Florida for Combat Archer which provided an opportunity for live fire weapons training. To top off the year, six dozen members and six aircraft deployed to Nellis AFB, Nevada between October 24 and November 7 for Red Flag. During the opening minutes of the exercise, a 144th Fighter Wing four-ship flight killed four actual MiG-29s. These were the first-ever MiG-29 kills in a Red Flag exercise.

Other squadrons within the Wing also had a chance to travel during 1999. The Civil Engineering Squadron's Fire Department deployed to Sheppard AFB, Texas for training, and 44 members of the Services Flight trained at Tyndall AFB, Florida. Fifty-five members of the Medical Squadron received medical readiness training at Alpena, Michigan.

Members from the the Civil Engineering Squadron participated in the rebuilding of a devastated village in Nicaragua after Hurricane Mitch, as a part of a humanitarian mission called New Horizon.

Coronet Nighthawk, the annual counterdrug deployment to the Caribbean region, was highly successful again this year. It was supported with three rotations of approximately 90 members and four aircraft.

The 144th Fighter Wing sent the first California ANG members to assist in operational and intelligence planning for Operation Allied Force. Members were also sent to Bosnia to gain insight into Aerospace Expeditionary Force operations.

One doctor, two nurses, and twelve enlisted personnel from the 144th Medical Squadron participated in the peacekeeping exercise Peace Shield 99, held in Lviv, Ukraine.

The 144th stood up a short-notice deployment to Bahrain which was cancelled at the last moment and still fulfilled active duty commitments including detached air sovereignty alert at March Air Reserve Base, Coronet Nighthawk, and a six-month backfill Houston Alert tour.

For more information about the 144th, [CLICK HERE](#)