

Guard flyin' high

By Charles McCarthy
The Fresno Bee

Millions of dollars in high-tech hardware, including supersonic F-16 fighter jets, will be available for public inspection Saturday at the Fresno Air National Guard Base.

All will be free.

"We are going to have representative aircraft from all services," said 144th Fighter Wing executive officer Lt. Col. James Arthur.

This will be the first open house since 1989 at the Fresno Air Guard Base on the McKinley Avenue side of the Fresno Air Terminal.

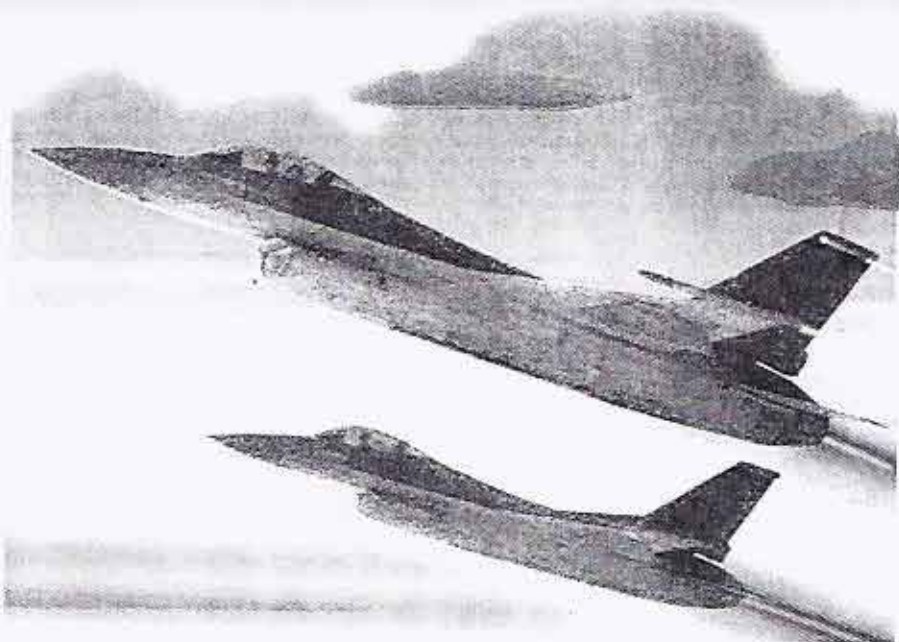
Between 11 a.m. and noon, military pilots will demonstrate overhead just why the F-16 has been called the world's most maneuverable jet fighter. Other aircraft, including helicopters, usually seen only in film of the Gulf War or Somalia, also will skim past at low altitude.

From 10 a.m.-3 p.m., the public will be allowed to get close to aircraft parked on the Air Guard ramps. Vehicle parking will be free, Arthur said.

AIR-SHOW PREVIEW

Free open house 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Saturday, Fresno Air National Guard Base, McKinley Avenue just west of Clovis Avenue.

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Air show: Supersonic fighter jets

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"The important thing is to get to the intersection of McKinley and Clovis avenues, and from there they'll be directed to parking," Arthur said.

Since the last Air Guard air show in 1989, people have been asking to be allowed past the armed guards at the Fresno base gates, Arthur said. Base personnel have been too busy to play host because of events like the upgrading from F-4D Phantom jets to the sleek F-16s and crisis deployments to places like Panama.

That'll just make Saturday's open house better, Arthur said.

Among aircraft never before seen in Fresno will be an Air Force B-1B Lancer strategic bomber. This controversial jet carries the load as successor to the B-52 Stratofortress for nuclear and conventional bomb and missile attack.

Also dropping in to Fresno will be an F117E Aardvark, which along with the B-1B has terrain radar. This allows its pilots to fly at night just below the speed of sound at grass-top level, sneaking through canyons and over mountains before unleashing its weapons or photographing an enemy close-up.

Both are capable of supersonic flight, but the resulting boom and infra-red heat from the jet engines would be a quick tip-off to their approach.

Military

Other aircraft will come from as far away as Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland and from just across the Fresno runways, where the Army National Guard keeps its twin-engine C-23 Sherpa combat transport. A Gulf War performer, the tank-busting A-10 Thunderbolt will fly in from Arizona.

A Mig-17 jet fighter also will be on display. It will be among many civilian-owned former military and antique aircraft in Saturday's show.

Visitors also will see an F-4G Wild Weasel, the type of plane that homed in on Iraqi radar beams and blasted Saddam Hussein's attack warning system just before Desert Storm.

Arriving from Whidbey Island, Wash., will be a Navy A-6 Intruder jet bomber, the type that starred in the movie "Flight of the Intruder."

Arthur expects at least 28 visiting military and civilian aircraft.