

F-15 Fighter Jet touches down in Fresno

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By [Linda Mumma](#)

FRESNO, Calif. --

The first of a new fleet of military aircraft has arrived at the California Air National Guard base in Fresno.

It was a big day for the 144th Fighter Wing and the city of Fresno, Tuesday afternoon, as the first of 21 F-15 Fighter Jets touched down on the tarmac for the first time.

"What you see here is the right equipment, in the right place with the right people to defend the United States," said Col. Clay Garrison, Commander of the 144th Fighter Wing.

Mayor Ashley Swearengin and other local leaders were on hand to welcome the new aircraft to Fresno Yosemite International Airport.

"It means so much to our community," said Swearengin. "For example 500 full time employees is what this mission represents to the city, 587 part time reservists and an annual pay role of \$42 million."

Over the next few months, the Air National Guard will ramp up the number of F-15's and will eventually replace its predecessor, the F-16 Fighting Falcon, with the new aircraft arriving from Montana.

"It's very exciting," said Chief Cameron Williams, Maintenance Superintendent of the 144th Fighter Wing. "We've been waiting for a few years for this aircraft. We've been talking about bringing the F-15 now for three to four years, that I'm aware of, so it's nice to see it come to fruition."

Members of the Fighter Wing said the F-15 is better suited for its mission of air defense for several reasons. First, it has two engines, rather than one.

"It's a safer aircraft from that aspect," said Williams. "If one engine goes down, the pilot can still fly home on the other engine. On the F-16, we have one engine. If it goes out the pilot doesn't fly home."

The planes are also bigger and faster and can outperform any current enemy aircraft in air-to-air combat.

"The F-15 is an extremely powerful aircraft at altitude and carries more weapons, has more powerful radar so for our mission, here in California, it's definitely an upgrade," said Lt. Col. Rob Swertfager, pilot with the 144th Fighter Wing. "you have twice as many 20 mm rounds and two extra missiles. It's also easier to land, by the way, so pilots like that."

But probably the biggest benefit of all, is the longevity the aircraft will bring to the once threatened base.

"The Air Force has said the F-15 is going to be the air defense platform for probably the next 30 years," said Lt. Dave Johnson.

A statement many believe will not only help secure the United States, but the Guard's future in Fresno.

Three more F-15's are expected to arrive from Montana in the next few weeks. Williams said, maintenance workers will use them for training, essentially tearing them apart and putting them back together.

The remaining aircraft will arrive by early to mid-October, with the aging F-16's heading to Davis Monthan Air Force Base in Tucson and a few to Phoenix, Arizona.

Once the new aircraft arrive in Fresno, members of the Fighter Wing will go through a 4-5 month training course to learn how to fly and fix the F-15 Eagle.
