

FOUR FRESNO F-15S TO ARRIVE AT KINGSLEY FIELD FOR TRAINING

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KLAMATH FALLS, Ore. - Four F-15s from the 144th Fighter Wing, Fresno, Calif. will arrive at Kingsley Field Dec. 4, at approximately 10:00 a.m. This will open a new chapter in history for the 173rd Fighter Wing as the aircraft and personnel plan to integrate seamlessly into Kingsley operations to help stave off a looming pilot shortage at the 144th.

According to Lt. Col. Jeff Smith, 173rd Maintenance Group Deputy Commander, as the 144th converts from the F-16 to the F-15 they have the aircraft and the maintenance personnel for the mission, but lack trained F-15 pilots to fill the cockpits.

"This was a major problem," said Smith. "They came to us and said, 'what can we do to help you guys increase the number of pilots you are training?'"

Leadership from both wings sat down and hammered out a plan that would allow the 173rd to train additional 144th track-one students, pilots who have flight experience in a different fighter aircraft, and meet the production needs of the 144th. The 144th will send four F-15s and a group of maintenance and support personnel to Kingsley Field, allowing the 173rd to increase their flying by four additional aircraft flights in a day. In turn, this facilitates the 173rd the opportunity to train four additional Fresno F-15 pilots.

"This is the 173rd looking at the challenges and finding solutions," said Col. Jeremy Baenen, the 173rd Fighter Wing Commander. "We are willing and able to expand and meet the challenges that are presented to the National Guard Bureau. We are flexible and adaptable."

Smith added, "We are showing we can step up. It is part of our culture--we have a challenge, Kingsley is the solution. Give us the resources and we are expandable."

There were multiple reasons for the limited number of trained pilots at the 144th including the delay in transferring the aircraft from the Montana Guard, sequestration, and the resulting furloughs.

Fresno personnel will rotate through Kingsley Field on a 60-day cycle, and will comprise various job specialties, primarily in the maintenance group. These personnel will integrate seamlessly into the 173rd shops, working side by side with Kingsley Airmen.

"This is a great opportunity for their maintainers to get the hands-on experience fixing jets that they need," added Smith. "As they stand up their mission they will be prepared to meet the day-to-day challenges having spent that time with us."

The 173rd benefits by providing pilots and students a chance to fly an aircraft with V-1 radar, a more modern and upgraded version of the V-0 radar found in the Kingsley aircraft. "The V-1 radar is one of the primary 'go to war' radar types in the F-15 with newer hardware and upgraded software," noted Smith. "This is an excellent opportunity for our instructors and students."

Smith expects the increase in flights to have minimal noise impact on the community. "We currently typically fly a 10 turn 8 schedule; this will increase to a 12 turn 10," he said. "The community should not hear much of a difference in the noise level."

Smith also points to the benefit to the community, namely the visiting Airmen shopping, eating, and staying in the Basin for the next eight months.

Fresno people and aircraft are scheduled to leave Kingsley in the mid-June time frame.

The 144th Fighter Wing is responsible for providing air defense on the west coast as well as air superiority in support of worldwide joint operations. The 173rd Fighter Wing is the home to the sole F-15 Eagle pilot training unit for the United States Air Force.