

Fresno-based Air Guard jet crashes; 2 die

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A Fresno-based Air National Guard F-4D Phantom jet fighter-interceptor crashed Saturday while on a training mission near Tucson, Ariz., killing both the pilot and weapons system officer.

Lt. Col. James A. Arthur, spokesman for the Fresno-based 144th Fighter-Interceptor Wing, said Saturday that the names of the two air crewmen were being withheld until next of kin could be notified.

Arthur said there were no live armaments aboard the combat jet.

The crash was the first fatal accident involving Fresno-based F-4D Phantoms. The Fresno-based 144th Fighter-Interceptor Wing began flying the 1966-model two-seat combat aircraft in 1984.

At Davis-Monthan Air Force Base near Tucson, a spokesman said the pilot had the rank of captain and the weapons systems officer, who sits in the rear cockpit, held the rank of major. He, too, declined to name the victims other than to confirm both were Fresno-based Air Guardsmen.

Maj. Gary Hawksworth, Davis-Monthan public affairs officer, said the plane crashed at 11:32 a.m. in "fairly open country" 25 miles southwest of Tucson and just north of the town of Arivaca.

An Air Force accident investigation team arrived at the crash site Saturday afternoon. The causes of fatal Air Force and Air Guard crashes often aren't revealed until a month or more after the accident.

Hawksworth said the Fresno-based fliers arrived at

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Crash

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Davis-Monthan Friday to participate in training exercises with Missouri Air National Guard C-130 Hercules four-engine tactical transport planes. He didn't know whether any other Fresno-based planes were involved in Saturday's training mission.

Fresno-based Air Guard planes routinely participate with Air Guard units from other states and regular Air Force, Navy and Canadian Defense Forces planes in training exercises.

The crash was the first fatal accident involving Fresno Air Guard fliers since a T-33 jet trainer with only the pilot aboard left Fresno Air Terminal to be the target in an offshore intercept mission and mysteriously disappeared into the Pacific Ocean off Santa Maria on Sept. 15, 1983.