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Arizona Air Guard to Watch over Super Bowl

By Capt. Gabe Johnson, USAF
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TUCSON, Ariz., Jan. 30, 2008 – Pilots assigned to the 162nd Fighter Wing Alert Detachment at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base will fly air patrols and air defense deterrence missions in support of Super Bowl XLII in Glendale, Ariz., Feb. 3.



An F-16 Fighting Falcon sits ready to deploy at a moment's notice at the 162nd Fighter Wing's Alert Detachment at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Ariz. Arizona Air National Guardsmen from Tucson will fly this aircraft and others to secure the airspace over Super Bowl XLII. Photo by Master Sgt. David Neve, USAF

Arizona's Air Guardsmen are teaming up with the North American Aerospace Defense Command in a consolidated effort with federal, state and local agencies to provide security for the National Football League's championship game at the 73,719-seat University of Phoenix Stadium.

"We have the best jobs in the world," said Lt. Col. Moon Milham, the alert detachment commander. "We get to defend our country and our way of life, and we get to do it from the cockpit of a high-performance fighter jet."

Milham, a 21-year F-16 Fighting Falcon pilot, and his team of aircrew and aircraft maintainers are well-seasoned in the area of homeland defense, having provided an around-the-clock rapid response force in support of Operation Noble Eagle, the U.S. air defense mission that began in the wake of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

The pilots will fly about 8 a.m. Feb. 1 over the Phoenix metropolitan area and Nogales to make a visual show of capability to the general population and the aviation community to deter threats and to reassure the public of their safety.

"Over the Phoenix area, we'll have two F-16s flying in low formation at a medium speed just to let everyone know we are on the job," Milham said.

It's extremely rare that F-16s would fly at 2,000 feet over the city; therefore, the pilots are coordinating with local airports to ensure the sorties do not interfere with normal flight activity in the area, the colonel said.

The jets will make approaches at Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport, Sky Harbor Airport, Goodyear, Glendale, Deer Valley and Scottsdale, and then press south near Nogales to demonstrate U.S. air defense capability near the border.

During the Super Bowl, an undisclosed number of F-16s will perform air patrols to enforce the Federal Aviation Administration's temporary flight restriction over the area. Only approved military, law enforcement and emergency medical flights will be authorized within two nautical miles of the stadium between 1 and 3 p.m.

Within 10 nautical miles of the stadium, between 3 and 10:30 p.m., authorization extends to regularly scheduled commercial passenger, private charter and all-cargo flights that meet or exceed approved security programs. From 10 to 30 nautical miles, all other aircraft arriving or departing local airfields will be authorized to pass through, but will be required to maintain constant radio communication with air traffic control.

"We won't be as visible to people on the ground during the game on Sunday, but we'll be up there," Milham said.

(Air Force Capt. Gabe Johnson serves in public affairs with the 162nd Fighter Wing.)