



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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ICE and defense department investigators seize four F-14 fighter jets *Probe revealed aircraft were not properly "demilitarized" prior to transfer*

LOS ANGELES – Agents from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the Defense Criminal Investigative Service (DCIS) today seized four F-14 "Tomcat" fighter planes, including three held by local air museums, after a multi-agency investigation revealed the aircraft were improperly transferred into private hands.

The seizures follow a 17-month investigation by ICE, DCIS, the Naval Criminal Investigative Service, into allegations that the jet fighters were not properly "demilitarized" before being transferred to private parties, as required by military regulations. Those regulations mandate that parts such as ejector seats must be removed from the aircraft before it is turned over to a private party.

Two of the seized aircraft were located at the Yanks Air Museum in Chino, another was at the Planes of Fame museum, also in Chino. The fourth F-14, which was previously acquired by the production company for the television show "JAG," was most recently stored at a facility operated by Southern California Aviation at the Southern California Logistics Airport in Victorville.

The fighter jets were retired or "stricken" from active service at the Naval Air Station at Point Mugu, Calif. in the late 1990s. Rather than cutting up the aircraft as required by the military's Stricken Aircraft and Disposal Program, three of the planes were sold as "scrap metal." The fourth F-14 was sold to the production company that made the television show "JAG."

"The same thing that makes these planes a source of interest for aircraft enthusiasts, their relatively pristine condition, also makes them desirable for those with less innocent motives," said Robert Schoch, special agent in charge for the ICE office of investigations in Los Angeles. "The strict regulations governing the transfer of military aircraft are designed to reduce the likelihood that sensitive equipment and technology might fall into the hands of individuals or countries seeking to do us or our allies harm."

The seized aircraft were transferred to private parties in the late 1990s. Since then, the U.S. Navy has instituted new policies and procedures to prevent planes that have not been properly demilitarized from being turned over to private owners. The Naval Inventory Control Point is responsible for overseeing the Naval Stricken Aircraft Program.

The F-14s will be partially dismantled and transported to the military's Aerospace Maintenance and Regeneration Center (AMARC) in Tucson, Ariz., for storage and final demilitarization. Meanwhile, the multi-agency investigation into the transfer of the aircraft is ongoing.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.