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Military jets intercepted two small planes during Obama's visit to Des Moines

12:11 PM, Aug 21, 2012 | by William Petroski | Comments

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Military fighter jets under the supervision of the North American Aerospace Defense Command intercepted two small general aviation aircraft during President Barack Obama's visit to Des Moines last week and escorted them to nearby airfields, a military spokesman confirmed.

Both planes violated the temporary flight restricted area that was being enforced for security reasons during Obama's visit Aug. 13, said NORAD spokesman John Cornelio in Colorado Springs, Colo. Obama spent three days campaigning in Iowa last week, including a stop in Des Moines to visit the Iowa State Fair.

"There were two intercepts of small general aviation aircraft. What we typically do is escort them out of the flight restricted area. They will land nearby and the local authorities or the FAA (Federal Aviation Administration) will handle that," Cornelio said.

Both incidents happened in and around the Des Moines area, Cornelio said, and both aircraft landed at local airfields, including one plane that apparently landed at a nearby grass airstrip.

Neither aircraft posed a danger to Obama, but the flight space is restricted during presidential visit, the NORAD spokesman said. Prior to Obama's arrival, the FAA had posted what is known as a notice to airmen to make pilots aware of the restrictions. Unfortunately, such violations are not uncommon, Cornelio said.

"Our responsibility is simply to defend the airspace and keep the safety of the skies," Cornelio said. "You know the good thing is that there was no threat whatsoever, but we

William Petroski



Bill Petroski is a senior reporter with the Des Moines Register.

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still have our responsibility to protect and defend the airspace when there is a VIP in that area.”

FAA spokeswoman Elizabeth Isham Cory in Des Plaines, Ill., said today the events of Aug. 13 are still under investigation, and the agency's policy is not to discuss open investigations. “We never release names” of pilots involved in such incidents, she added.

The military jets which intercepted the two small aircraft were not from the Iowa Air National Guard's 132nd Fighter Wing, said Maj. Ken Hartman, a spokesman for the Des Moines-based unit. He said the Iowa Guard unit, which has F-16 jets, wasn't flying on Aug. 13 because of runway construction at the Des Moines airport.

Tags: federal aviation administration, Iowa Air National Guard, NORAD, North American Aerospace Defense Command, President Barack Obama

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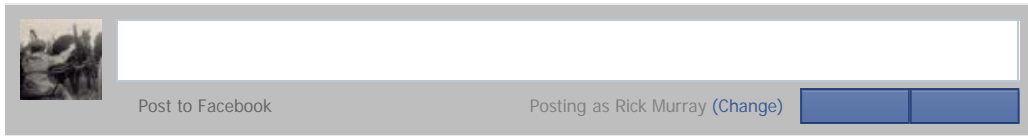
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