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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CONR responds to disturbance aboard Hawaiian Airlines flight

*By Lt. Col. Susan A. Romano
AFNORTH Public Affairs*

TYNDALL AIR FORCE BASE, Fla. – Two Air Force fighter jets based in Portland, Ore., scrambled Wednesday afternoon when a commercial airliner reported having a disruptive passenger aboard.

The F-15 Eagles, piloted by Air National Guardsmen assigned to the 142nd Fighter Wing in Portland, immediately jumped into action after receiving notification from the Western Air Defense Sector, part of the Washington State Air National Guard at McChord AFB, Wash. The pilots were alerted that there was a problem aboard Hawaiian Air Flight 39, and within minutes, they had visual airborne contact with the Boeing 767 that departed Portland International Airport bound for Maui.

The fighter pilots shadowed the aircraft safely back to Portland International and returned to base without incident. Local law enforcement met the plane once it touched down.

Lt. Col. Mark Dunham, one of the F-15 pilots who shadowed the airliner back to the airport, said the event was a textbook example of what effective communication can accomplish. “Once we were airborne, the coordination between WADS, air traffic control and the FAA was stellar,” he said. “Everybody did exactly what they were supposed to do, and it made our job easy.”

“Although we didn’t know exactly what kind of disruption was happening aboard the airliner, we made our decision to launch jets based on the information we were receiving from the Federal Aviation Administration,” said Col. Eric Vogt, WADS director of operations. “It’s always better to err on the side of caution by scrambling fighters and take any air threat seriously.”

A component of the North American Aerospace Defense Command, the Continental U.S. NORAD Region directs air sovereignty activities for the continental United States. Since Sept. 11, 2001, CONR has been the lead agency to protect the U.S. from further airborne aggression from inside and outside America’s borders.

“The Redhawks from the 142nd FW performed magnificently as one of the premier air sovereignty alert sites in our nation,” said Maj. Gen. Garry Dean, CONR commander. “Their ability to respond in near-record time to a potential threat in our skies demonstrates the dedication, professionalism and agility of these highly trained aviators.”