

Lt. Col. Seth “Jethro” Nehring California Air National Guard

The pilot who died in a jet crash in Ukraine was from the Fresno-based 144th Fighter Wing of the California Air National Guard, authorities confirmed Wednesday.

He was identified by the base in Fresno as U. S. Air Force pilot Lt. Col. Seth “Jethro” Nehring, 44, a fighter pilot with the California Air National Guard’s 194th Fighter Squadron, part of the 144th Fighter Wing.

Nehring was born and raised in Fresno, and was living in Reno.

The Ukrainian pilot was Col. Ivan Petrenko, Deputy Commander of the East Air, Chief of Aviation from Ozern Air Base, Zhytomer, Ukraine.

“We are a close-knit family and when a tragedy like this occurs, every member of the 144th Fighter Wing feels it,” said U.S. Air Force Col. Daniel Kelly, commander of the 144th Fighter Wing. “We share in the sorrow felt by Jethro’s loved ones and our thoughts and prayers go out to his family and friends as well as those of the Ukrainian aviator.”

Nehring has been a member of the 144th family for more than 20 years. He began his career here as an enlisted crew chief before being selected for a pilot slot. He flew the F-16 Viper for more than 15 years and converted to the F-15 Eagle.

The Ukrainian Su-27UB fighter jet crashed at approximately 5 p.m. local time (7 a.m. Fresno time) Tuesday during Exercise Clear Sky 2018 in the Khmelnytskyi region. A Ukrainian pilot also died in the crash.

Nehring was taking part in a single-aircraft familiarization flight with a Ukrainian counterpart. No other aircraft were involved in the incident.

“This is a sad day for the United States and Ukraine,” said Maj. Gen. Clay Garrison, California ANG commander and Clear Sky exercise director. “Our deepest condolences go out to the family, friends and fellow Airmen of both the U.S. Airman and Ukrainian aviator who were killed in the incident.”

Nehring “bravely gave his life in service to our state and nation,” Gov. Jerry Brown said in a statement. He and California First Lady Anne Gust Brown “extend their deepest condolences to his family and friends at this difficult time,” the statement said.

Brown ordered that flags be flown at half-staff over the state Capitol. Nehring’s family will receive a letter of condolence from the governor.

Exercise Clear Sky 2018 is a multinational exercise that involves approximately 950 personnel from Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and the United States.