STATEMENT OF BILL F. JEFFERS, DIRECTOR OF AIR TRAFFIC, FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION, BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE, SUBCOMMITTEE ON AVIATION, CONCERNING HIGH-PERFORMANCE TAKE-OFFS BY MILITARY AIRCRAFT AT CIVILIAN AIRPORTS. MAY 29, 1996.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I welcome the opportunity to appear before the Subcommittee today to discuss high-performance takeoffs by military aircraft at civilian airports. Let me say that we at the FAA are saddened, as we know our Department of Defense colleagues are, by the loss of life that occurred on January 29, when an F-14A crashed near Nashville, Tennessee, just after takeoff from Nashville International Airport. Since the investigation of that accident is within the purview of the Department of Defense, the DOD representatives here today are, of course, best positioned to provide you with those details.

Before I describe the FAA's policy on what has been referred to by some as high performance takeoffs -- or as we refer to these maneuvers, "unrestricted climbs" -- let me just say that the relationship between FAA and DOD in terms of providing air traffic control has been a positive one.

While DOD controllers and military facilities handle much of the military air traffic, FAA personnel and facilities are strategically placed, with civilian controllers working with military controllers to provide safe and efficient ATC services for civil and military aircraft. In 1994, the FAA's Air Route Traffic Control Centers logged some 4.4 million

military operations, while FAA towers logged about 2.3 million military operations. In fact, there are large numbers of both high performance and cargo-type military aircraft operating at a number of commercial airports, such as St. Louis and O'Hare.

FAA air traffic controllers provide services and exercise control over military aircraft that largely mirror the services provided to, and control exercised over, civil aircraft. There are, however, some examples of special procedures applied primarily to military operations that I can share with you.

Clearance to conduct formation flights, for example, is granted to primarily military aircraft when air traffic conditions permit. Formation flights take place when two or more aircraft apply visual separation with one another, but are controlled by air traffic control as one aircraft. There is a military subset of formation flights, known as "Military Authority Assumes Responsibility for Separation of Aircraft", or MARSA. In MARSA, subject to air traffic control approval, the military services involved in the flights assume direct responsibility for separation between those aircraft within the formation during the formation flight.

MARSA is also used by the military at civil airports or in civil airspace in other circumstances -- for example, in special takeoff procedures, such as minimum interval takeoffs, and in air refueling. When it is safe to do so, MARSA permits the FAA to accommodate the military mission-specific operations in civil airspace.

The FAA does not use or define the term "high-performance" takeoff in its air traffic control procedures. We do, however, recognize and grant, when appropriate, a request by a pilot to make an "unrestricted climb". This type of air traffic clearance allows an aircraft to take off and more quickly assume its desired altitude, instead of climbing in stages. In the case of some high performance aircraft, such as the F-14A, this may involve a very rapid ascent to altitude.

One of the chief advantages from a pilot's perspective is the fuel savings afforded by such a maneuver. This is why, in addition to requests that are received from military aircraft, civil aircraft such as business and cargo jets often request unrestricted climbs. In either case, whether military or civil, an unrestricted climb clearance would be granted by FAA as a matter of course if such a request can be safely accommodated by the air traffic conditions in the surrounding airspace. Simply stated, the controller's job is to separate the aircraft being controlled, and, if an unrestricted climb can be accommodated within existing air traffic conditions, the controller will grant that clearance. This was the case with the F-14A aircraft involved in the January 29 accident at Nashville International Airport. I should add that, following that accident, an FAA review determined that FAA air traffic control procedures were properly followed in granting the unrestricted climb clearance.

That completes my prepared statement, Mr. Chairman. I would be pleased to respond to any questions you may have at this time.