

# PRESS RELEASE

## House Armed Services Committee Duncan Hunter, Chairman

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### **OPENING REMARKS OF CHAIRMAN DUNCAN HUNTER**

#### *Hearing on Military Aviation Safety*

Today's hearing will review the past ten year history of the services' Class A mishaps. Class As are the most severe accidents, in which an aircraft is destroyed, damages of \$1 million dollars or more occur, or the mishap results in a fatality or permanent total disability. Mishaps statistics are provided as the number of mishaps per 100,000 flying hours.

Historically speaking, the military's rate of aviation accidents has gone down dramatically over the years. For instance, in 1950, the Air Force and the Navy had rates of 36 and 50 mishaps per 100,000 flying hours respectively. By comparison, last year the mishap rate for the entire Department of Defense was roughly two. For the ten year period between 1990 and 2000, overall mishap rates declined from just over two to about 1.5.

However, in 2002 and 2003, the Department's overall mishap rate jumped back up to about two mishaps per 100,000 flying hours.

The question is...why is this happening?

It is well established that I am a strong proponent of modernizing our armed forces with new equipment, and reducing the average age of our aircraft inventories. While I understand that human factors are the most prevalent cause factors in the military's aviation accidents, I hope that today's witnesses will help the Committee understand how aircraft aging has affected recent mishap rates.

Military aviation safety is a concern to policy makers in both the Department of Defense and Congress. We want to improve aviation safety because aviation accidents erode the Department's war fighting capabilities by degrading readiness and reducing the number of aircraft readily available. Sometimes, entire fleets of aircraft are grounded during an accident investigation. Accidents also consume financial resources since damaged aircraft must be repaired, and destroyed aircraft must be replaced. Most importantly, accidents are also hard on personnel. They hurt morale and cost lives. According to Department of Defense, 3,072 people died in military aviation accidents between 1980 and 2003.

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On May 19, 2003, the Secretary of Defense challenged the military services to improve accident rates. He said, "World class organizations do not tolerate preventable accidents. Our accident rates have increased recently, and we need to turn this situation around." This Committee strongly supports the Secretary's challenge to the Services.

To address this and other important military aviation issues, the Committee has invited a distinguished panel to testify before us today.

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