Casenotes and Statute Notes

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FEDERAL TORT CLAIMS ACT — GOVERNMENT LIABILITY FOR PERSONAL INJURIES TO MILITARY PERSONNEL —

The Feres doctrine does not bar recovery by a serviceman under the FTCA when the claim does not involve or compromise a military relationship and when the suit will not encroach upon the military disciplinary structure. Johnson v. United States, 749 F.2d 1530 (11th Cir.), vacated for reh'g en banc, 760 F.2d 244 (11th Cir. 1985), reinstated, No. 83-5764 (11th Cir. Jan. 13, 1986) (per curiam).

On January 7, 1982, the Hawaiian offices of the United States Coast Guard1 dispatched a helicopter to search for a civilian boat in distress.2 Horton W. Johnson, an active-duty member of the Coast Guard, piloted the helicopter assigned for the rescue operation. During the course of the mission, Johnson encountered inclement weather conditions and requested radar assistance3 from civilian air controllers employed by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).4 Shortly after the FAA personnel assumed control of Johnson's flight path, the helicopter crashed

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1 14 U.S.C. § 1 (1982) provides that the Coast Guard operates as "a military service and a branch of the armed forces of the United States at all times."

2 Coastal rescue missions constitute one of the Coast Guard's primary duties under federal law. See id. at § 2 ("The Coast guard shall . . . maintain and operate . . . rescue facilities for the promotion of safety on, under, and over the high seas . . . ").

3 Federal regulations require a pilot to utilize radar assistance when poor visibility conditions exist. See generally 14 C.F.R. § 91.105 (1984). Military pilots must comply with these regulations except in cases of "military emergency or urgent military necessity, [and] when appropriate military authority so determines, and prior notice thereof is given to the Secretary of Transportation." 49 U.S.C. § 1348(f) (1982).

4 The FAA functions as a civilian administration, under the auspices of the Department of Transportation (DOT). See Act of Jan. 12, 1983, Pub. L. No. 97-449, 1983 U.S. CODE CONG. & AD. NEWS (96 Stat.) 2413, 2416 (to be codified at 49 U.S.C. § 106(a)) (revising without substantive change 49 U.S.C. § 1341(a)(1982)). Interestingly, the Coast Guard also operates as a service in DOT except in times of war. 14 U.S.C. §§ 1, 3 (1982). Therefore, Johnson and the air controllers (the alleged tortfeasors in this case) were employees of the same department.
into the side of a mountain on Molokai Island. Johnson
died in the crash.

Johnson's widow, Frieda Joyce Johnson, instituted an
action against the United States under the Federal Tort
Claims Act (FTCA). Mrs. Johnson's complaint alleged
that the FAA controllers acted negligently by vectoring
Johnson's helicopter into the mountainside. The Govern-
ment moved to dismiss the complaint, urging that it failed
to state a claim upon which relief could be granted. The
Government contended that since Johnson's death oc-
curred incident to his military service, the Feres doctrine
barred recovery under the FTCA. The district court
agreed, and dismissed the action with prejudice.

Mrs. Johnson appealed the dismissal to the United
States Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit. She ar-
gued that the Feres doctrine did not apply to her case,
since no military relationship existed between the dece-
dent and the civilian employees of the FAA. Held, reversed
and remanded: The Feres doctrine does not bar recovery by
a serviceman under the FTCA when the claim does not
involve or compromise a military relationship and when
the suit will not encroach upon the military disciplinary
structure. Johnson v. United States, 749 F.2d 1530 (11th
Cir.), vacated for reh'g en banc, 760 F.2d 244 (11th Cir.
(per curiam).

28 U.S.C. §§ 1346, 2671-80 (1982). For the pertinent language of the FTCA,
see infra note 13 and accompanying text. See also infra notes 8-18 and accompany-
ing text (discussing the legislative history and purpose behind the FTCA).

The Feres doctrine originated in the landmark case of Feres v. United States,
340 U.S. 135 (1950). Briefly stated, the doctrine holds that the FTCA does not
waive the federal government's sovereign immunity for injuries to military per-
sonnel, if the injuries arise out of or are incident to military service. See infra notes
33-55 and accompanying text, for a complete discussion of Feres.

Technically, the district court erred by dismissing the action for failure to
state a claim. Such a dismissal reflects a disposition on the merits, but a defense
based on Feres rests on the notion that the court lacks jurisdiction to adjudicate the
merits of the case. See Johnson v. United States, 749 F.2d 1530, 1532 n.2 (11th
Cir. 1985). In light of the circuit court's holding, however, this error proved "of
no consequence." Id.
I. THE FERES DOCTRINE — A TROUBLED HISTORY

The Feres doctrine finds its roots in common law concepts of sovereign immunity. Briefly stated, "sovereign immunity" refers to the idea that a litigant cannot assert an otherwise meritorious claim against a sovereign state unless the sovereign consents to suit. Originally, this principle shielded the United States from liability for its own tortious conduct, as well as for torts committed by its agents. In 1946, however, the United States Congress passed the FTCA in an effort to mitigate the harsh consequences often produced by sovereign immunity.

The FTCA waives the government's sovereign immunity in certain contexts, making the United States amena-

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9 See Feres, 340 U.S. at 139. The English version of the sovereign immunity doctrine rested largely upon the notion that the king enjoyed immunity in his courts as a matter of personal, royal prerogative. Borchard, Government Liability in Tort, 34 YALE L.J. 1, 3 (1924). Given the absence of a sovereign in the United States, adoption of the doctrine in this country remains somewhat of a mystery. Id. at 4-5.

10 Exceptions and alternative remedies had been created in England to prevent the injustice which sometimes occurred through strict application of sovereign immunity principles. Muskopf, 55 Cal. 2d at 212 n.1, 359 P.2d at 458 n.1, 11 Cal. Rptr. at 90 n.1. For example, a claimant always could seek equitable relief through the Court of Exchequer since the king was thought to be the fountain of equity. Id. Furthermore, a citizen of the Crown could obtain legal relief through a "petition of right" if he could show a legal right to redress. Id. When the United States adopted common law sovereign immunity, it failed to devise similar exceptions and alternatives. Blind application of the rule by American courts frequently resulted in grossly inequitable denials of relief to legitimate claimants. See Borchard, supra note 9, at 5.

11 Johnson, 749 F.2d at 1532 (citing Feres, 340 U.S. at 139). Several earlier attempts were made to provide detours for bypassing the sovereign immunity barrier. See Feres, 340 U.S. at 139-40. Before enactment of the FTCA, a private citizen's only recourse for injuries suffered through government negligence was to seek a private relief bill from Congress. The FTCA sought to alleviate the burdens this placed both on private claimants and Congress. H.R. REP. NO. 1287, 79th Cong., 1st Sess. 2 (1946).
ble to suit in federal court for conduct which would subject a private individual to tort liability. Specifically, the FTCA provides that the United States shall be liable for "injury or ... death caused by [the negligence of any government employee] under circumstances where the United States, if a private person, would be liable to the claimant." The Supreme Court's initial reactions to the FTCA were somewhat schizophrenic. In one case the Court offered a very broad interpretation of the FTCA, suggesting that the preclusion of tort claims through more narrow interpretations might frustrate the purpose of the statute. In another instance, the Court balked at a liberal reading of the FTCA, fearful of going beyond the boundaries of the FTCA and the sovereign immunity the FTCA waived. Despite the confusion, one fact remained clear: the FTCA did not impose blanket liability. On the contrary, Congress included specific exceptions in the statute, which retained the government's immunity for certain types of activities. Much of the aforementioned uncertainty sprang out of attempts to define the parameters of these exceptions.

Questions about the role the FTCA should play in the

12 See supra note 5.
14 See Note, From Feres to Stencel: Should Military Personnel Have Access to FTCA Recovery? 77 MICH. L. REV. 1099, 1102 (1977) [hereinafter cited as Note, From Feres to Stencel].
15 See Indian Towing Co. v. United States, 350 U.S. 61 (1955) (holding that the Coast Guard's operation of a lighthouse beacon does not constitute a "discretionary function" for which the government remains immune from suit). For the statutory text of the "discretionary function" exception, see infra note 19.
16 See Dalehite v. United States, 346 U.S. 15 (1953) (holding that the government's adoption of a fertilizer export plan amounted to a "discretionary" activity under the FTCA; hence, the government could not be held liable for injuries caused by a negligently induced explosion of dangerous fertilizer chemicals).
17 Johnson, 749 F.2d at 1532.
18 28 U.S.C. § 2680 (1982) lists the express exceptions to the FTCA. These exceptions include claims arising out of negligent postal handling, most intentional tort claims, claims arising out of military combat activities, and claims arising in a foreign country. Id.
19 The immunity which the government retained for "discretionary functions," for example, presented one of the most troubling exceptions for the courts. See supra notes 15-16. 28 U.S.C. § 2680 (1982) contains this exception, providing
military context added still more fuel to the fires of confusion.\textsuperscript{20} The Supreme Court has long recognized that cases involving the military present special issues and concerns distinct from those found in a typical civilian lawsuit.\textsuperscript{21} Accordingly, the Court has declared that Congress enjoys the liberty of legislating with greater breadth when prescribing laws directed at the armed services.\textsuperscript{22}

The language employed in the FTCA offers little assistance in solving the military problem.\textsuperscript{23} The FTCA does exclude "any claim arising out of the combatant activities of the military or naval forces, or the Coast Guard, during time of war."\textsuperscript{24} Yet the statute does not exclude all actions by members of the military; specifically, it does not exclude those actions arising out of non-combatant activities.\textsuperscript{25} Nevertheless, the courts soon "rushed in where legislators feared to tread."\textsuperscript{26} This judicial intrepidity found expression in the \textit{Feres} doctrine— a court-implied exception to the FTCA, barring claims arising out of or incident to military service.\textsuperscript{27}

Congressional omission of FTCA language to deal with claims by military personnel arising out of non-combatant duties left a legislative gap in the structure of the FTCA.\textsuperscript{28}
The Supreme Court's first occasion to address this gap arose in *Brooks v. United States*. In *Brooks*, a United States Army truck, driven by a civilian employee of the Army, struck a car carrying Welker Brooks and his brother, Arthur. Arthur Brooks died in the crash, and his brother Welker suffered severe injuries. Both men served in the armed forces, but were not on duty when the accident occurred. The Brookses sued the United States under the FTCA, alleging negligence on the part of the Army truck driver. The Supreme Court upheld the Brookses' FTCA claims, on the ground that the accident had nothing to do with their army careers. According to the Court, Congress would have been more explicit in its legislation if it intended to bar FTCA claims by servicemen in all situations. The Court expressly reserved opinion on how to handle a case involving injuries incident to service under the FTCA.

Just one year later in *Feres v. United States*, the Supreme Court came face-to-face with the question it had been able to avoid in *Brooks*. *Feres* involved three consolidated cases. Claims by servicemen in two of these cases alleged medical malpractice on the part of United States Army physicians. The third case involved the claim of a serviceman killed in a barrack destroyed by fire. In each case, the claimant sustained his injury while on active duty.

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29 337 U.S. 49 (1949).
30 Id. at 50.
31 Id.
32 Id.
33 Id.
34 Id. at 52.
35 Id. at 51.
36 Id. at 52 ("Were the accident incident to the Brooks' service, a wholly different case would be presented. We express no opinion as to it . . . .").
38 See supra note 36 and accompanying text.
39 *Feres*, 340 U.S. at 135.
41 *Feres*, 340 U.S. at 135.
duty, at the hands of others in the armed forces.\textsuperscript{42} In deciding whether or not the FTCA imposed government liability in such situations, the Court stated:

There are few guiding materials for our task of statutory construction. No committee reports or floor debates disclose what effect the statute was designed to have on the problem before us, or that it even was in mind. Under these circumstances, no conclusion can be above challenge, but if we misinterpret the Act, at least Congress possesses a ready remedy.\textsuperscript{43}

In this absence of legislative direction, the \textit{Feres} Court proceeded to a cautious interpretation of the FTCA, establishing what has proven to be the only judicially-created exception to the FTCA.\textsuperscript{44} The Court refused recovery by the servicemen, holding that "the Government is not liable under the [FTCA] for injuries to servicemen where the injuries arise out of or are in the course of activity incident to service."\textsuperscript{45}

The \textit{Feres} Court gave several reasons why the FTCA did not impose liability for claims "incident to service."\textsuperscript{46} First, it noted that the FTCA imposes governmental liability only to "the same extent as a private individual under like circumstances."\textsuperscript{47} Because no law had ever permitted an American soldier to sue the federal government for negligence, and because private citizens have no authority to raise an army, the Court found an absence of the requisite "parallel private liability."\textsuperscript{48} Second, the Court pointed out that the FTCA relies on the substantive law of the state where the accident occurred for determining the extent of the government's liability.\textsuperscript{49} Since servicemen

\begin{itemize}
  \item\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Id.} at 138.
  \item\textsuperscript{43} \textit{Id.}
  \item\textsuperscript{44} \textit{Note, From Feres to Stencel, supra note 14, at 1102.}
  \item\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Feres, 340 U.S.} at 146.
  \item\textsuperscript{46} \textit{See infra} notes 47-52 and accompanying text.
  \item\textsuperscript{47} \textit{Feres, 340 U.S.} at 141 (quoting 28 U.S.C. § 2674 (1982)).
  \item\textsuperscript{48} \textit{Feres, 340 U.S.} at 141-42.
  \item\textsuperscript{49} \textit{Id.} at 142. \textit{See 28 U.S.C. § 1346(b) (1982) ("the law of the place where the act or omission occurred" governs liability under the FTCA).}
\end{itemize}
have little or no choice of habitat, application of the FTCA to their claims would result in an unfair, non-uniform claims system. Additionally, the Court suggested that application of state law to claims brought by soldiers would be an encroachment on the "distinctively federal" character of the relationship between the government and its armed forces. Finally, the Court reasoned that Congress already provided a sufficient compensation scheme in the form of veterans' benefits.

*Feres* and its progeny reflected the judicial conviction that some rule must exist to block certain FTCA claims by military personnel, even in some non-combat situations. Accepting *arguendo* the premise that such a rule should exist, two closely-related questions remained unanswered: (1) *When* the rule should be applied, and (2) *Why* the rule should be applied. The conflicting decisions rendered since the inception of the *Feres* doctrine, as well as the widespread criticism the doctrine has received, suggest that the courts have yet to produce a satisfactory response to either question.

A. When *Feres* Should Be Applied — "The Incident to Service" Problem

In attempts to answer the "when" question, the most plaguing difficulty faced by the courts has been classification *vel non* of an activity as "incident to service." In *Brooks*, the pre-*Feres* decision discussed above, the

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50 *Feres*, 340 U.S. at 143.
51 Id., at 143-44.
52 Id. at 144.
53 See supra notes 42-52 and accompanying text.
54 Some commentators have suggested that the need for such a rule does not exist. See, e.g., Note, From *Feres* to *Stencil*, supra note 14, at 1125-26.
55 See, e.g., In re "Agent Orange" Product Liability Litigation, 580 F. Supp. 1242, 1246-47 (E.D.N.Y. 1984) (citing a laundry list of sources criticizing the *Feres* rule, and refusing to apply it to bar FTCA claims by military wives and children injured indirectly by former servicemen’s contact with agent orange).
56 See infra notes 57 &74 and accompanying text.
57 See Note, From *Feres* to *Stencil*, supra note 14, at 1099-1100 nn.6-7.
58 337 U.S. 49 (1949).
Supreme Court allowed FTCA recovery by servicemen injured during a furlough period when a military vehicle struck their private car. The Brooks Court concluded that the plaintiffs were not acting incident to service, stating that the accident "had nothing to do with [the plaintiffs'] army career[s]."

Since Feres, some courts have adopted a Brooks-like approach, barring claims only if the serviceman suffered the injury while on active duty. Other courts have based the "incident to service" determination on whether the claimant sustained the injuries on-base or off-base. These considerations, however, have provided little assistance in the vast majority of cases. Most courts have placed a primary emphasis on the type of activity which gave rise to the injury, looking for relevant links between the activity and the claimant's military duties.

The range of activities considered incident to service

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50 Id. at 52.

60 See, e.g., Hass v. United States, 518 F.2d 1138 (4th Cir. 1975) (barring an FTCA claim by a marine injured while riding a horse rented from a military-operated stable, since his active-duty status made the injury "incident to service"); Henninger v. United States, 473 F.2d 814 (9th Cir.) (denying FTCA recovery by a Navy enlisted man for injuries sustained by the negligence of Navy physicians, since the injury occurred while the claimant was on active duty), cert. denied, 414 U.S. 819 (1973).

61 See, e.g., Chambers v. United States, 357 F.2d 224 (8th Cir. 1966) (pointing out the on-base situs of the accident in denying FTCA recovery to the parents of an Air Force enlisted man who died at a swimming pool on the base); Zoula v. United States, 217 F.2d 81 (5th Cir. 1954) (precluding FTCA claims by servicemen injured in a collision with an Army ambulance, since the accident occurred on a military reservation).

62 Parker v. United States, 611 F.2d 1007, 1009 (5th Cir. 1980) (allowing FTCA recovery to the family of a soldier killed in an off-duty car crash with a vehicle driven by another serviceman, and stating, "The Supreme Court cases under [Feres] do not provide many clear signposts to the parameters of 'incident to service'.")

63 See, e.g., Hale v. United States, 416 F.2d 355 (6th Cir. 1969) (vacating and remanding the dismissed case of a serviceman suing under the FTCA when he was struck by a car after being haled to the middle of a highway where a military police vehicle was stopped); Schwager v. United States, 279 F. Supp. 262 (E.D. Pa. 1968) (denying the Government's motion for summary judgment in an FTCA case instituted by the widow of a sailor who died because of the alleged negligence of naval hospital agents).
may be fairly broad. For example, the courts have barred FTCA claims for injuries sustained while riding a horse rented from a military-operated stable, playing "donkey softball," swimming in an on-base swimming pool, and riding a bus to a beach party sponsored by the military. And, of course, Feres itself found claimants' injuries incident to service when they resulted from the alleged medical malpractice of Army physicians.

B. Why Feres Should Be Applied — The Rationales and Their Demise

Much of the difficulty in determining when to apply Feres occurs because of uncertainty about "why" the rule should be applied. Several different rationales have been offered to support the Feres doctrine. These include the absence of a "parallel private liability"; the notion that since state tort law must be consulted under the FTCA, recovery by servicemen would be irrationally dependent upon geographic considerations beyond the victim's sphere of control; the possible adverse effects FTCA claims might have on military discipline; the existence of

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64 See infra notes 65-68 and accompanying text.
65 Hass, 518 F.2d at 1141-42.
67 Chambers v. United States, 357 F.2d 224 (8th Cir. 1966).
68 Degentesh v. United States, 230 F. Supp. 763 (N.D. Ill. 1964) (concluding that despite the pleasurable nature of the beach party in question, it still constituted an activity "incident to service" due to the military sponsorship involved).
69 See Feres, 340 U.S. at 137.
70 See Note, From Feres to Stencel, supra note 14, at 1101; Johnson, 749 F.2d at 1532-33; Feres, 340 U.S. at 141-46.
71 Feres, 340 U.S. at 141-42.
72 See supra note 49 and accompanying text.
73 Feres, 340 U.S. at 142-43.
74 While the Feres Court may have based its decision partly on the military discipline concern, it did not articulate this reasoning. Four years after Feres, however, the Supreme Court explicitly recognized the discipline factor as one of the foundation stones of the Feres doctrine. United States v. Brown, 348 U.S. 110, 112 (1954). In an opinion refusing to bar a veteran's claim for medical malpractice by an Army surgeon, the Brown Court made the following statement:
The peculiar and special relationship of the soldier to his superiors,
an alternative compensation scheme for service personnel; and the "distinctively federal" relationship in military cases. Over the rocky road of Feres' thirty-five year history, these rationales have been knocked down and reasserted, analyzed and reanalyzed.

1. Parallel Private Liability

The "parallel private liability" rationale became the first theoretical predicate of Feres to fall prey to criticism. Feres had suggested that the express language of the FTCA barred military claims since they lacked a parallel, or an analogy, in the private sector. The Court reasoned that to interpret the FTCA otherwise would "visit the Government with novel and unprecedented liabilities," a visitation which the Court believed Congress did not intend. Despite the force of this argument in Feres, the Supreme Court later rejected the parallel liability test completely. In Indian Towing Co. v. United States, the Court held the United States liable on an FTCA claim the effects of the maintenance of such suits on discipline, and the extreme results that might obtain if suits under the Tort Claims Act were allowed for negligent orders given or negligent acts committed in the course of military duty, led the [Feres] Court to read that Act as excluding claims of that character.

See notes 78-130 and accompanying text. See also Johnson, 749 F.2d at 1533-35.

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See infra note 83 and accompanying text.

for loss of a barge by a towing company resulting from negligent operation of a Coast Guard lighthouse. The Court concluded that it "would be attributing bizarre motives to Congress [to predicate FTCA liability on] the presence or absence of identical private activity." Shortly after Indian Towing, the Supreme Court delivered the final coup de grace to the parallel liability test in Rayonier, Inc. v. United States. In allowing FTCA recovery for property destroyed by fire through the negligence of the United States Forest Service, the Rayonier Court expressly rejected the parallel liability test as a misinterpretation of the FTCA. As a result of these decisions, application of the Feres doctrine today requires more than the absence of "parallel private liability."

2. The Uniformity Argument

A second Feres rationale which quickly succumbed was the idea that the FTCA "law of the place" requirement creates an unfair non-uniformity when applied to servicemen who have no choice of habitat. The Feres Court reasoned that the resort to state tort law required by the FTCA:

perhaps is fair enough when the claimant is not on duty or is free to choose his own habitat and thereby limit the jurisdiction in which it will be possible for federal activities to cause him injury. But a soldier on active duty has no such choice. . . . That the geography of an injury should select the law to be applied to his tort claims makes no sense.

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84 Id. at 68-70.
85 Id. at 67.
87 Id. at 319. The Court concluded that "the very purpose of the [FTCA] was to waive the Government's traditional all-encompassing immunity from tort actions and to establish novel and unprecedented governmental liability." Id.
88 See Johnson, 749 F.2d at 1533; Note, From Feres to Stencel, supra note 14, at 1104.
89 See supra note 49 and accompanying text.
90 Johnson, 749 F.2d at 1534.
91 Feres, 340 U.S. at 142-43.
But the Supreme Court rejected a similar argument in United States v. Muniz,\(^92\) allowing a federal prisoner to pursue an FTCA claim despite the prisoner’s lack of control over his environment.\(^93\) The Muniz Court pointed out that complete denial of any tort recovery presents far greater prejudice to the claimant than application of non-uniform state laws.\(^94\) Thus, the uniformity argument seems to have fallen to the wayside along with the parallel liability test.\(^95\)

3. The Discipline Factor

Although the remaining rationales have fared much better,\(^96\) these pillars of support have not escaped criticism.\(^97\) Several courts have suggested that the military discipline rationale constitutes the most important and defensible reason for application of the Feres doctrine.\(^98\) The discipline rationale rests on a fear that FTCA claims by servicemen might place a chilling effect on the exercise of military expertise and discretion in carrying out military operations.\(^99\) The hindering effect FTCA liability might have on an officer’s willingness to issue commands might strain the military’s need for discipline, both on the battlefield and in training.\(^100\) Furthermore, such claims might prompt a subordinate to disobey or challenge an order issued by his superior.\(^101\) Although at least one

\(^{92}\) 374 U.S. 150 (1963).

\(^{93}\) Id. at 164-65.

\(^{94}\) Id. at 162. Although Muniz dealt with a federal prisoner and not with a serviceman, the case can be seen as further erosion of the uniformity rationale in the military context as well. See Johnson, 749 F.2d at 1533. Soldiers and prisoners are in similar circumstances with respect to their choice of forum in a lawsuit, since the government chooses the habitat for both.

\(^{95}\) For a more extensive discussion of the uniformity problem, see Note, From Feres to Stencel, supra note 14, at 1118-21.

\(^{96}\) See infra notes 98-130 and accompanying text.

\(^{97}\) See Note, From Feres to Stencel, supra note 14, at 1104-18.

\(^{98}\) See, e.g., Johnson, 749 F.2d at 1533 (citing Brown, 348 U.S. at 112, for the proposition that the discipline factor best explains the Feres rule).

\(^{99}\) See Note, From Feres to Stencel, supra note 14, at 1118.

\(^{100}\) Brown v. United States, 739 F.2d 362, 365 (8th Cir. 1984).

\(^{101}\) See Brown, 348 U.S. at 112.
scholar has advocated rejection of the discipline factor as a rationale for the Feres rule, it continues to enjoy the favor of most courts.

4. Existence of Alternative Compensation

A subject of greater criticism has been the "existence of alternative compensation" rationale. The Feres Court breathed life into this rationale by concluding that Congress did not intend the FTCA to apply to the military, since legislation had already been enacted providing for disability payments to injured servicemen. The FTCA's legislative history revealed no congressional utterances on this issue. The Court, however, found this silence indicative of congressional intent to make the existing veterans' compensation scheme an exclusive remedy.

One of the criticisms leveled at alternative compensation focuses on the Supreme Court's inconsistent treatment of the rationale. The Court has also been condemned for assuming that disability payments offer a

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102 Note, From Feres to Stencel, supra note 14, at 1104-09, and the sources cited therein.
103 See, e.g., Hunt v. United States, 636 F.2d 580, 598-99 (D.C. Cir. 1980) (allowing Swine Flu Act recovery by servicemen who contracted disease after receiving swine flu shots, and noting that "the protection of military discipline . . . serves largely if not exclusively as the predicate for the Feres doctrine"); Johnson, 749 F.2d at 1539 (allowing prosecution of plaintiff's claim since it "cannot conceivably involve or compromise . . . the military disciplinary structure").
104 See, e.g., Note, From Feres to Stencel, supra note 14, at 1104-09.
105 Feres, 340 U.S. at 144. When the Court handed down the Feres decision, disability payments to veterans were awarded pursuant to various laws included in Title 38 of the United States Code. These laws have since been completely revised by the Veterans' Benefits Act, Pub. L. No. 85-857, § 1, 72 Stat. 1105 (1958).
106 Feres, 340 U.S. at 158.
107 Id. at 140. The Feres Court concluded that Congress passed the FTCA to extend compensation to the remediless, not to those who already enjoyed a comprehensive system of relief. Id. See Note, From Feres to Stencel, supra note 14, at 1105-06, for a further discussion of why the Court reached this conclusion.
108 See, e.g., Parker, 611 F.2d at 1011-12; Brief of Appellant at 12, Johnson v. United States, 749 F.2d 1530 (11th Cir. 1985) [hereinafter cited as Brief of Appellant]. As an example of this inconsistent treatment, compare Brooks v. United States, 337 U.S. 49, 53 (1949) (veterans' benefits should be set off against but should not bar FTCA recovery), with Feres, 340 U.S. at 144 (veterans' benefits preclude FTCA recovery).
"simple, certain and uniform" alternative to FTCA recovery. Unlike most other compensation schemes, which create a vested right in the beneficiary, veterans' awards are conditional in nature. Temporary or permanent forfeiture of the award can occur for a number of reasons, including imprisonment, treason, subversive activities, conscientious objection, and homosexuality.

Because of the attacks upon the alternative compensation rationale, some courts have come close to rejecting the rationale as a valid justification for the Feres doctrine. While one of the Supreme Court's most recent opinions reaffirmed the alternative compensation rationale, the Court has questioned its viability in the past. This questioning exemplifies the Supreme Court's inconsistent treatment of the alternative compensation rationale. In some cases, the Court has nearly ignored the rationale, while in other decisions the Court lists the rationale as a major foundation for the Feres doctrine.

5. Distinctively Federal Character

The vitality of the somewhat nebulous "distinctively federal character" rationale has also been questioned. Closely related to both the discipline and uniformity concerns, this leg of the Feres doctrine stands on the unique

109 Feres, 340 U.S. at 144.
110 See Note, From Feres to Stencel, supra note 14, at 1106-08 (suggesting that veterans' benefits are not as certain as some have assumed).
111 Id. at 1107-08.
112 See id. at nn.51-57 and accompanying text.
113 See, e.g., Hunt, 636 F.2d at 595.
115 See Brown, 348 U.S. at 113 (noting that in Brooks, 337 U.S. at 53, the Court concluded that Congress did not intend to make veterans' benefits an exclusive remedy).
116 See infra note 117 and accompanying text.
117 Compare Stencel Aero Eng'g Corp. v. United States, 431 U.S. 666, 671-73 (1977) (listing the alternative compensation provided by veterans' benefits as one of three rationales for invoking the Feres doctrine), with Brown, 348 U.S. at 112 (refusing to apply Feres although the plaintiff was eligible for veterans' benefits, since the case did not involve a threat to military discipline).
118 See Note, From Feres to Stencel, supra note 14, at 1110-12.
relationship which exists between the United States and its service personnel. Courts have usually given deference to military autonomy and the unique role of the American military. The constitutional duopoly enjoyed by the executive and legislative branches with respect to the military, the need to safeguard the military disciplinary structure for national security, and other military-unique concerns played a part in prompting the judicial restraint found in Feres.

Despite the judiciary's reluctance to involve itself with military cases, the "distinctively federal" argument has been criticized. To begin with, the Supreme Court has become increasingly willing to review court-martial and military administrative decisions. One author has asserted that military autonomy issues in tort cases would be identical to military autonomy questions in court-martial and administrative review cases. Hence, the federal relationship issue should not bar judicial review of FTCA claims made by soldiers. Secondly, the "distinctively federal" argument could be made just as forcefully with

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119 Feres, 340 U.S. at 143.
121 U.S. CONST. art. I, § 8 gives Congress the power to raise and support armies, to maintain a navy, to make rules for the government of the armed forces, and to organize, train and equip a militia. U.S. CONST. art. II, § 2 cl. 1 makes the President the "Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States."
122 See Sherman, Legal Inadequacies and Doctrinal Restraints in Controlling the Military, 49 IND. L.J. 539, 540-41 (1974). Sherman asserts that courts frequently back away from judicial review of military cases because the "very survival of the nation" rests in the hands of the military. Id. at 540.
123 See generally Note, From Feres to Stencel, supra note 14, at 1109-12 (noting that frequently allowing FTCA claims by injured servicemen raises fears that soldiers will begin to "second-guess" orders, or that discipline could be affected by the testimony of one soldier against another).
124 See Feres, 340 U.S. at 141-46.
125 Note, From Feres to Stencel, supra note 14, at 1109-12.
127 Note, From Feres to Stencel, supra note 14, at 1114-17.
128 Id. at 1118.
respect to other federal agencies that do not enjoy immunity from FTCA claims. Despite these criticisms, the Supreme Court continues to cling to the "distinctively federal" rationale.

C. A Revival of the Feres Rationales?

1. Stencel Aero Engineering Corp. v. United States

By the mid-1970's, disgruntlement with the Feres doctrine prompted expectations that the Supreme Court might discard the rule. At the very least, one might have expected the Court to deliver a death blow to the widely-discredited "distinctively federal" and "alternative compensation" rationales. The expected mortal wounds never came. Instead, the Supreme Court breathed new life into the Feres doctrine with the 1977 case of Stencel Aero Engineering Corp. v. United States. In

129 Jaffe v. United States, 663 F.2d 1226, 1233 n.7 (3d Cir. 1981) (en banc), cert. denied, 456 U.S. 972 (1982). In a case barring tort recovery to a former soldier injured in radiation tests of a nuclear device, the Jaffe court noted that the "distinctively federal" argument probably serves only to reinforce the other Feres rationales. Id. at 1233. A major weakness of the "distinctively federal" rationale is that similar arguments could be made regarding the "Bureau of the Census, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, and many other agencies of the Federal Government" not immune from FTCA liability. Id. at 1233 (quoting Stencel, 431 U.S. at 675 (Marshall, J., dissenting)).

130 See, e.g., Stencel, 431 U.S. at 672, stating that "the ['distinctively federal character' rationale] considered in Feres operates with equal force in this case." Id.

131 See, e.g., Veillette v. United States, 615 F.2d 505, 507 (9th Cir. 1980) (rejecting an FTCA claim filed by the parents of a serviceman whose death was allegedly attributable to naval hospital negligence, the court concluded that it had no choice but to follow Feres, despite the doctrine's anomalies); Peluso v. United States, 474 F.2d 605, 606 (3d Cir.) cert. denied, 414 U.S. 879 (1973) (reluctantly rejecting the FTCA claim brought by the parents of a national guardsman killed by the alleged negligence of an Army hospital, and stating, "[I]f the matter were open to us we would be receptive to the appellants' argument that Feres should be reconsidered."); Hitch, The Federal Tort Claims Act and Military Personnel, 8 Rutgers L. Rev. 316 (1954); Rhodes, The Feres Doctrine After Twenty-Five Years, 18 A.F.L. Rev. 24 (1976).

132 See generally Brief of Appellant, supra note 108, at 11-17. The Appellant quoted Hunt, 636 F.2d at 599: "[T]he protection of military discipline... serves largely if not exclusively as the predicate for the Feres doctrine." Brief of Appellant, supra note 108, at 13 (emphasis added).

133 See infra note 134 and accompanying text.

Stencel, a National Guard officer received permanent injuries when his fighter aircraft's ejection system malfunctioned during a mid-air crisis. The disabled pilot filed suit against both the Government and Stencel, the manufacturer of the ejection system. Stencel brought a cross-claim against the United States, seeking indemnity for its own liability to the pilot. The lower courts barred both the pilot's and Stencel's claims against the Government, and Stencel appealed. The Supreme Court, applying the Feres doctrine, affirmed the denial of FTCA recovery by the manufacturer. The Court not only reaffirmed the Feres doctrine, but "dusted off and reasserted" the "distinctively federal" and "alternative compensation" rationales. These rationales, in addition to the "military discipline" consideration, were recognized in Stencel as the analytical triad upon which Feres rested.

2. Chappell v. Wallace

The Stencel Court's cursory treatment of the Feres doctrine's rationales has prompted suggestions that the decision amounts to a judicial aberration, which should be overturned. However, in Chappell v. Wallace, the

135 Id. at 667.
136 Id. at 668.
137 Id.
138 Id.
139 Id. at 673-74. For an extensive discussion of how the Feres rule affects U.S. defense contractors, see Note, Stencel Aero Engineering Corp. v. United States: An Expansion of the Feres Doctrine to Include Military Contractors, Subcontractors, and Suppliers, 29 Hastings L.J. 1217 (1978).
140 Parker, 611 F.2d at 1011.
141 Stencel, 431 U.S. at 671-73.
142 Id.
143 Chief Justice Burger's majority opinion accepted the Feres rationales without any apparent analysis of their merit. Id. at 669-74. Despite an exhaustive dissent, id. at 674-77, the majority failed to acknowledge any of the criticisms directed at the doctrine during its twenty-five year history.
144 See In re "Agent Orange," 580 F. Supp. at 1246-47 (citing several post-Stencel cases which apply Feres "reluctantly" and question the continuing viability of its theoretical bases). See also Brief of Appellant, supra note 108, at 17-19.
Supreme Court recently gave implicit approval to the reasoning in *Stencel*.' In *Chappell*, five Navy enlisted men sued their superior officers for alleged unconstitutional discrimination. The plaintiffs urged that because of their minority race, the defendant officers failed to assign them desirable duties and gave them low performance evaluations. The Court noted that the remedy sought depended on the absence of "special factors counselling hesitation." The Court identified these "special factors" as the same alternative compensation, distinctively federal, and military discipline factors enunciated in *Stencel* as the backbone of the *Feres* doctrine. Finding these factors were present, the *Chappell* Court denied recovery by the enlisted men. For the moment at least, the *Chappell* reasoning indicates that *Stencel*’s reaffirmation of *Feres* and its theoretical underpinnings "is beyond question ... the

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146 See id. at 299.

147 Id. at 297. While federal officials generally are immune from such suits, the Supreme Court has authorized recovery against federal agents whose actions amount to a serious violation of an individual's constitutional rights. See *Bivens v. Six Unknown Named Agents of Fed. Bureau of Narcotics*, 403 U.S. 388 (1971) (holding agents of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics liable for the warrantless entry of the petitioner's apartment, since it clearly violated his fourth amendment right to privacy).

149 *Chappell*, 462 U.S. at 297.

149 Id. at 298 (quoting *Bivens*, 403 U.S. at 396).

150 Id. at 298-99.

151 Id. at 305.

152 The Supreme Court's most recent admonition on the application of *Feres* appears in *United States v. Shearer*, 105 S. Ct. 3039 (1985). In *Shearer*, the Court concluded that *Feres* barred FTCA recovery by a mother whose Army private son was murdered by a fellow soldier while off duty and away from the base. Id. at 3041. The Court saw the plaintiff's allegation that the Army negligently failed to exercise control over the murderer as a claim which "goes directly to the 'management' of the military [calling] into question basic choices about ... discipline." Id. at 3043. Although it cited *Stencel* with approval, the Court skirted the "distinctively federal" and "alternative compensation" rationales endorsed by *Stencel*. The *Shearer* majority did assert, however, that "[t]he *Feres* doctrine cannot be reduced to a few bright-line rules; each case must be examined in light of the statute as it has been construed in *Feres* and subsequent cases." Id. The Supreme Court handed down the *Shearer* opinion shortly after the panel decision in *Johnson*. The per curiam opinion from the en banc rehearing in *Johnson* relied on the *Shearer* language quoted above to support its reinstatement of the panel decision. See infra note 211 and accompanying text.
II. THE STATUS OF THE TORTFEASOR: PAVING THE WAY FOR INTERCIRCUIT CONFLICT

In Uptegrove v. United States, the Ninth Circuit denied FTCA recovery on facts "strikingly similar" to those in Johnson. The Uptegrove court barred an FTCA suit by the widow of a Navy Lieutenant killed in the crash of an Air Force C-141 transport, allegedly caused by the negligence of three civilian FAA air traffic controllers. The Uptegrove court did not consider the tortfeasors' civilian status important, stating that "the status of the deceased or injured person controls." The Uptegrove decision followed an earlier Ninth Circuit case, United States v. Lee, which employed similar reasoning in denying FTCA recovery to two active-duty marines killed in an airplane crash that allegedly resulted from FAA controller negligence. A decision from the Seventh Circuit, Layne v. United States, also refused to consider the status of the tortfeasor in applying Feres. The Layne court refused to allow an FTCA proceeding by the widow of an Air National Guardsman killed in a training flight accident, although the alleged tortfeasors were civilian employees of the FAA.

Cases from three other federal circuits have also disregarded the status of the tortfeasor in analyzing FTCA claims by service personnel, although these cases differ

155 Johnson, 749 F.2d at 1535.
154 600 F.2d 1248 (9th Cir. 1979), cert. denied, 444 U.S. 1044 (1980).
155 Johnson, 749 F.2d at 1539.
156 Uptegrove, 600 F.2d at 1251.
157 Id.
158 Id. (quoting United States v. Lee, 400 F.2d 558, 562 (9th Cir. 1968), cert. denied, 393 U.S. 1053 (1969)).
159 400 F.2d 558 (9th Cir. 1968), cert. denied, 393 U.S. 1053 (1969).
160 Id. at 562.
161 295 F.2d 433 (7th Cir. 1961), cert. denied, 368 U.S. 990 (1962).
162 Id. at 436.
163 Id.
factually from *Uptegrove, Lee and Layne*. In *Potts v. United States*, a Sixth Circuit case, a medical corpsman received injuries while aboard a Navy landing craft when a cable used to hoist the craft onto a Navy ship snapped and struck him. The crewmen responsible for operating the hoist were civilians. The injured corpsman sued the United States. The Sixth Circuit, applying the *Feres* doctrine, denied recovery without even mentioning the civilian status of the hoist operators.

The Tenth Circuit in *Carter v. City of Cheyenne*, relied on a *Stencel*-type application of *Feres* to preclude a third-party claim against the United States by the City of Cheyenne, Wyoming. The City sought indemnity after being named a defendant in an action brought by the family of an Air Force Thunderbird pilot killed in a runway crash at the municipal airport in Cheyenne. The court cited *Uptegrove* and agreed that "the status of the deceased or injured person . . . controls in determining whether the claimant may recover under the Tort Claims Act." Hence, the court concluded that the Air Force pilot could not have sued the United States successfully and, under *Stencel*, it necessarily followed that the City should not be allowed to recover.

In *Hass v. United States*, a United States Marine received injuries while riding a horse rented from a stable

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164 See infra notes 165-179 and accompanying text.
166 Id.
167 Id.
168 Id. The plaintiff actually sued under the Public Service Vessels Act, 46 U.S.C. §§ 781-90 (1982), and the Suits in Admiralty Act, 46 U.S.C. §§ 741-52 (1982), rather than the FTCA. The court concluded, however, that *Feres* applied with equal force to suits by military personnel under these acts. *Potts*, 723 F.2d at 22.
169 *Potts*, 723 F.2d at 22.
170 649 F.2d 827 (10th Cir. 1981).
171 Id. at 831.
172 Id. at 827.
173 Id. at 830.
174 Id. at 830-31.
175 518 F.2d 1138 (4th Cir. 1975).
owned and operated by the government.\textsuperscript{176} The stable managers were civilian employees of the government.\textsuperscript{177} The United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit held that the \textit{Feres} doctrine barred the injured marine's FTCA claim against the government.\textsuperscript{178} As to the civilian status of the alleged tortfeasors, the court stated:

Although relevant to the ultimate fact inference to be drawn, it is not, we think, essential to application of the \textit{Feres} doctrine that the injury to the serviceman have been caused by another member of the military rather than a civilian employee of the military. [In this case the stable managers'] civilian status did not affect their job performance . . . we hold that their civilian status does not operate to prevent application of the \textit{Feres} doctrine.\textsuperscript{179}

III. \textit{JOHNSON V. UNITED STATES — THE COURT'S ANALYSIS}

The \textit{Johnson} court confronted the issue of whether the \textit{Feres} doctrine bars an FTCA suit for the death of an active-duty serviceman, allegedly caused by the negligent conduct of civilian employees of the FAA.\textsuperscript{180} After wading through the doctrine's murky history,\textsuperscript{181} the court addressed the arguments raised by both parties.

The court discussed the erosion of the "distinctively federal" and "alternative compensation" rationales in \textit{Brown} and \textit{Muniz},\textsuperscript{182} but refused to accept the plaintiff's contention that the "military discipline" concern provides the only solid ground for an application of \textit{Feres}.\textsuperscript{183} The plaintiff argued that while \textit{Chappell} discussed all three of the \textit{Feres} rationales reaffirmed in \textit{Stencel}, the reasoning in

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{176} \textit{Id.} at 1139.
\textsuperscript{177} \textit{Id.} at 1141.
\textsuperscript{178} \textit{Id.} at 1142.
\textsuperscript{179} \textit{Id.} at 1141.
\textsuperscript{180} \textit{Johnson}, 749 F.2d at 1531.
\textsuperscript{181} \textit{Id.} at 1532-35.
\textsuperscript{182} \textit{Id.} at 1533-34.
\textsuperscript{183} \textit{Id.} at 1534-35. See Brief of Appellant, \textit{supra} note 108, at 20, for a more thorough treatment of the plaintiff's argument on this issue.
\end{footnotes}
Chappell emphasizes the "military discipline" rationale and "implicitly disavows the first two makeweights historically mustered in support of the Feres doctrine."\(^{184}\) The court rejected this assertion, noting that Chappell did not confine itself to the "military discipline" factor, but also considered the "alternative compensation" and "distinctively federal character" rationales.\(^{185}\) The court also rejected an argument that their earlier decision in Parker v. United States,\(^{186}\) although denying FTCA recovery, had discarded the widely-criticized rationales.\(^{187}\)

Finally, the Johnson court considered the plaintiff's proposition as requiring an analysis of the discipline factor on a case-by-case basis.\(^{188}\) The court stated that this approach would prove impractical, since "the Armed Services would be faced with maintaining a claims department."\(^{189}\) The court acknowledged the willingness of some jurisdictions to adopt this approach,\(^{190}\) but concluded that a case-by-case inquiry serves efficiency only when a case presents a factual situation "radically different from the typical Feres doctrine case."\(^{191}\) If such a situation exists, the rationales of the doctrine must be

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\(^{184}\) Reply Brief of Appellant at 6, Johnson v. United States, 749 F.2d 1530 (11th Cir. 1985) [hereinafter cited as Reply Brief of Appellant].

\(^{185}\) Johnson, 749 F.2d at 1535 n.4.

\(^{186}\) 611 F.2d 1007 (5th Cir. 1980).

\(^{187}\) The plaintiff suggested that Parker had rejected the "distinctively federal" and "alternative compensation" rationales. The author of the Johnson opinion, Judge Fay, also wrote the Parker opinion. While Parker is a Fifth Circuit decision, it acts as binding precedent on Eleventh Circuit cases (such as Johnson), thanks to a recent reorganization of the federal circuit court system. See Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals Reorganization Act of 1980, Pub. L. No. 96-452, 94 Stat. 1994 (codified as amended at 28 U.S.C. § 41 (1982)). While acknowledging Parker's force, the Johnson court rejected the plaintiff's assertion that Parker had departed from the original Feres doctrine. See Johnson, 749 F.2d at 1537 n.7.

\(^{188}\) Johnson, 749 F.2d at 1536 n.6.

\(^{189}\) Id. (quoting Hall v. United States, 451 F.2d 353, 354 (1st Cir. 1971)).

\(^{190}\) See, e.g., Johnson v. United States, 704 F.2d 1431 (9th Cir. 1983) (rejecting application of Feres although both claimant and tortfeasor were active-duty servicemen, since the claims involved could not possibly affect military discipline).

\(^{191}\) Johnson, 749 F.2d at 1537 n.6.
consulted to ascertain its applicability. However, when the standard Feres paradigm presents itself — *i.e.*, when both the victim and tortfeasor are employees of the armed services — the sole question is whether or not the injuries were incurred incident to service.

In *Johnson*, the court concluded that the events surrounding the decedent's crash made the case factually dissimilar to Feres. The court agreed with the plaintiff that the civilian status of the FAA ground controllers required more than a blind application of the Feres rule. This finding precluded the Government's argument that "[t]he status of the deceased, not the status of the tortfeasor, controls."

Finding the facts in *Johnson* distinguishable from the Feres paradigm, the court proceeded to analyze the case in the light of the policies supporting the Feres doctrine. Although the court refused to accept the plaintiff's contention that the first two rationales for the doctrine were no longer viable, the court recognized that the discipline factor "serves largely if not exclusively as the predicate for the Feres doctrine." Applying the Feres policies to the *Johnson* facts, the court concluded that not only could the conduct of the civilian tortfeasors be scrutinized without implicating the military services, but the case presented no danger of compromising military discipline. The court then decided that the plaintiff's FTCA

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192 *Johnson*, 749 F.2d at 1537.
193 *Id.*
194 *Id.* at 1537-39.
195 *Reply Brief of Appellant, supra* note 184, at 3.
196 *Johnson*, 749 F.2d at 1539.
198 *Johnson*, 749 F.2d at 1535-39.
199 *See supra* notes 186-187 and accompanying text.
200 *Johnson*, 749 F.2d at 1539 (quoting *Hunt*, 636 F.2d at 599).
201 *Id.* In an initial Petition for Rehearing (which the court denied, *id.* at 1530), the Government accused the court of focusing solely on the discipline factor, at the expense of the other rationales the opinion expressly acknowledged. *See Petition for Rehearing and Suggestion for Rehearing En Banc* at 8, *Johnson v. United States*, 749 F.2d 1530 (11th Cir. 1985) [hereinafter cited as Petition for Rehear-
claim should be allowed to proceed.\textsuperscript{202}

The court criticized the conflicting opinion of the Ninth Circuit in the \textit{Uptegrove} case decided on facts similar to those in \textit{Johnson}.
\textsuperscript{203} According to \textit{Johnson}, the \textit{Uptegrove} court had applied the \textit{Feres} doctrine blindly by ignoring the civilian status of the tortfeasor.
\textsuperscript{204} The court concluded that the Ninth Circuit approach "has the virtue of easy application, [but is not] the better jurisprudential course."\textsuperscript{205} Furthermore, recent developments in the \textit{Feres} area raised doubts about the continuing force of the \textit{Uptegrove} approach, even within the Ninth Circuit.\textsuperscript{206}
Subsequent to filing of the panel opinion in *Johnson*, the Government sought review by the full court of the Eleventh Circuit.\(^{207}\) The court denied the Government’s original motion for rehearing en banc, but granted a second, similar request.\(^{208}\) This action temporarily vacated the panel opinion.\(^{209}\) Following rehearing, however, a majority of the court issued a per curiam opinion reinstating the panel opinion.\(^{210}\) The court stated:

[W]e find that the panel opinion has given proper consideration to the *Feres* factors with particular attention to whether or not the claims asserted here will implicate civilian courts in conflicts involving the military structure or military decisions. The claims presented here are based solely upon the conduct of civilian employees of the [FAA]. The fact that the decedent was a helicopter pilot for the United States Coast Guard is not sufficient, standing alone, to activate the *Feres* preclusion.\(^{211}\)

Three judges joined in dissent from the decision to rein-

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\(^{207}\) See supra note 201.

\(^{208}\) *Johnson v. United States*, 760 F.2d 244 (11th Cir. 1985). See supra note 201.

\(^{209}\) See supra note 201.


\(^{211}\) *Id.* The court found support for the *Johnson* approach in *Shearer v. United States*, 105 S. Ct. 3039 (1985). The Supreme Court handed down the *Shearer* decision after the panel opinion had been filed in *Johnson*. Although *Shearer* differed factually from *Johnson*, en banc review in *Johnson* led to a conclusion that the panel opinion comports with the *Shearer* suggestion that “‘[t]he *Feres* doctrine cannot be reduced to a few bright-line rules; each case must be examined in light of the statute as it has been construed in *Feres* and subsequent cases.’” *Johnson v. United States*, No. 83-5764 (11th Cir. Jan. 13, 1986) (per curiam) (quoting *Shearer*, 105 S. Ct. at 3043). The dissent in the *Johnson* rehearing argued that the majority of the full court had misinterpreted the *Shearer* language as a mandate for case-by-case application of the *Feres* rationales. *Id.* (Johnson, J., dissenting). The dissent read the quoted passage as simply a reaffirmance that “‘each case should be examined in light of the traditional application of the exception — not that each case should be scrutinized under each *Feres* rationale.’” *Id.* For additional discussion of the dissenting opinion, see infra notes 212-215 and accompanying text.
state the panel opinion.\textsuperscript{212} The dissent argued that the majority reinstatement reflects "a novel way to evade the commands [of binding precedent] to allow recovery."\textsuperscript{213} The dissent insisted on a traditional "incident to service" inquiry, stating that "cases in which a serviceman was injured incident to service by a civilian government employee are hardly novel. This fact pattern has appeared consistently over the years. And just as consistently, no court until now has allowed recovery against the government in this sort of suit."\textsuperscript{214} The true "\textit{Feres} factual paradigm," according to the dissent, includes all situations involving injuries incident to military service, regardless of the government tortfeasor’s civilian or military status.\textsuperscript{215}

IV. THE IMPLICATIONS OF \textit{JOHNSON}

Those who have ventured into the \textit{Feres} jungle are all too familiar with the quicksands awaiting one who would explore the implications of a case like \textit{Johnson}.\textsuperscript{216} Despite the anomalies of the \textit{Feres} doctrine, some cautious observations can be made about the effects of the \textit{Johnson} holding. First, \textit{Johnson} admittedly stands in direct conflict with the decisions of another federal circuit.\textsuperscript{217} A closer examination of the circuits suggests that at least two, and perhaps as many as five circuits, have reached a result opposite from that reached in \textit{Johnson}.\textsuperscript{218} Resolution of this conflict may require guidance from the United States

\begin{footnotes}
\item[\textsuperscript{213}] Id.
\item[\textsuperscript{214}] Id. The dissent cited a number of cases to support this statement, including the Uptegrove, Lee, Layne, Potts, Carter, and Hass decisions discussed \textit{supra} notes 154-178 and accompanying text.
\item[\textsuperscript{215}] Id.
\item[\textsuperscript{216}] See Veillette v. United States, 615 F.2d 505, 507 (9th Cir. 1980) (admitting that \textit{Feres} sometimes creates anomalies).
\item[\textsuperscript{217}] See \textit{Johnson}, 749 F.2d at 1539.
\item[\textsuperscript{218}] See \textit{supra} notes 158-178 and accompanying text. \textit{Johnson} did not address these other decisions.
\end{footnotes}
The case undoubtedly increases the government’s exposure to FTCA liability. By the same stroke, it opens up new avenues of compensation for injured military personnel. At least in the Eleventh Circuit, the government no longer will be able to rely on boilerplate arguments when sued by an active-duty serviceman injured at the hands of a civilian federal employee. The United States will be able to block such claims only by showing that the rationales for Feres apply. Johnson probably will not adversely affect military discipline, despite government contentions to the contrary, since it requires a fresh analysis of the discipline factor each time the Johnson paradigm arises. When the tortfeasor is a civilian employee of the government, Johnson refuses to implicate the discipline rationale auto-

219 See Dombroff, Commentary on Johnson v. United States, Av. Litig. Rep., Feb. 17, 1986, at 4608, 4609. Dombroff offers the following observation on the Johnson decision:

It appears that the Supreme Court will once again have the opportunity to consider the liability of the United States. There is little doubt but that intensive discussions are presently on-going in the Justice Department regarding the question of taking the Eleventh Circuit decision in Johnson to the Supreme Court. Obviously, if certiorari is not sought or is denied, a profound change will have been made to the complexion of government litigation. The real excitement, however, will arise if certiorari is granted.

Id. at 4609.

220 See supra notes 200-202 and accompanying text.

221 Petition for Rehearing, supra note 201, at 12.
matically as it would in a typical Feres paradigm.\textsuperscript{222} Instead, an examination of the Feres rationales as they apply to the particular facts must ensue.\textsuperscript{223} The Johnson reasoning presumably would still allow application of the Feres doctrine if FTCA recovery would adversely affect military discipline under the circumstances.\textsuperscript{224}

Finally, Johnson's overall impact on the Feres doctrine remains uncertain. Since it concededly involves a fact situation different from the typical Feres case,\textsuperscript{225} the government may argue that Johnson should be dismissed as inapposite in future Feres analyses. On the other hand, it may be seen as further erosion of an already much-criticized doctrine.\textsuperscript{226}

\section*{V. Conclusion}

Despite its own assertion to the contrary,\textsuperscript{227} Johnson represents a fresh and novel approach to FTCA claims by military personnel. Granted, other courts have taken the position that the Feres rationales must be analyzed when the facts at hand present a twist not found in the Feres paradigm.\textsuperscript{228} Johnson, however, stands alone for the proposition that if the serviceman received his injury at the hands of a civilian government employee, the case does not fall automatically into the Feres web.

This willingness to break new ground is one of the more admirable attributes of Johnson. The opinion serves as a reminder that Congress and the courts have a long way to go in perfecting a system which provides fair and adequate compensation to service personnel victimized by government negligence. It also illustrates the kind of judicial creativity courts have had to employ to avoid the harsh consequences of Feres. Certainly the case adds its

\begin{footnotes}
\item[222] Johnson, 749 F.2d at 1540.
\item[223] See id. at 1538.
\item[224] See id. at 1538-40.
\item[225] See supra note 194 and accompanying text.
\item[226] See supra note 55.
\item[227] Johnson, 749 F.2d at 1537-38.
\item[228] See, e.g., Stencel, 431 U.S. at 670.
\end{footnotes}
voice to the chorus of *Feres* criticism, and sounds the reveille for reanalysis of the law in this area.\(^{229}\)

For the aforementioned reasons, *Johnson* represents a step in the right direction. Nonetheless, the case has some weaknesses. First, the court ignored its opportunity to clarify the probative force of each *Feres* rationale. This omission leaves a cloak of mystery wrapped around the *Feres* rationales. No one knows whether the three rationales are conjunctive requirements, or if one or more can support *Feres* independently.

Another weakness in the opinion lies in the court’s reluctance to accept the argument that the military discipline factor must be considered each time the *Feres* defense arises. The court reached the nonsensical conclusion that the discipline rationale must be analyzed when the case involves a civilian tortfeasor, but implicates itself automatically when a serviceman receives injuries incident to service at the hands of a fellow serviceman.\(^{230}\) If it is inappropriate to focus solely on the victim’s status in cases like *Johnson*,\(^{231}\) it becomes equally inappropriate to assume that the rationales are applicable simply because the tortfeasor occupies a military position. The court offers a poor excuse for not requiring analysis of the applicability of the rationales even in a typical *Feres* paradigm, when it suggests that a case-by-case discipline analysis would force the Armed Services to maintain a claims department.\(^{232}\) This kind of reasoning leads to application of a rule without reason — an approach which the *Johnson* court emphatically rejected.\(^{233}\) For example, one has difficulty seeing how a claim for injuries received en route to

\(^{229}\) While *Johnson* does not expressly criticize the *Feres* rule, a careful reading of the case leaves the impression that the court agrees with many of the criticisms leveled at the doctrine. Similarly, the court at least implicitly acknowledges the need to take a fresh look at *Feres*.

\(^{230}\) *Johnson*, 749 F.2d at 1537.

\(^{231}\) Id. at 1539-40.

\(^{232}\) See id. at 1536 n.6 (citing *Feres*, 340 U.S. at 146).

\(^{233}\) See id. at 1540. Note that similar blind applications of the sovereign immunity doctrine led to its ultimate downfall. See *supra* note 10 and the sources cited therein.
an optional, military-sponsored beach party\textsuperscript{234} has greater adverse effects on discipline than the claim in \textit{Johnson}.\textsuperscript{235}

In summary, \textit{Johnson} offers servicemen greater access to the federal compensation system. More importantly, it sheds new light on the problems created by the \textit{Feres} doctrine, and encourages a deeper probe into the rationales supporting \textit{Feres} when new situations arise. Unfortunately, it does not advocate a similar analysis for actions brought by servicemen \textit{qua} servicemen. Hopefully, the \textit{Johnson} decision will prompt new guidance from the Supreme Court, and will not be viewed merely as an exception to the exception.

\textit{Mark Lloyd Smith}

\textsuperscript{234} \textit{See Degentesh}, 230 F. Supp. at 764.

\textsuperscript{235} \textit{Johnson} concluded that the claim in question could not “conceivably impinge on the military disciplinary structure.” \textit{Johnson}, 749 F.2d at 1539 n.11. However, given the military’s reliance on its close working relationship with the FAA, \textit{see supra} notes 3-4 and accompanying text, the court perhaps dismissed the discipline rationale too quickly and should have given more scrutinious consideration to the role of air traffic controllers in the disciplinary context. According to one observer, however, the relationship between FAA controllers and Coast Guard pilots differs little from the relationship between FAA controllers and civilian pilots. Conversation with Lieutenant Commander Richard Norat, Command Flight Safety Officer, United States Coast Guard Aviation Training Center, Mobile, Alabama (Feb. 27, 1986). Lieutenant Commander Norat, who knew Horton Johnson personally, also suggests that the \textit{Johnson} opinion actually may improve discipline. Norat bases this suggestion on the fact that many Coast Guard pilots familiar with the case have greater confidence in a system which acknowledges and deals with controller negligence instead of trying to conceal or ignore such negligence. \textit{Id.}