

The 55th Wing will hold its 28th annual Birthday Ball, Saturday, April 1, 2006 at the Qwest Center Omaha. The gala event is open to all active duty ranks, retirees, and by invitation to community leaders. The Ball is the Wing's largest formal social function.

The Ball celebrates the 65th anniversary of the organization from its roots in the activation of the 55th Pursuit Group at Hamilton Field, CA, in January 1941 for World War II. Then its heritage through the 55th Reconnaissance Group, which stood up at MacDill Field, FL, in Strategic Air Command in February 1947; the 55th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing from 1950 to 1992, at Barksdale AFB, LA, Ramey AFB, PR, Forbes AFB, KS, and Offutt AFB, NE; and up to the present.

The Birthday Ball was originated by then-Colonel (now, BrigGen-Retired) Regis F. A. Urschler, commander of the 55th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing, in January 1979. His idea was to connect the wing's roots, history and heritage to the active duty personnel and missions. That tradition continues today.

This year's theme is The Fightin' 55th "Leads the Fight," recognizing the men and women who perform the many and varied missions the Wing executes worldwide in support of both peacetime and the war on terrorism.

The Ball planning committee is led by Major (LtCol-sel) Michael Kosco, 1ACCS, This year's event will be hosted by BrigGen-sel Jonathan George 55th Wing Commander. The program will feature as guest speaker, Lt General (Ret) Thomas G. McInerney, former Asst Chief of Staff, HQ USAF, now a military analyst for Fox TV News.

Other items on the program include induction of new members into the 55th Wing Hall of Fame; presentation of the 55th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing (SRW) Association Award for Excellence; and the traditional cutting of the birthday cake by the eldest ranking member in attendance, and the youngest member of the Wing. The Noteables big band ensemble of the ACC Heartland of America Band will perform wearing their WWII replica uniforms.

"Tales of the 55th," an additional event associated with the Ball, takes place at 1600 Friday, March 31, in the Offutt Club. Veterans of various periods of the Wing's history will relate their personal experiences. The event is tri-sponsored by the 55th SRW Association, the Strategic Roost of the Association of Old Crows, and the Order of Dadaelians, and coordinated and emceed by Col (Ret) Jim Thomas.

It is well attended by the senior wing staff and active duty troops, and has grown in each of the years it has been presented. This event is a must for out of towners who come in to attend the Ball. It is informal and light refreshments will be available. A \$2 donation at the door is requested.

There is no hotel tie-in with the Qwest Center, but the Ball committee has contracted with the Marriott Courtyard and the Hilton Garden Inn in downtown Omaha for rooms and rates for the Ball. Both have shuttle service to the Qwest Center.