

*This testimony was given on the floor of the House of Representatives by **Congressman Don Bacon (NE-2)**, BrigGen USAF Retired and former **55th Wing Commander**(March 2011-June 2012) on 1 April 2019.*

Mr./ Madame Speaker, I rise to commemorate the long-standing bond our Midwest communities enjoy with the United States Air Force's ***Fightin' Fifty-Fifth***, also known as the **55th Wing** based at Offutt Air Force Base in Nebraska, but with units and people spread all around the globe. The **55th Wing** and the **55th Wing Association** will jointly celebrate a uniquely treasured relationship at this year's reunion in April that will feature numerous dedications and commemorative events.

The ***Fightin' Fifty-Fifth's*** historic lineage began before World War II. Since 1940, the unit has distinguished itself as a preeminent Air Force organization, flying and supporting worldwide operations in peace and conflict. Of note, the **55th Fighter Group** conducted fighter sweeps over the invasion beaches on June 6, 1944 using their P-38s.

In 1966, the ***Fightin' Fifty-Fifth*** transferred to Nebraska as part of the Strategic Air Command. For over fifty years, **55th Wing** personnel have supported national interests around the world; primarily focused on providing first-class reconnaissance, real-time intelligence, command and control, information warfare, and combat support capabilities. It is the largest wing in Air Combat Command and flies the most diverse types of aircraft. Notably, since DESERT SHIELD/STORM the **55th Wing** is the only Air Force wing with continuous operations, maintenance, and aircraft presence in the United States Central Command theater of operations.

Indeed, the sheer longevity of this storied unit's history and global mission-reach, personifies their motto, "The sun never sets on the ***Fightin' Fifty-Fifth***". This phrase is spoken often at ceremonies and will continue to be for years to come.

The unit's exceptional record of service was the catalyst for the **55th Wing Association's** creation. Following decades of ***Fightin' Fifty-Fifth*** camaraderie, global deployments, and operational achievements, a handful of veteran aviators were determined to preserve this invaluable heritage, so it would not be lost to future generations. This innovative initial cadre formed the **55th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing Association** to serve alongside Offutt's **55th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing** active duty force. Both organizations were eventually renamed to today's **55th Wing** and **55th Wing Association**, respectively; but have remained Nebraska-based ever since.

The **55th Wing Association** is comprised of Air Force veterans who served honorably in the ***Fightin' Fifty-Fifth'***, most of whom were stationed at Offutt Air Force Base. The **55th Wing Association's** support to their active duty counterparts is second to none and its support to **55th Wing** alumni is a model for other Air Force organizations to emulate. It embodies the impressive relationship between alumni veterans and active duty military members in their credo, "Honoring those who served; and serving those who do". It could not be said any better.

This bond between veteran citizens and military personnel is nothing short of remarkable. These organizations demonstrate the very best of cooperation to serve our national interests, sustain organizational values, and foster military fellowship from as far back as those who served in World War II to those of the present who still fly, fight, and win our nation's battles right now. Their relationship will forever be enshrined at the many ceremonies in Nebraska on April 6th, where monuments will be dedicated to the alumni of the ***Fightin' Fifty-Fifth'***, past, present, and future.

In 2003, the **55th Wing Association** captured the inspirational essence of their history in choosing the following inscription on their U.S. Air Force Museum Monument: "We must never forget that freedom is never really free; it is the most costly thing in the world and freedom is never paid in a lump sum; payments come due in every generation. All any of us can do is to offer the generations that follow a chance for freedom."

The **55th Wing Association** also chose these same words for inclusion on the monuments they will dedicate this April. They are fitting praise for the accomplishments of the past and a challenge to the ***Fightin' Fifty-Fifth*** for the future.

Just 11 days ago Nebraska was hit with the worst natural disaster in the history of our state, and a third of Offutt Air Force Base was damaged, including key operations and support facilities. The ***Fightin' Fifty-Fifth*** never missed a beat supporting operations all over the world and continued training. This indomitable spirit of our ***Fightin' Fifty-Fifth*** led **the Secretary of the Air Force, Heather Wilson**, to say "Not even Mother Nature can defeat the **55th Wing**."

After 75+ years as an organizational flying wing, over a half-century based in Nebraska, and more than 25 consecutive years deployed in the Middle East for combat operations, the ***Fightin' Fifty-Fifth*** deserves our highest respect and I am honored to salute the **55th Wing Association** for all its efforts to preserve its rich heritage.