

## The 55<sup>th</sup> Spouse - Past, Present, and Future

For many years airmen have left their loved ones to fly to far away lands or go on distant missions to protect those loved ones. This timeless event pictured above has occurred countless times in the Fighting Fifty-Fifth during the dark days of World War II, the often forgotten war in Korea, the many years of the Cold War, and recently Desert Storm, Enduring Freedom and the post 9/11 conflicts. Comforting to the warrior is the knowledge that all is well on the home front. Meanwhile, those who serve in silence remain behind... unseen... waiting... dealing with uncertainty each day... knowing the unknown every night... yet these angels... for all times... have and will give their warrior more than can be asked... their love, encouragement and loyalty... come what may. These angels have many faces... and many are the airmen who honor them... forever.



### **WHAT A SILLY QUESTION**

Of course I'm secure. What a silly question! Of course I may return home from this convention and find that we're moving to Okinawa next month and I may move 20 times in 20 years, but I'm well adjusted. My husband's work schedule changes from day to day, but I'm happy. I'm well acquainted with loneliness and a little fear, yet I remain secure. I owe my peace of mind and self-control to my membership in a very exclusive organization.

We have no official title, but we're affectionately referred to as 'military wives.' I am very proud to belong to this organization. It is quite an honor, since every member has to be personally accepted and approved by a 'certain' serviceman.

The qualifications differ with each applicant, but we are all expert flag wavers. We band together in this group to learn from each others' experiences, to share each others' hardships, and to try to keep each other sane. In other words: to be secure.

We are very cliquish, I'm afraid. Throw any two of us in the middle of any sized group, and we immediately dominate the conversation with our travel tales, flavoring our vocabulary with such esoteric terms as 'TDY,' 'PCS,' and 'operational sortie.' And we seldom venture from our 'ivory' military bases, but prefer the cloistered comfort of our comrades. I admit that these irritating traits merely suggest that we find our total security only in each others' company.

We're trying to attain that certain strong carriage that comes with self-confidence. We spend endless months alone while our husbands are in combat, flying secret missions from some remote base, or attending classes in Honolulu, and we endure the months of isolation while in various stages of pregnancy and with any number of children or pets.

We sometimes must have babies by ourselves, have miscarriages by ourselves, and even have the Asian flu by ourselves. We can fertilize a yard, charge a dead battery, fix a disposal, clean a furnace, fill out an income tax return, and deworm a cat, a dog, or a seven-year-old boy.

We are trying to attain that countenance of stability that belongs to the nomads. The feeling of putting roots down is entirely foreign to us. Our houses are not our homes, but merely temporary shelters. Our families are our homes. Although we collect things, and are dismayed because they take up so much space and weight, we also collect memories and friends and find them far more satisfying than tangible trinkets because memories don't tarnish with age and friends can't break.

We're seeking that serenity of faith and trust. I have to learn to accept the fact that everything my husband does militarily is classified, and I may never share in his work. I can be proud of my husband's medals, but I may never know what he did to earn them.

We want to have that personal magnetism that belongs to the courageous. We want to be able to grieve over the death or capture of a friend one day and then, without qualm, send our husbands out on a similar mission the next.

I want to be able to say only words of encouragement when I see my husband's face etched in tension as he dons his flight suit, double checks his survival gear, and prepares for another mission; when I'm aware that any goodbye may be the last.

We're easily spotted at any parade. We stand a little straighter than most when the flag is marched by, and we salute it without embarrassment. That flag means something to us. Its red is the red of our pain; its white, the white of our tears; its blue the blue of our loneliness. We belong to it.

That's why we can remain unshaken when we hear our husbands called 'war criminals,' 'aggressors,' 'murderers,' 'torturers of children.' And that's why we can remain steadfast when we hear our country, the country they fight for, called 'imperialistic' and 'the one big threat to world peace.'

Our organization for mental and physical security is not unique. There are myriads of such groups blanketing our country. The membership is open to any and all who can meet the very demanding qualifications.

First, they must cherish their freedom enough to suffer and sacrifice for it. Second, they must be expert flag wavers. Then, if anyone should ask them, "Are you secure?", they can just shrug their shoulders and say, "Of course I'm secure. What a silly question!"

- Molly Strong, *Offutt AFB, NE, 1968*