

Mr. Speaker, nearly 100 years ago the Department of War made a contract with two all-American men who would revolutionize human life as we know it. Those Ohio-born Wright brothers had a starry-eyed vision, tenacity, and brilliance that transformed their vision from theory to reality when they contracted with the United States Army to build a flying machine for the use of the United States Armed Forces.

Since then the United States Air Force has proven that mortals can break the sound barrier many times over in heavier-than-air, high-powered aircraft defying, it seems, the very forces of gravity and transcending the previously incontrovertible dimensions of human capacity. Even at this very moment, the Air Force is working to defend our assets in a new frontier of national security: space itself.

Mr. Speaker, this year marks the 60th anniversary of the year in which the United States Air Force became an official separate military service within the Department of Defense. Since then, the ability to protect the forces of freedom all over the world through flight in air, space, and cyberspace has transformed warfare in a way that perhaps only can be truly appreciated by the enemies of liberty.

Air power was born through the courage and resilience with which our noble men and women in the Air Force overcame in the crucibles of World War I, World War II, and the Cold War. And today the courageous airmen and women of this generation are shaping history still as the enemies of liberty feel the just fury of the Air Force in Operation Iraqi Freedom. The U.S. Air Force has risen to meet the challenge of international terrorism by attaining a new level of technological capability to surveil a battle space virtually encompassing the entire planet.

Mr. Speaker, I have the precious honor of representing the Second Congressional District of Arizona, which includes Luke Air Force Base, a vital strategic asset to our national security and the largest fighter wing in the United States Air Force. Luke Air Force Base trains over 95 percent of all U.S. Air Force F-16 pilots and over 50 percent of all U.S. fighter pilots. The commanders at Luke are entrusted with the solemn mission of effectively equipping the Nation's greatest F-16 pilots and maintainers to be deployed as mission-ready war fighters. It is a center and symbol of excellence to the Air Force and a beacon of courage, honor, military strategy, and effectiveness for our armed services throughout America.

As the Nation commends 60 years of noble and selfless service in the cause of the freedom and security of these United States, it is an honor for me to stand here on the floor of the United States House of Representatives and thank Luke Air Force Base and the entire United States Air Force for their selfless dedication and their commitment to the cause of human freedom. None of us can ever fully convey the gratitude that we owe to these warriors who have answered liberty's call to service and sacrifice.

So, Mr. Speaker, may I pause this moment and offer my deepest and heartfelt gratitude, and that of the entire Nation, to the gallant men and women of the United States Air

Force who have now, for these 60 years, borne upon their noble wings of freedom the cause of America and the hope of humanity.

God bless them all, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.