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Air Show Photographers Made This Video Tribute to a Fallen Blue Angel

Two professional photographers honor Marine Capt. Jeff Kuss.

By Eric Tegler Jun 24, 2016

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On June 2, Marine Capt. and Blue Angels pilot Jeff Kuss [lost his life](#) in a crash during practice for an air show. Just minutes before he had been in the air for a photo shoot with his teammate, Navy Lt. Ryan Chamberlain, air show performer Sean Tucker, and professional aviation and spaceflight photographer, [Mike Killian](#).

"It was a great day that went really bad, really fast," Killian says. Now he and another aviation photographers have compiled their imagery of riding with Capt. Kuss, into a new video tribute to the aviator.



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Mike Killian

The photo shoot was Killian's first with the Blue Angels, one he hadn't even planned. "When I woke up that morning I wasn't expecting to do that," Killian tells PM. "I was working with [airshow performer] Sean Tucker on another shoot. Sean just told me, 'Hey, we've got time to do a shoot with the Blues, come on, let's go!' It happened that fast."

Two months earlier, aviation photographer Glenn Watson did his own shoot with the two Blue Angel solos and air show performer Rob Holland at a show at NAS Kingsville, Texas. Watson had photographed the team several times previously and knew Capt. Kuss from working with him in 2015, when Kuss was the Blue Angel's narrator and pilot of the #7 jet. "I spent time with him last year when he was the narrator and showed up early [at air show sites]," Watson remembers. "He was quiet, confident, and a very nice guy."

June 2 was a tragic day for aviation. Earlier the same day, an Air Force Thunderbird jet crashed south of Colorado Springs, CO, just after a graduation ceremony flyover at the Air Force Academy. Capt Kuss crashed shortly after takeoff from Smyrna-Rutherford County Airport in Tennessee during practice for the Great Tennessee Air Show.

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The crashes moved Killian and Watson to combine behind-the-scenes footage of their recent air to air shoots into a video tribute to Captain Kuss. In the video, Kuss' F/A-18 Blue Angel #6 can be seen on the outside of the formation, tucked up on the #5 jet of Lt. Chamberlain, first with the Team Oracle Challenger biplane of aerobatic performer Tucker and then with the MXS-RH monoplane of aerobatic performer Rob Holland. The video closes with a shot of Capt. Kuss landing.



MachPointOne Aviation / Glenn Watson

Both photographers say they've been honored to fly photo missions with the Blue Angels and treasure the experience. "It's fast-paced and you have to deal with the wind, it's noisy and sometimes you can't communicate effectively," Watson explains. "But the Blue Angel pilots are the best and they make it

happen safely. It's so exciting when they pull up, you have to control your breathing and just get to work."

"We understand how rare the opportunity to do this kind of thing is, especially with the Blue Angels," Killian adds. "Sometimes we have to pinch ourselves to remind us it's real. We hope that folks like imagery as much as we love producing it."

From: Popular Mechanics

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