



A reserve aircraft from the Blue Angels' flight demonstration squadron, painted with the number 6 in memory of Blue Angels Lt. Cmdr. Kevin Davis, is on display at Sherman Field at Naval Air Station in Pensacola, Fla. Davis died in an air show crash in Beaufort, S.C., on April 21.

Photo courtesy of Bruce Graner, *Pensacola News Journal*

By Kimberly L. Wright

'He Will Always be Part of the CAP Family'



Photo courtesy of Boeing Photo Department

Blue Angel, Former Cadet
Touched Others With
Soaring Excellence

Lt. Cmdr. Kevin J. Davis lived the life many young aviators dream of, but few attain. He was a member of the Blue Angels — the Navy's elite flight demonstration squadron that inspires young and old at air shows every year.

His selection as a Blue Angel honored a flier who already had achieved so much. Davis attended elite flight training, graduating from the U.S. Navy Fighter Weapons School, also known as Top Gun, the one made famous by the 1986 movie. He was deployed aboard aircraft carriers and flew missions in support of



Operation Enduring Freedom, America's military response to the Sept. 11 attacks.

A top-notch aviator, Davis was also a top-notch person. "For a guy who achieved what most people would consider the pinnacle of aviation — he was still as down-to-earth and likeable as the first day I met him," said Heath Marsden, Davis' friend from their CAP cadet days. "He is one of the coolest and genuinely nice guys I've ever met. He was always smiling and had some kind of remark to put a smile on your face."

Davis died doing what he loved — flying — on April 21 in an air show crash at Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort, S.C. He was 32.

Before he became Lt. Cmdr. Kevin J. Davis of the Blue Angels, he was a Civil Air Patrol cadet in the Massachusetts Wing— one who, despite all he achieved through naval aviation, never forgot his CAP roots.

From CAP cadet to naval aviator

Davis joined the Camp Curtis Guild Squadron in 1990 after he moved east to Reading from his native Pittsfield, Mass.

Marsden said he and Davis were drawn to CAP for the same reason — aviation. Marsden, now of Newport, N.H., where he works as an airport planner,

noted the influence Davis and CAP had. "(CAP) definitely played a role in my acceptance at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University and Kevin was the one who told me about ERAU," said Marsden.

Marsden says Davis wanted to be a Navy aviator even back then. "I don't remember him specifically saying the Blue Angels — although I guess it's every aviator's dream to fly for either them or the (Air Force) Thunderbirds," he said.

CAP gave the friends the opportunity to experience aviation, solidifying their ambitions for the future. "We both participated in the orientation flights as well as at least one of the Thunderbirds air shows at Hanscom Air Force Base (Mass.)," said Marsden. "We also went on many bivouacs together."

Davis graduated from Reading Memorial High School in 1992, leaving home and CAP behind to attend ERAU in Daytona Beach, Fla. After earning a bachelor's degree in aeronautical science with honors in 1996, he began his naval aviation career.

Highlights of his career include earning "top-stick" designation in training on the F-14 Tomcat and deployments aboard the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower and USS John F. Kennedy, during which time he flew extended operations in the North Arabian Sea and Arabian Gulf in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. Davis graduated from the U.S. Navy Fighter Weapons School in December 2004.

The down-to-earth aviator and Boston Red Sox fan received an unparalleled opportunity in 2004 — flying in a World Series flyover as his team prepared to sweep the St. Louis Cardinals and win the championship. "He said that one of the happiest moments of his life was watching the Red Sox win the World Series as he stood in their clubhouse," Marsden notes.

Unbelievable privilege

Davis joined the Blue Angels in September 2005, serving as narrator for the air shows and piloting VIP flights for celebrities like American Idol winner Kelly Clarkson. This year, he became an opposing solo pilot, flying the No. 6 jet.

To be selected as a Blue Angel is difficult, said CAP

member Maj. Rob Wunderlich Jr. of the Missouri Wing. Wunderlich was selected to the Blue Angels in 1997 as a Marine Corps aviator piloting Fat Albert, the Blue Angels' Lockheed KC-130 Hercules logistical support plane.

The stringent selection process places an emphasis on the personality of the pilot, said Wunderlich. The pilot, of course, has to be extremely skilled to even be considered. "The process takes a good five to six months, and it is rare that an officer applicant is selected on the first try," he noted. A Blue Angel serves for two years. "There are about 115 team members, and roughly half turn over year to year," he said. "This way the senior half trains the oncoming 'newbies.'"

Wunderlich shared what an honor it is to be part of the Blue Angels team: "It was an unbelievable privilege to do this, and interaction with the public and especially kids is the best part. I can only hope we have a big impact on their lives."

On the loss of a comrade-at-arms whom he never had the opportunity to meet, Wunderlich noted, "The entire team, past and present, feels a tremendous and grievous loss, as does Naval aviation at large, and indeed should the country. The Blue Angels perform well within the performance envelope of the aircraft and within stringent regulations set forth to ensure the safest possible demonstration. But sometimes things happen. I do believe Davis gave the last full measure to prevent anyone on the ground from being hurt."

Part of the CAP family

Even as high as Davis soared in his career, he never lost sight of his CAP roots. "Kevin was extremely focused in his pursuits, but at the same time never lost touch of where he came from," said Marsden. "When we met up in September, he spoke to his other teammates fondly of our days in CAP."

The affection Davis still held for CAP was clear, according to Capt. Carl Cope, squadron commander of the Missouri Wing's St. Louis Composite Squadron 1. The Blue Angels welcomed the squadron to attend a rehearsal for the St. Louis air show in 2005, back when Davis was the show's emcee. It was the first time Cope remembers the squadron having this chance, which he attributes to Davis' appreciation of his cadet heritage. After the rehearsal, the cadets talked to the Blue Angels, including Davis, and were given photos the pilots autographed.

"He knew what the cadets were looking for," said Cope. "They just lit up to be given the opportunity to go out on the

flight line. I think it was a good opportunity. It shows the cadets there is hope for them to become a pilot. It gives cadets something to look forward to, that cadets will someday fill his shoes. He was a good mentor for the cadets."

The squadron paid tribute to Davis in their first meeting after his death by posting his picture and holding a memorial service. "It was a great loss," said Cope. "I think Kevin had a real good future. Even though he was no longer a member, he served as a cadet and he will always be part of the CAP family. He will always be in our hearts." ▲

Photo courtesy of Bruce Graner, Pensacola News Journal



By April 23, well-wishers had set up a memorial in the parking space belonging to Lt. Cmdr. Kevin Davis at Naval Air Station Pensacola in Florida.