

2017 Festus R-VI Hall of Fame Recipient

Lt. Kent M. Kiepe

Lt. Kent M. Kiepe was born July 13, 1962 in Festus to Glenn and Mary Jane Kiepe. He was a 1980 graduate of Festus High School where he was active in band, football, basketball, baseball, and student council. He was looked upon as an exemplary school citizen and well-liked by all.

After high school, he attended Jefferson College where he received his Associate of Arts in Business and played baseball for the Vikings. He then moved on to Missouri Western State College, graduating in 1985 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Agricultural Business. Kent also was an important member of the Golden Griffons baseball team.

After college, the United States Navy is where Kent found his true calling, a place where his personality and adventurous spirit could flourish. He was accepted into Naval Officer Candidate School and earned the Navy's "Wings of Gold". He became a Naval Aviator flying the F/A-18 "Hornet", the Navy's #1 fighter aircraft. According to his commanding officer, Kent was a natural leader who displayed unlimited potential. His impact was far-reaching, ranging from serving as Legal Officer after graduating from the Navy Legal Justice School with honors, to an Air Wing coordinator for the Naval softball league, where he was a command team coach.

Lt. Kiepe was then assigned to serve on the USS Midway as part of the "Golden Dragons" squadron. He flew missions into Iraq during the Persian Gulf War, and made numerous night carrier landings. Kent was awarded the USS Midway's "Tailhooker of the Year" for 1990, and was ranked in the top 10 of 100 pilots in carrier landings. Upon returning to the states, he was assigned to VX-4 squadron to test and evaluate the US Navy fighter aircraft. He was tragically killed at the age of 29 in a Navy air crash in California on February 26, 1992. At the time of his death, he was supervising a program to greatly improve the "Hornet" radar's capability, which was unveiled in 1997.

When Kent's life ended suddenly in the rough and desolate terrain of the San Gabriel Mountains northeast of Los Angeles, he was on the brink of so many exciting possibilities. Kent was named a "potential front runner" and finalist for the prestigious "Blue Angels", the United States Navy's flight demonstration squadron. He was to begin flying with the "Blue Angels" in November of 1992. He was also to attend TOPGUN School in July of 1992.

Kent served his country for seven years. While his passing was tragic and came much too early, the mark he left on his country, his military comrades, his friends, and his family was undeniable. His Commanding Officer, Tom Perkins, offered these words during a memorial service held in Kent's honor. *"Kent impressed me and everyone he met with his energy, charisma, and positive outlook on life. A true fighter pilot, Kent possessed an aggressive spirit, quick intelligence, and a well-rounded sense of humor. Always striving for excellence, he was well known and well liked throughout the aviation community and the Naval Service. As a leader, Kent set an example for all to emulate. Actively coaching and participating in VX-4 athletics, he was a source of strength and morale to the entire squadron. His involvement with young people, including my own son, my sailors, and so many others will never be forgotten. Kent's friendship, high moral standards, and vivacious, take-charge attitude have made positive and lasting contributions. His boundless spirit lives on in all who knew him. Kent will long be remembered for his dedicated defense of the United States and our way of life. He died while honorably serving his country."*

His selfless spirit lives on in the many examples of the way he lived his life in his 29 years on this earth. He raised money for a Japanese community in need, he wrote articles for the base newspaper, and he was part of a flyover at the 1988 Olympics in Seoul. He visited his sister's fourth grade classroom and allowed the students to try on his gear. Kent continually gave of himself, day in and day out.

Even after his death, Kent continues to serve. The Lt. Kent M. Kiepe Scholarship has provided thousands of dollars to deserving graduating seniors of Festus High School. There is also a scholarship in his name that has been awarded at Missouri Western State University since 1995.

Lt. Kent M. Kiepe lived his life by his squadron's motto: "Get it Right--Make it Happen!" He is the epitome of what a member of the Festus R-6 School District Hall of Fame should be.