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Masters Of The Sky - Laurie K. Gilbert

The readers of "Wiraze" have long known the excellent photography of Laurie K. Gilbert s.o.c. from the images in the 22/2001 issue about the Turkish military acrobatics team, the Turkish Stars. This was the cameraman who spent many exciting weeks in the air with this exceptional team in Turkey.

The CV of Laurie K. Gilbert s.o.c. is indeed a very colourful one for someone who was born in Zimbabwe, but grew up in Ireland. He was educated at Heversham Grammar School in the English Lake District, and then went on to study fine art in Sutton Coldfield Art College in the English Midlands. He decided to become a film cameraman in 1970 after reading an article in an "American Cinematographer Magazine" which he discovered in the school library. The article documented the production challenges encountered on the movie "On Her Majesty's Secret Service", with the now worldwide famous Secret Agent 007 - James Bond. Those challenges intrigued Gilbert and his abilities eventually led to him winning the first Royal Scholarship to study film production at the International London Film School, from where he graduated in 1973.



After graduating, he spent two additional years in Europe before he migrated to New Zealand, the first of the many different countries he was eventually to live in. He spent four years in New Zealand shooting television news and current affairs bulletins on black & white motion picture film and it was during that time that he shot his first aerial sequence from aboard a helicopter.



Helicopter Aerial in New Zealand

In 1979, Gilbert moved to Australia where he worked as a film cameraman in both the movie commercial industry and television and gradually began to shoot more and more film aerial sequences. His work was recognised by the Australian Cinematography Society, who awarded him gold and silver film awards for his craft and it was in Australia that he developed a friendship with Terry Lee, the famous Australian film helicopter pilot. He also contributed to the revolutionary development in the TV broadcasting of offshore sailing, a very popular sport in Australia.



Gilbert & His Camera Mount

In 1989 the deepening recession caused Gilbert to relocate again, to Hong Kong this time, where he established an international film production company called **L'Image Hong Kong**. For the next nine to ten years he continued his global cinematographic activities from that region, including numerous professional commissions in China. In 1996 he anticipated the country's hand-over to China and moved his company from Hong Kong to Singapore, to then become **L'Image Cinematography** in the island state. While operating from Singapore, his cinematography has now become well known and it recognised all over the world, especially in the specialist discipline of aerial imagery as he regularly receives global commissions from prestigious American and European production companies. In 2001, he was invited to join Aerial Cinematography.Com, in Hollywood - an elite group of six cameramen who specialize in undertaking difficult aerial cinematography challenges.



Cameraman Laurie K. Gilbert with Turkish Stars Pilot, Lt. Kale and the F5b Camera-ship

In order to operate in-cockpit for the film, Gilbert had to pass extensive medical tests and prove to the Turkish Air Force that he could survive in an extreme aerial environment. He was trained in a spinning centrifuge that recreated the G-loads experienced during dynamic aerial maneuvers and it turned out that his body could endure a lot – he did not faint even under 8+G loads! September and October 2000 were very challenging months for Gilbert. It took him more than two weeks to research and solve the problems of aerial filming under the heavy G-load conditions that the pilots normally endure in the F-5A/B Freedom Fighters of the Turkish Stars team. He shock-tested a wide range of different cameras that were small and vibration resistant, and yet able to provide the high quality of motion picture images. He and his camera team also worked with a group of Turkish aircraft engineers to install a range of seven different camera mount positions inside the cockpits of the fighter jets.

In early 2000, an Istanbul television producer called Ahmet Kayacik, was searching the web on behalf of the Turkish Air Force when he discovered Aerial Cinematography.com in Hollywood. He was looking world wide for a professional cinematographer capable of filming in-flight with the supersonic acrobatic team, the **Turkish Stars**. This team is the "Top Gun" show team of the Turkish Air Force and the pride of the 134 Acrobatics Squadron (134 Akrotim Filo) who are stationed in Konya, in Central Turkey. According to his research, no one had ever filmed the team in-cockpit before because of extreme technical difficulties involved, and there was certainly no one in Turkey who could undertake such a feat.

Thanks to Aerial Cinematography.Com, he was able locate and contact specialist cameraman Laurie K. Gilbert s.o.c. who was then invited to travel to Turkey. After preliminary talks with Flight Command in Ankara, Gilbert flew to Konya in central Anatolya to research whether it was possible to complete the mission as it was conceived by Tuürk Hava Kuvvetleri (the original name of the Turkish Air Force). After considerable thought and experimentation, he decided to accept the challenge.



Cameras Mounted Inside the Aircraft



The Cameraman's View as The Aircraft Rolls

Once the mounting system was ready Gilbert loaded his 4 motion picture cameras and took to the air on daily sorties. In the five week period he was operating his cameras in flight, he was able to shoot almost 60 hours of dramatic air to air material of the Turkish Stars performing their extreme aerobatic maneuvers over the countryside of central Turkey.



Operating inside The Flying Formation



Close Formation

During his two-month stay in Turkey, Gilbert collected enough footage for several different films to be made by the Ahmet Kayacik and his talented production team. One of these productions, an 18 min drama film entitled **"Turkish Stars - A Star Is Born"**, tells the story of a little Istanbul boy who dreams about pilots and flying. One day his dreams are realised with the help of the commander and chief pilot of the legendary team **Türki Yıldizlari Akrotim (Turkish Stars)**. The experience that Gilbert acquired in Turkey has helped him to become an expert in the installation of motion picture cameras in the cockpits of fighter jet airplanes. Thanks to his proven ability to shoot the highest quality aerial images of extreme acrobatic jet maneuvers, he can now confidently offer his services both to the military air forces and to the civil airline operators all over the world.



Unfortunately he also has sad memories of his stay in Turkey. On the 20th December, 2000, **Ahmed Kayacik** – the extraordinarily talent man behind the movie project – died in a tragic crash when the civil airplane that he was piloting collided with a flock of birds. Ahmet Kayacik was unable to ever see the realisation of his dreams and it was his professional associates who eventually completed the edit and submitted "Turkish Stars - A Star Is Born" to the Flight Command of the Turkish Air Force in Ankara, for final approval. The final film is dedicated to his memory.

Laurie K. Gilbert s.o.c. has been a camera-man for almost 27 years. In that time, he has shot motion picture and stills material in a total of 43 countries world wide.

The name of **L'Image Cinematography** is now known worldwide and is particularly associated with stunning images taken under the most challenging of conditions. encountered in aerial cinematography

He and his company are genuine **Masters Of The Sky**



The Legendary Turkish Stars Over Kapadocia

M.J.Kantor

The two films "Turkish Stars - A Star Is Born" & "Turkish Stars - Supersonic Heros" have won the following prestigious international film awards

'BEST CHILDRENS SHORT FILM'

**THE NEW YORK
INTERNATIONAL INDEPENDENT FILM AND VIDEO FESTIVAL 2001**

**"BEST CINEMATOGRAPHY
LONG FORM"**

THE 2001 ASIAN TELEVISION CREATIVE & TECHNICAL AWARDS

**"BEST CINEMATOGRAPHY -
PROMOTIONAL FILM"**

THE 2001 A.E.G.I.S. AWARD U.S.A.