



SEVENTEEN

SURFING ON
AIR FORCE ONE AND
BUGS ON A HARLEY
WINDSHIELD

*We may be entering one of the most chaotic periods
in American history. It is very clear the Democrats are
going to try to steal the election with absentee ballots
and vote harvesting.*

—PETER NAVARRO, JOURNAL ENTRY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2020

On the morning of November 1, I was looking forward to some comic relief—a big badass of a two-day barnstorming trip with the Boss on Big Bird One for ten “close the deal” rallies across seven battleground states. It doesn’t get much better than that in Trump Land.

I knew, of course, that I wouldn’t get to bed until four or five in the morning each day, and after the blitz was over I wouldn’t just be dragging derriere, I’d be in the mumble tank. But it was history, I was going along for the ride, and we were on a glide path that I thought might even take us all the way home to a soft landing and second term.



A DRAG RACER ON NITRO

The worst part of any trip with the Boss was always the last, one-toke-over-the-fatigue-line, forty-minute bus ride from Joint Base Andrews back to the White House. That was the worst part *unless* you got one of the coveted few seats on POTUS's Marine One helicopter. That elegant bird would fly like an eagle seemingly within inches of the Washington Monument and get us back to home base in a quarter of the time.

Of course, one of the best parts of any trip on Air Force One was the takeoff. It is sudden, without much preparation, as you instantly rumble down the runway. There's no soothing voice telling you to "please take your seat," no martinet demanding that you put your seat belt on.

Nope. It's just slam-bam and off we go with Air Force One's "fly at the speed of sound" engines performing like a drag racer on nitro.

A GRIP AND GROAN WITH KIM JUNG-UN

Normally, on Air Force One, guests at the top of the influence chain are seated in the big conference room in the middle of the plane. It's got a nice long table with beautiful leather swivel chairs, a long couch on the left side of the room, and big-screen TVs at both the front and back of the table.

Then there is the soft carpet. It doubles as a decent bed to lie down on during the interminably long transcontinental red-eye trips I sometimes got to take with the Boss.

These were G20 trips such as the 2018 Buenos Aires and 2019 Osaka summits. That Osaka adventure, by the way, included an incredible leg to the Korean demilitarized zone and the Boss's grip and groan with Kim Jong-un. As the Nighthawks headed to our rendezvous with history flying low

and loud over the South Korean landscape, I felt like an extra in *Apocalypse Now*.

THE BOSS AND I SURF BIG BIRD ONE

Though as senior staff I always had an assigned seat in one of the smaller executive cabins or among the seats immediately behind the conference room, I never used that seat. Instead, as soon as I got to the plane, I would hang out at the top of the stairs and get some sun and fresh air until the Boss's Marine One chopper landed. Then I would move inside the plane and make a beeline for the conference room, where I would remain for much of the journey.

I did that for two reasons. First, I quickly discovered that the conference room was a great place to do a little networking with whatever grand pooh-bahs might be on the plane that day—from captains of industry and cabinet officials to congressional leaders.

In fact, I met some of my very best allies and connections in that conference room. They include one of my all-time favorites, the now-retired congressman Sean Duffy, a true-blue MAGA man from the Badger State who would help me try to advance the Boss's beloved Reciprocal Trade Act on Capitol Hill.

Of course, the second reason I would make a beeline for the president's conference room was that it was always the very first place the Boss would go to when he boarded the plane. Ever the gracious host, he wanted to make sure that his guests felt comfortable.

One of the fun things I loved to do in that conference room during takeoffs was to crouch hands free like a surfer as the plane headed down the runway and up into the air and

see how long I could hold my balance. Truth be told, the Boss liked to do something akin to the same thing.

As the Big Bird would shake, rattle, and roll down the runway and up into the red, white, and blue yonder, the leader of the Free World would just stand there holding court without holding on to anything. If the plane lurched a bit, it wouldn't faze him. It just showed me both how strong he is and why he's such a good golfer. With that kind of balance and his kind of build, it's pretty damn easy to hit the ball long, hard, and true.

At any rate, I'd like to tell you that I wound up on the Boss's Big Bird on November 1. But if I told you that, I'd be lying. Because sometime around noon that day, I got a curt email alert from the travel team that I had been scratched from the manifest.

Of course, I was molten lava hot when I got this news. So I immediately walked from my corner office in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building down the long hallway to where the folks on the advance team hung out. They were all very good folks, so I wasn't about to shoot the messenger. I just wanted to see who had elbowed me out of the way on what I knew to be a very crowded flight and whether my grounding might be fixable with a quick call to the Oval Office.

When I found out what had happened, my anger immediately melted into an outright laugh. I had been bumped by the last-minute addition of none other than Corey Lewandowski. Thought I, *if I had to get bumped by somebody, it might as well be one of my best buddies.*

As it turned out, it was a very good thing Corey went on the plane instead of me because he and his frequent coauthor, Dave Bossie, would become part of an absolutely priceless vignette, one that perfectly sets the stage for our discussion of

the most sophisticated theft of an election in US history. So take it from here, Brother Corey, and tell us that tale.

So Dave and I are stuffed like sardines in the back of the plane with none other than Jared Kushner, [Campaign Manager] Bill Stepien, and [Deputy Campaign Manager] Justin Clark. So at one point in the conversation, Bossie tells Kushner and Company point-blank, “You guys better be prepared for what’s coming on election day.”

But all Jared said was how great everything was, how Stepien had done a perfect job since [Brad] Parscale had left twelve weeks ago, that they had everything under control, and things were beautiful.

When Dave tried to press his case, Jared dismissed him with a pat on his head and said, “Hey, Dave, we’ve got it covered. If election day is our biggest problem, we’re gonna be fine.”

Now, if you know Dave, he’s not the kind of guy to take that kind of crap or give up. So Dave says, “Look, I’m telling you guys, I’ve done this, but you don’t want to listen to me. I was a chief investigator for Congress, and I know what’s coming, and you guys aren’t ready.” And Justin [Clark] was like “We’ve got more attorneys than we could ever use, and we are prepared.”

That night, as Dave and I walked off the plane. I said, “Dude, this thing is a f***ing shit show.” And he asked me, “Do you want to go on the [Air Force One] trip tomorrow?” I said, “Hey, man, we’ve gone this far, so we gotta go.”

So we jumped on the plane for that last day and watched all of these guys congratulate themselves on

the campaign they ran. There's people dancing at the events and hugging each other, and saying "It's amazing what we've pulled off," etc., etc.

Nobody had any reality of what was coming. . . . They believed that the data indicated that they were in better shape than they were in 2016, that the absentee and mail-in ballot efforts were not going to impact them negatively, and they bought the messaging from the Republican National Committee spinmeisters who boasted, "We've knocked on more doors this cycle than ever in RNC history," and "We've transitioned the campaign from knocking on doors to online because we had to." Of course, come shortly after midnight on November fourth, reality would hit these Trump Campaign masterminds like they were bugs on a Harley-Davidson windshield.