

AIR FORCE ONE

An Honor, Privilege,
and Pleasure to Serve

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ODE TO AIR FORCE ONE

BY JOHN L. HAIGH, SR.

Air Force One
Is the silver winged symbol
of the free world
carrying its most powerful leaders
to all points of the globe
at a moment's notice
never conceding,
never retreating,
and always on alert
to defeat the enemies of freedom

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CHAPTER 1



SPECIAL AIR MISSIONS

(1973 – 1979)



MY GOAL TO TRAVEL and see the world started in March 1963 at McGuire Air Force Base, New Jersey. Little did I know that ten years later, I would volunteer and be accepted into the 89th Military Airlift Wing, Special Air Missions Organization, at Andrews Air Force Base, Maryland—home of Air Force One. And that is where my story begins ...

Apollo 17 Astronauts

In July 1973, I was selected to be part of the crew transporting the *Apollo 17* astronauts, along with their wives and staff, on a presidential goodwill trip around the world, hosted by the heads of state at each stop. Due to the nature of the mission, a top-secret clearance was required of all personnel, so I gained the clearance and got the green light.

We served the astronauts—Navy Captains Gene Cernan and Ron Evans—and civilian geologist Dr. Harrison Schmitt. We traveled to



PRIME CREW OF ELEVENTH MANNED APOLLO MISSION
Harrison H. Schmitt Ronald E. Evans Eugene A. Cernan

Spain, the Canary Islands, Africa (with seven stops there), Pakistan, India, Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, Guam, the Marshall Islands, and Honolulu in Hawaii, and then we returned to Andrews Air Force Base.

While I have some good memories of that trip, Honolulu in particular comes to mind, and not just because it was so beautiful. Captain Cernan, the lead astronaut, and his wife had invited the flight crew to their personal suite on the twenty-fifth floor of the Hyatt Regency Hotel, overlooking Waikiki Beach. He'd said that we had taken such good care of them for the past month, they would like to be our hosts for a change.

So there I was, standing out on the balcony and talking to Captain Cernan. A full moon hung overhead, and at one point, Captain Cernan looked up at it.

“You know,” he said, “when I was a young boy, I often wondered what it would be like to walk on the moon. And now that I’ve been there and done that, I know!”

I got goose bumps all over. That was indeed a moment to remember!



Secretary of State Kissinger

A fellow steward and I were on a mission carrying US secretary of state Dr. Henry Kissinger to Mexico City. My colleague had flown with the secretary on previous missions, and thus he had been assigned to serve him on this trip. The secretary came aboard and went directly to the state room compartment. The other steward walked in behind him to present the itinerary and menu of the day. A moment later, he came out of the state room, looking red faced and saying, “Henry’s hot! He chewed me out.” I laughed of course!

The flight was five hours long, and Dr. Kissinger did not see or talk to me the entire trip. Upon landing in Mexico City, the other steward and I positioned ourselves a few steps forward of the state room door. As the secretary was departing, he walked past the other steward without saying a word to him. He stopped in front of me, reached out and grasped my hand,

then said, “Vunderful job, Sergeant,” and then he deplaned. The other steward stood there, dumfounded.



That was nothing, though! Five days later, we were returning to Washington with Dr. Kissinger. The secretary once again did not see or talk to me during the five-hour flight. After landing and taxiing to the arrival spot, the other steward stood alone just forward of the state room door, and I was at my position in the front galley. The secretary emerged

from the state room, walked past the other steward without saying a word, and then stopped at the front galley. He reached toward me, grasped my hand, looked me in the eye, and said, “Vunderful job, Sergeant,” and then he deplaned. I looked over at the other steward, who had a “What am I? Chopped liver?” look on his face.

“It must be my good looks,” I said.

Secretary of Defense Schlesinger

A funny, but humbling, moment occurred on a return trip from London while carrying the secretary of defense, James Schlesinger. I was cooking, and my fellow steward was serving the secretary. We had served the entire official party and flight crew, but when it came time to serve Secretary Schlesinger, we were delayed by several press conferences. Meanwhile, his breakfast was on hold in the oven. The biscuits being served were the old-fashioned type—like Grandma used to make, as they say. There was only one catch: after heating them for the third time, they got harder than a brick bat. We finally served him, and when he tried to eat the biscuit, it

crumbled in his hand. He looked at the steward and said, “Can’t you do any better than this?”

The steward said, “TOAST!”

It was then fifteen minutes from arrival at Andrews Air Force Base. The steward came to me and said, “The man wants toast.” I had just cleaned up the galley and secured everything for landing. But I replied fervently: “TOAST!”

I made the toast, and the steward said, “BUTTER IT!”

So I buttered it, placed it on a dish, and said, “HERE, GIVE THIS TO THAT DING-DONG!”

The steward turned around—and guess who was standing directly behind him? You guessed it: the ding-dong himself, Secretary Schlesinger. “Here’s your toast, sir,” the steward said to him.

I could have died right there.

“Can’t you do any better than this?”

Vice President Ford

When Vice President Agnew resigned, President Nixon selected Congressman Gerald Ford from Michigan to be his new second-in-command. I was assigned to fly with Mr. Ford on Air Force Two during the following eight months. We traveled to forty of the fifty states to give the American people an opportunity to get to know their new vice president. Most of our trips were one-day out-and-back missions, with one of our longest days being twenty-two hours. On that trip, we were due to arrive back at Andrews Air Force Base at 6:30 a.m. At 4:00 a.m., Vice President Ford said to me, “John, I’m going to take a nap, so wake me up at 6:00 a.m.”

By 10:00 a.m. that same morning, Mr. Ford was out playing eighteen holes of golf while the rest of us were home in bed. He was a veritable