

WILL YOU RUN FOR PRESIDENT?

By Daniel R. Vovak

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Luke Vovak has the talent and resume that could qualify him for President of the United States. He is a West Point graduate, has worked as a general's aide, and has become a successful professor at the University of Connecticut. He has the contacts and speaking ability to make him a legitimate threat to the political parties, as a handsome and intelligent history buff who knows many flukes in the political process. However, neither he, nor his wife, Savannah, are interested in the White House.

As a professor, he wears a white wig during his lectures. The publicity stunt works as the perfect motivator for his students studying American political history.

Luke's enthusiasm inadvertently inspires his students to try to make him a candidate for President. A surprise campaign rally pressures him to fly to Iowa and to learn more about the Iowa caucus system—the first step in becoming President. The folks in Iowa teach him how he could defeat President Bush, with a last-minute announcement. But can he win as a 33-year-old candidate, when the Constitution seems to make him ineligible to run for President of the United States?

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PRAISE FOR
WILL YOU RUN FOR PRESIDENT?

“Vovak reminds us of Ike during the 1952 campaign, who wouldn’t claim if he was a Republican or Democrat until late in the game. He is a moderate who can gain cross-party appeal. His book, *Will You Run for President* will give him momentum during the Iowa caucuses. Will he win? That depends on turnout.”
—*Beltway Weekly*

“The problem the political parties are facing is that Washington is now run as a well-greased machine. After the Iowa caucuses, the frontrunners are determined and after Super Tuesday, the presidential contest is set. Daniel Vovak’s book, *Will You Run for President*, will throw a monkey wrench into that process.”
—*The Washington Paper*

“Vovak is a legitimate contender for the Democratic presidential nomination.”
—*The Democrat Daily*

“Daniel Vovak is one of the biggest thorns in the side of President George W. Bush. He will motivate the dissenters on the Bush team to begin talking. The issue party insiders are asking is: ‘When Iowa has its caucuses, will Vovak motivate enough people to influence the voting habits of Republicans nationally.’”
—*American Republican Weekly*

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Chapter 1

MILITARY SCHOOL PRANK

AUGUST 1982—Luke Vovak stood beneath the towering iron statue of General Douglas MacArthur. It was the first time Luke had been to West Point—the final trip he would take with his father.

His father laid his callous hand on Luke’s shoulder and said: “Everyone at West Point wants to be President of the United States—or at least a general—though he’ll *never* admit it.”

“Not me, Daddy,” the young twelve-year-old boy replied. “I just want to be a soldier, like you and grandpa.”

His father gave him some advice: “If you learn the history about American politics, its Presidents, and generals, maybe you’ll find a path that helps you become one someday.”

Engraved into the wall surrounding the memorial was the theme of a speech MacArthur gave to the West Point cadets in May 1962: ‘Duty, Honor, Country.’ As a young boy, Luke was inspired by the words, just as he believed the words engraved into any rock. The purpose of an engraved message was to inspire the hopeless. It was to make alive that which was dead, and to ingrain that which was important.

Luke touched his youthful hands against the granite words engraved into the memorial, and turned to face his father. His father looked at Luke and straightened his slightly bent body and lifted his right hand along a line parallel to his side, keeping his thumb and fingers extended and joined, palm to the left, with his hand and wrist straight. He held his upper arm horizontally, and his forearm inclined at an angle of 45° until the tip of his index finger was above and slightly to the right of his eye, looking directly into Luke's blue eyes.

It was the first time Luke was saluted. Instinctively, Luke returned the salute, mimicking the actions of his father, though not as gracefully. Then his father dropped his hand smartly, straightening his arm and hand alongside his right leg. Luke's father had saluted his son because he believed the boy would someday be a man of great authority, able to accomplish any complex task he began.

SEPTEMBER 1988—When he began college at West Point, the MacArthur statue was still confidently inspecting the same vast, grassy football field. The peaceful landscape contrasted with the war-inspired philosophies and technical maneuvers taught at the four-year college.

Luke was now a student at West Point, the most coveted college in America. To attend the school, each student had to be nominated by a United States congressman. He had to pass a rigorous test and fulfill his duty to honorably serve his country

until his death. The West Point Class of 1992 adopted the motto: “The brave and the few.” Luke had suggested the phrase during a discussion with classmates at Thayer Hall.

JANUARY 1991—American troops were launching Patriot Missiles at military targets in Iraq. The Persian Gulf War became a simple success as Iraqi troops with limited power were forced to withdraw from Kuwait, a country southeast of Iraq that is roughly the size of Hawaii. American casualties amounted to 382 soldiers. The exact amount of Iraqi dead—presumed to be in the thousands—was not reported in the American press.

It was the ideal war for President H. W. Bush. (As usual, the American public wondering where Iraq was on a map. Most Americans had never heard of Kuwait.) The Persian Gulf War was as much of a public relations victory as a military victory. For instance, “Sadam” Hussein sounded similar to “Sodom” or “Satan,” one of several factors making it natural for the American public to support the war against a tyrant.

Cadets at West Point were consumed with lectures about Iraq, Kuwait, and even Saudi Arabia, Libya, Israel, and Jordan. All information about the Middle East, even the grade of sand in the Persian Gulf, was evaluated and discussed. Nevertheless, cadets were frustrated being at West Point during a war because it was so removed from the action. Combat action of the war could only be learned through television cameras while military reports—

greatly delayed—provided some of the specific maneuvers of each battle.

OCTOBER 1991—Regardless of the West Point Black Knight’s dismal 4-7 record, the football game between Army (in West Point, New York) and Navy (in Annapolis, Maryland) epitomized the pride so apparent in the military. The winner of that game would be considered superior for an entire year, better managed, and more able to meet the challenges of foreign war played on peaceful domestic turf.

Three West Point cadets were involved in an intense discussion about the upcoming football game. Luke Vovak had become the Company Commander, and president of his class. Bud Bryant was known as the “loyal skeptic,” slow to be convinced about a task, but determined to accomplish it when he was convinced it was viable. Jimmy Schumacher was more of an arbitrator, a referee.

“We’ll never beat the Citadels,” said Bud Bryant as he paced his dorm room. “Their team has only lost two games—and those were away.”

“Our record doesn’t mean anything,” said Luke, folding his hands on his desk. “This game is as much a part of West Point tradition as is the plebe introduction. We have to win. We don’t want to go through life without a star next to our graduating class.”

“Luke’s right,” said Jimmy Schumacher, lying on his top bunk. “We need a plan. If we can’t beat Navy outright, then we need to outmaneuver them. . . . Maybe we can steal all the footballs.”

The three cadets scoffed at the notion of blowing post and driving six hours to Maryland to steal a few footballs.

Jimmy sat up in his top bunk bed. “Heck, we don’t even know where they keep their balls. Maybe we should steal that dumb goat, Bill. That’ll put their whole school on high alert. Their girlfriends at St. John’s will have to help those weenies find some other animal and it will still have more hair than half their team combined.”

“They’ve tried to steal that goat a couple times,” said Luke, pressing together his fingertips. “I want to do something more challenging, more unusual, more creative. No one admires a copycat. It’s the rare few who push their limits to uncharted waters who are remembered throughout history.”

“Quit it with the puns,” said Jimmy as he jumped off his bed and punched Luke on his shoulder.

“The Navy is best in the sea,” said Luke, ignoring the punch. “We need to outmaneuver them on the land.” He paused as if deep in thought.

“Well, I’m tired of thinking,” said Jimmy. “Let’s just put a big ‘ole tarp on top of Thayer Hall. We can paint ‘Beat Navy’ on it. That’s impressive enough for me.”

“You don’t even know where you’ll find a tarp that big,” said Bud as he ran his fingers through his hair. “Besides, you can’t even get onto that roof.”

“Why?” Luke asked, looking at his watch.

“Someone tried to kill himself up there once,” said Bud. “It’s been closed ever since.”

Luke’s blue eyes suddenly glistened with interest. “Let’s look at the logistics behind this. Can we still get onto that roof?”

“No,” said Bud, nodding. “You could be suspended.”

“What I’m saying is,” Luke said, leaning forward in his chair, “is it technically possible to get onto that roof?”

Bud blinked. “Well, if you put it that way, maybe you can trick some janitor to open the door for a few minutes.”

“What about the tarp?” Luke added. “Can we find a tarp *anywhere* on campus?”

“Heck, if you want to dream the impossible dream,” began Bud, “we can always find a tarp, a bunch of ropes, and trick a janitor—or even two janitors—if we need to. Why?”

“That’s my point,” said Luke, his smile growing. “With the proper planning, we can do anything we imagine. In fact, with enough planning, we could even nail that tarp onto the roof of Bancroft Hall in Annapolis.”

“No way!” said Bud.

“Why not?” Luke asked, without blinking.

“*That* would be considered damaging military property,” Jimmy cut in with a clever smile. “We need the ropes—minimal damage. If you want to spend the next two weeks preparing for

the mission of a lifetime, then I'm not going to be suspended over some hole on a roof. This plan needs to be flawless. We need the perfect execution. . . . Luke, I hate when you drag me into your brainy little plots."

"You always say that," said Bud, glancing over at the calendar on the wall. "So, why do you encourage him?"

"This is different," said Jimmy, placing himself between Bud and the calendar, blocking his view. "In a year everyone will forget the score of the Army-Navy football game. In ten years, they'll even forget who won, yet they'll never forget that our squad tied a 'Beat Navy' tarp onto the roof of the most prized building on the Annapolis campus. Wait a minute. How is anyone even going to know that there's a tarp on that roof? It's not as if someone goes up there every day. For all we know, they may have already put 'Beat Army' on top of Thayer Hall."

"Quit squabbling," said Luke, opening a drawer in his desk. "Nobody but us would come up with a scheme like this. It's the execution of the plan that's the most difficult." He placed a pad of paper and pen on his desk and began listing a series of necessary tools for the scheme. "Let's organize our squad. There are nine of us in our squad who need to agree on this plot. We need to be totally committed to it—sworn to secrecy. We'll need a big van for all of us to drive there. Do we have a map of Annapolis?"

"Yeah, I have one in my 'Luke is delusional' file," said Bud sarcastically.

Luke raised an eyebrow at Bud.

“Sorry, Mr. C.O.”

“Just for that outburst, it’ll be your job to handle every aspect of the maps—down to a blueprint of Bancroft Hall.”

“Luke, that’s impossible,” Bud sputtered, a drop of spit flying into the air. “For all we know, there may not even be a blueprint available. That’s an old building. I don’t even know where we’ll find a road atlas to drive there.”

“I would imagine General Schmidt has one in his office.”

“Luke, you’re nuts,” said Bud, shaking his head.

“Bud, I need you to be totally committed to this task, or you’ll be the only member of our squad who isn’t in that van to Annapolis. Do I have your unconditional support or not?”

“Yes sir,” said Bud, standing and saluting him.

“We’ll start with the girlfriends of the Citadels,” said Luke. “Those St. John’s girls love to talk. Maybe we can use them to get us access to Annapolis without blowing our cover. Let’s alert the rest of our squad.”

Luke lifted up and pointed to the front of a three-ring binder on his desk. Proudly inscribed on the cover was their Company motto. He lowered his head and extended his arm in a fist over the binder.

“The brave and the few,” the cadets intoned in unison.

FOR LUKE, the greatest success of the mission wasn’t its flawless execution, though the rest of the squad ranked that the highest. Luke’s pride was that his squad maintained absolute

secrecy throughout the mission, even days after the 20'x20' tarp was roped into place. Jimmy was correct in his prediction that no one would notice the banner.

It was a custom for the Air Force to perform a flyby over the football field before the Army-Navy game. One of the details of Luke's plan was that one of the pilots would notice the banner during said flyby. Flawless implementation of a great scheme is impressive, but how that scheme is communicated to the public is a crucial factor. If Luke's squad at West Point would have called CNN and explained that they had placed "Beat Navy" on a Citadel roof, the publicity would be great, but short-lived, and not lastingly impressive. However, when two of the Air Force fighter pilots radioed their base, reporting that a "Beat Navy" banner was on a rooftop at Annapolis, Luke's plot had been fully successful, and since the banner was placed during the same week as the coveted football rivalry, the seeds of mass publicity were perfectly sewn.

Luke's squad—all nine of them—was seated around the television as the news broke live on CNN. Apparently, after the pilots had radioed their Air Force base in Colorado Springs, gossip had spread to the editor of their college newspaper, who called CNN with the embarrassing story: that Army had humiliated Navy by placing a "Beat Navy" tarp on the roof of a significant building prior to their football game. The news traveled so fast that a swarm of television cameras greeted the pilots in Colorado Springs as they emerged from their large, silver planes. Then a blimp, flying over the field, broadcast the

feat to American soldiers throughout the world. It was obvious that Navy had lost the coveted football game against Army, even before it had begun.

MAY 1992—A month before graduation, the idea to apply for a job working for General Lincoln van Handel came to Luke when he was at a bar talking with Bud and Jimmy. Being an aide to a general was the perfect job to insure military advancement and long-term financial security. More importantly, it would be a challenge to meet and impress one of the highest-ranking generals in the military.

Van Handel's Pentagon office responded to Luke with a letter informing him that there were no openings. However, the letter recommended that Luke attend a class at Fort Huachuca, Arizona, which taught the basics and fundamentals of being an officer. As a Second Lieutenant—and with a glowing recommendation letter from General Schmidt—Luke entered the six-month class and then received a six-month assignment in Heidelberg, Germany. Being a determined soldier, Luke sent General van Handel monthly updates of his progress, requesting an interview with him if a position became available.