

NATALIE HARP: GATEKEEPER TO THE REICH

I want to unpack a Marc Caputo story about Natalie Harp, who he says is the person who posted the Reich meme video to Trump's Truth Social account this week.

Trump's account posted the Reich video on Monday.

On Tuesday, AP identified a troll (which it describes as a "meme creator"), Ramble_Rants, as the source of the video, and a Wikipedia entry on WWI as the source of the Reich image.

At least one of the headlines flashing in the video appears to be text copied verbatim from a Wikipedia entry on World War I: "German industrial strength and production had significantly increased after 1871, driven by the creation of a unified Reich."

In one image, the headlines "Border Is Closed" and "15 Million Illegal Aliens Deported" appear above smaller text with the start and end dates of World War I.

The video appears to have been created by a meme creator who goes by the username Ramble_Rants.

The creator, who is part of a group of meme makers that The New York Times reported has previously collaborated with the Trump campaign, posted the video on the social platform X Monday morning.

In a post on X, Ramble_Rants defended the video, arguing it was about "American peace and prosperity."

Then Media Matters described (as the earlier NYT

story also had) that Ramble_Rants is part of a trolling group, led by a guy named Brenden Dilley, that the Trump team has closely integrated with the campaign.

Regardless of the intention behind the video Trump shared, Dilley and his team's association with the Trump campaign is noteworthy.

Trump and his campaign have repeatedly shared the meme team's material, and the campaign reportedly "privately communicated with members of the meme team, giving them access and making specific requests for content," and "in at least one instance ... shared behind-the-scenes footage to be used in videos, according to members of the team." Trump has been photographed with Dilley and reportedly "sent personalized notes to several of the group's members, thanking them for their work."

Additionally, Dilley disclosed that the campaign gave him and another member of the meme team a "special" and "exclusive" press credential for the campaign's Iowa caucuses night, where "you hang out with all these wonderful people, and Don Jr. comes through, and Eric Trump comes through, and pretty much the entire Team Trump comes through." (Reporting has indicated that several journalists from mainstream publications, including The Washington Post, NBC News, Axios, and Vanity Fair, have been denied press access to Trump's campaign events.)

What we're seeing is the War Room in which Douglass Mackey, Microchip, and Don Jr collaborated to hijack mainstream news narratives together in 2016, integrated more closely with the campaign. It's not surprising Trump did that. Even in 2016, Baked Alaska described a Trump HQ Slack that was

“coordinat[ing] efforts.”

April 23, 2016

You want to join the Trump HQ Slack for more coordinated efforts?

bakedalaska 11:56 PM

Remember: Andrew Auernheimer, better known as Weev, and then still posting under his handle rabite, was a key early player in professionalizing that effort, even as he was serving as Webmaster for the Daily Stormer.

May 4, 2016

it's fucking astonishing how much reach our little group here has between us, and it'll solidify and grow after the general

rabite 3:49am

Given that pure Nazi lineage, the Nazi allusions are surely not happenstance.

In a post called Elon Musk's Machine for Fascism, I described how since 2016, trolls and their overlords have been working to perfect the conditions that allowed such trolls to have a significant influence in the 2016 election and an even bigger influence in Trump's attempted coup. One of the only things that stopped the trolls, and Trump, from sustaining his coup attempt after January 6 was Twitter suspending Trump's account. This time around, neither Elon Musk nor Trump's own social media platform will do that. Nor will Telegram, where the organizing function for all this trolling has moved offshore, away from the easy reach of US legal process, shut anything down.

All of which is to say, the Reich meme is not some random mistake. Rather, it is the manifestation of a trolling effort with roots in overt Neo-Nazism that goes back to 2015.

Which brings us back to what Caputo did in a story identifying Natalie Harp as the person who posted the Reich meme to Trump's account.

Caputo is a Florida-based journalist with very extensive sourcing to the far right. He was

recently on Roger Stone's show. His legal instincts – pretty clearly just parroting of what Trumpsters tell him to say – suck ass, but his political instincts are formidable.

About 16 paragraphs into his story, *after* he presented Harp's role in printing out content from social media and right wing sources to placate the boss, and *after* he described Harp's trajectory from Liberty University to being cured of cancer by a Trump initiative to working for the 2020 campaign to working for OANN to now driving his social media account, Caputo finally got around to identifying Harp as the culprit behind the Reich meme.

Harp also helps manage Trump's Truth Social media account and has taken over some of the duties from Trump's former caddy-turned-senior-adviser Dan Scavino.

This can be a taxing job. On Monday, while he was on trial in New York, Trump's Truth Social media account reposted a video, published first on X by a supporter using the handle @ramble_rants, called "What happens after Trump wins?" The video featured mock old-fashioned newspaper headlines. One of the sepia-toned faux-newspaper stock images included the phrase "Unified Reich." Maybe not the best look for a candidate who has dined with actual neo-Nazi Nick Fuentes and "joked" that he would like to be a dictator for a day.

After the Associated Press reported about the video, the Trump campaign deleted the Truth Social post and said Trump wasn't at fault.

"This was not a campaign video, it was created by a random account online and reposted by a junior staffer who clearly did not see the word, while the President was in court," Trump campaign spokeswoman Karoline Leavitt said in a

written statement that accused Democrats of being more antisemitic than Trump. The campaign wouldn't identify the name of that "junior staffer," but sources tell *The Bulwark* it was Harp. Scavino, one of the few others who has access to Trump's Truth Social account, isn't a "junior staffer." Harp couldn't be reached for comment.

In most outlets, this would be the scoop, in paragraph one and two, rather than buried 16 paragraphs deep. But that's not the premise of Caputo's story. That's not what a political reporter with very good sourcing in the Florida far right focuses on. Caputo is more interested in Harp's role as a gatekeeper, which he puts in paragraphs four and five.

Perhaps more than anyone else, Harp gatekeeps much of what Trump sees on social media and reads in the news.

"IF YOU WANT THE PRESIDENT TO SEE SOMETHING, the best route is Natalie," says a knowledgeable source who spoke on condition of anonymity to describe the internal workings of Trump's inner team and who has passed information to the candidate via Harp. "Don't underestimate her importance."

Caputo is not wrong to find this an important point of emphasis (though some people contest it). Dan Scavino has had a near monopoly on Trump's social media accounts since 2016. Anyone joining him in that role does play an absolutely central role in his means to power. And to the extent that Trump has moved off reading things on his own phone and instead reading what Harp prints out (is Trump's eyesight getting worse, or is he simply more paranoid?), she does play an absolutely central gatekeeping role.

Dick Cheney's memoir included a single solitary hint about the lessons he learned, not least as

a very young White House Chief of Staff, that allowed him to become the most formidable DC bureaucrat for almost 50 years: to park someone outside the President's office. Effectively, Harp is the person parked outside Trump's digital office.

Caputo's story, then, is that the woman who posted a meme that was interpreted – with good reason – as an intentional allusion to Nazism happens to be the person parked outside Trump's digital office.

Harp's key role may be why Caputo described posting that Reich meme as nothing more than, "Maybe not the best look." Because she's not going to get fired for doing so.

All the more so for another reason. Around about paragraph 21, Caputo describes that Susie Wiles and Chris LaCivita "don't directly oversee Harp and ... essentially leave her alone."

"No one spends as much time on this campaign around him as Natalie," said one insider. "If people think she's an airhead because of her looks, they don't understand how smart she is and how much the president relies on her."

The campaign's co-managers, Susie Wiles and Chris LaCivita, don't directly oversee Harp and, the source said, and essentially leave her alone.

"Natalie fills a role and Chris and Susie know that's what he wants," the source said, "so they focus on other things."

Again, if true (it appears to be single sourced), it is a really important insight: Trump's digital gatekeeper doesn't work for the ostensible campaign managers. The campaign – which serially offers statements in response to reporting on Project 2025 claiming that unless something comes from the campaign then it is not official policy – does not control Harp.

Caputo's source claims that the campaign doesn't control what comes in and out of Trump's digital persona. Harp does.

And people amenable to fascism know that, and know how to exploit it.