

CODE OF SILENCE

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Prologue

June 14, 2025 — Washington D.C.

The sky over Washington D.C. was a burnished steel gray, threatening rain that never came. Heat rippled off the asphalt along Constitution Avenue, where soldiers in pressed dress uniforms stood like statues. Behind them, tanks and armored vehicles gleamed in the sun—an arsenal on proud display.

The **250th Anniversary of the U.S. Army** was supposed to be a celebration of history, honor, and sacrifice. At least, that's what the official parade flyers said.

But to many Americans gathered behind steel barricades, the event was something else entirely—a show of force, orchestrated by President Roger Crump in his second term, a presidency defined by power struggles and cultural warfare.

Rows of bleachers bristled with hand-picked spectators. VIPs and donors fanned themselves in the oppressive heat. Protesters packed the margins of the crowd, a wall of rainbow flags, Black Lives Matter signs, and hastily made placards:

**"OUR SOLDIERS, NOT YOUR PROPS."**

**"TRANS RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS."**

**"NO PRIDE IN A FASCIST PARADE."**

A **line of National Guard troops** kept the groups apart, stone-faced beneath mirrored sunglasses.

From his post inside the Joint Operations Command tent, **Staff Sergeant Alex Rivera** could see it all through the network of surveillance cameras. The tent was tucked discreetly behind the National Archives building—close enough for real-time response but shielded from public view.

Alex adjusted his headset and zoomed in on the aerial feed. His thumb hovered over the joystick, panning across the parade staging areas. Soldiers in camouflage. Secret Service in sharp suits. Helicopters warming up on the tarmac at Joint Base Andrews.

His uniform felt heavier than usual. Not because of the heat. Because of what today represented.

*"I swore to protect a country that's trying to erase me."*

The thought came unbidden. He'd trained himself not to dwell on politics during operations, but it gnawed at him.

The **Executive Order 14092**—signed by the president last year—had effectively barred transgender individuals from military service. Rivera had been grandfathered in, a bitter victory. He was allowed to serve, but promotions were frozen. Deployment opportunities denied. He was a ghost soldier. Present, useful, but invisible to those in power.

*"They call it readiness," he thought. "But it's just fear. Fear of people like me."*

He shook the thought away and focused on the mission.

Overhead, three **UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters** circled in a holding pattern. They would be the final act of the parade flyover, roaring low over Constitution Avenue before landing on the South Lawn of the White House for a private demonstration.

To the untrained eye, they were just aircraft. But Rivera knew every inch of them. He'd spent years in tactical aviation units before transferring to Joint Ops. He could tell you the make of their rotors by sound alone.

*"So why does something feel wrong?"*

On his monitor, the lead Black Hawk maintained a perfect glide. But the other two seemed... out of sync. Their formation was tighter than the flight plan allowed. Too tight.

He tapped into their transponder data. Routine. Just a precaution.

The numbers popped up on his screen—and his breath caught.

**Black Hawk Two and Three had switched to an encrypted foreign frequency.**

That wasn't possible. Not without deliberate intervention.

He blinked, ran the scan again. Same result.

*"No. Not today. Not now."*

## **Chapter 1 — Before the Breach**

### **Washington D.C. — Joint Operations Command Tent- June 14, 2025 — 0830 Hours**

The hum of cooling fans filled the tent. Monitors buzzed softly, data streams flickering across every surface. Alex Rivera sat alone at his station, the other techs still grabbing coffee before the final pre-parade check-in.

*"Two hours until the flyover,"* he thought. *"Just another mission. Eyes open. Stay sharp."*

But beneath his steady exterior, the storm raged.

### **Six years earlier — Fort Benning, Georgia Summer, 2019**

*"Sergeant Rivera, I need to see you in my office."*

Captain Hall's voice had been tight, cautious. Alex followed him inside the prefab command trailer. Two chairs, a desk, a weathered American flag hanging crookedly on the wall.

"I've reviewed your request." Hall paused. "The one about transitioning while serving."

Alex stood at parade rest. "Yes, sir."

Hall exhaled heavily. "The brass won't be pleased. You know that."

"I'm not here to please them, sir. I'm here to serve."

A long silence.

"Look, Rivera. You're one of the best squad leaders I've had. You walk the line better than most officers. But this? It's going to cost you."

Alex swallowed. "I'm prepared for that."

*"Was I?"* he wondered later. When the counseling started. The paperwork. The psychological evaluations disguised as loyalty tests.

The letters from fellow soldiers helped at first. Quiet notes slipped into his locker. *"I've got your six."* *"Keep fighting."* *"You belong here."*

But then came the policy changes. The orders from above. Restrictions tightening like a noose. Promotions blocked. Deployment applications denied without explanation.

By the time **Executive Order 14092** passed, he was a soldier in uniform but a political target underneath.

###

**Washington D.C. — Present Day**

Alex refocused on the present. The monitors still glowed steadily, but a cold knot had formed in his gut.

*"The fight never ended. It just went silent."*

His phone buzzed quietly against the console.

**[Message from: Marco]**

*"Watching the parade on CNN. Be safe. Proud of you."*

Marco. His partner. A civilian. The man who had waited out deployments, court hearings, and the endless uncertainty of military life.

Alex typed a quick reply: *"Love you. Talk soon."*

*"Soon."* He hoped.

He looked back up at the screen.

Two helicopters. **Wrong frequency. Wrong formation.**

His fingers danced over the controls, opening a deeper scan. Unauthorized access points. Remote signal injections. Someone had overridden the birds' onboard systems.

It wasn't an accident. It wasn't a glitch.

**It was an attack.**

But was he allowed to say it? To report it?

*"They'll second-guess me. They always do."*

His credentials had been downgraded last year after filing an Equal Opportunity complaint. Not discharged. Just... sidelined. Given the less prestigious Joint Ops post with limited authority.

*"Just a tech. A helper. Stay out of politics."*

Now the lives of thousands, maybe tens of thousands—including his own—depended on whether he could break that silence.

*"If I speak up and I'm wrong, I'm finished."*

*"If I stay quiet and I'm right..."*

He knew what would happen.

**The president. The cabinet. The soldiers marching below. The civilians packed along Constitution Avenue. All dead.**

*"No one's going to believe me until it's too late."*

Alex inhaled slowly. Steady. Calm. Just like he had been taught back in Basic Training before everything changed.

*"I'm a soldier first."*

His fingers moved to the emergency override channel.

*"Even if the country no longer wants soldiers like me."*

The parade had begun.

Columns of soldiers moved in perfect sync down Constitution Avenue, boots striking pavement in rhythmic unison. Crowds roared. Patriotic music blasted from speakers set up along the route.

On the monitors, the advance units rolled past the viewing platform where President Crump stood surrounded by Secret Service and high-ranking officials. The gold-fringed presidential flag fluttered behind him.

*"Just a parade," Alex thought. "No different from any other. Keep telling yourself that."*

But the data feeds told another story.

**Black Hawk One** — callsign *Guardian Lead* — remained steady and responsive.  
**Black Hawks Two and Three** — callsigns *Guardian Shadow* and *Guardian Lance* — showed no system errors.

Except for the signal frequencies.

They weren't using the U.S. military's secure encrypted bands anymore.

*"Someone's ghosted them."*

A sophisticated hack could force an aircraft to transmit false telemetry while overriding onboard controls. It was possible, but rare. In Alex's eight years in Tactical Aviation Operations, he'd only seen simulations.

*"Not a rogue operator. This is military-grade. And foreign."*

His pulse thudded in his ears. He checked the flight crew manifest.

**Pilots:**

- Guardian Lead — Captain Mark A. Ryerson
- Guardian Shadow — Flight Officer Ryan Clarke
- Guardian Lance — Flight Officer Joseph Denton

Ryerson's record was solid. Clarke and Denton, too.

But the names meant nothing now. If their controls had been overridden, they weren't flying anymore.

*"The Sons of Liberation."*

The name surfaced unbidden from recent intelligence reports. A **militia alliance of European nationalists and American extremists**, funded through cryptocurrency and rogue nation-state sympathizers. Known for using former military personnel and mercenaries.

*"But they've never pulled off an op this big."*

Until today.

*"You're running out of time, Rivera."*

He reached for the comms headset. **Protocol dictated he notify Air Command and Joint Chiefs liaison staff immediately.**

But another thought stopped him cold.

**His authority level had been downgraded.**

If he raised an alert and his suspicions were dismissed — or worse, called politically motivated — the entire warning might get buried before it reached decision-makers.

*"They've sidelined me once. They'll do it again."*

That was when he noticed something else.

**Failsafe Override: Locked Out.**

The helicopters had **disabled remote kill-switch access** — the system designed to prevent precisely this kind of hijack. Someone had thought three steps ahead.

*"I can't stop them through official channels."*

But there was another way.

An unauthorized, high-risk, **manual override buried deep in the system code**. A leftover from a discontinued program called *Iron Halo*. Only a few operators still knew it existed.

*"And I'm one of them."*

If he activated *Iron Halo*, he could issue a self-destruct to the compromised helicopters before they struck. But doing so would require bypassing chain of command and military law.

It was treason.

Or heroism.

Depending on who survived the day.

His console pinged: **Guardian Lead reporting erratic formation from Shadows Two and Three.**

Captain Ryerson had noticed. The pilots were trying to fix their positions — but their controls were already compromised.

*"They're not flying anymore. They're passengers."*

And in minutes, they would be weapons.

Alex's hand hovered over the keystroke combination for *Iron Halo*.

**CTRL+ALT+F7. Confirm. Execute.**

His breath caught in his throat.

**If he was wrong, he would destroy two U.S. helicopters. Kill American soldiers. End his career.**

**If he was right, he might save the very man who spent four years trying to erase him and his community from the armed forces.**

*"I swore an oath."*

His fingers moved.

**Chapter 3 — *Shadow War***

**Joint Operations Command Tent – 0952 Hours**

*"If you act, there's no going back."*

The thought pulsed louder than the hum of servers and the occasional crackle of comms chatter.

Alex's fingers paused over the *Iron Halo* sequence.

The parade below was nearing its apex. Infantry divisions had passed. The tanks were rolling now, massive and unstoppable. The final flyover was minutes away.

He leaned closer to the monitor.



**Telemetry update — Black Hawk Two and Three:** Flight paths narrowing. Not the approved parade route. **A beeline toward the presidential viewing platform.**

**Target lock detected — infrared guidance system active.**

His blood turned to ice.  
*"They're not just off-course. They've weaponized the birds."*

Even if the pilots fought the overrides, they were passengers now. Human shields. And not just them.

**The President. The First Lady. The Joint Chiefs. Secretaries of Defense and State.**

And the troops marching below.

Thousands of lives.

*"The Sons planned to decapitate the entire chain of command in one strike."*

A clean break. Like the assassination coups he'd studied in asymmetric warfare briefings.

He pulled up a hidden subroutine, buried beneath outdated defense protocols.

**Sons of Liberation cross-reference: active sympathizers within U.S. forces — possible insider access.**

Two names flagged.

**Flight Officer Ryan Clarke** — assigned to Guardian Shadow.  
**Flight Officer Joseph Denton** — assigned to Guardian Lance.

*"No."*

Alex's stomach tightened. Clarke and Denton had spotless records. But further down their files—personal financial stress indicators. Gambling debts. Foreign travel patterns outside declared missions.

*"They were recruited. Turned. Or replaced entirely."*

His mind raced through every possibility. The Sons had either compromised the pilots or infiltrated them with lookalikes.

*"Doesn't matter. The outcome is the same."*

The **failsafe command** was still locked out by higher brass. Air Command had not responded to his pings.

*"They're either paralyzed or complicit."*

His finger hovered once more over the kill command.

**CTRL+ALT+F7. Confirm. Execute.**

The choice wasn't just operational anymore. It was moral. Personal.

*"Do I save the man who has dismantled everything I stand for? Who stripped rights from my community, drove soldiers like me out of the ranks, and created this atmosphere of hate that allowed the Sons to rise?"*

*"Or do I honor my oath, not to a man or a party, but to the Constitution and the people — ALL the people — even the ones who want me gone?"*

A thousand memories rushed him.

**Marco's hand in his own the night the Executive Order passed. His friends' tears. Soldiers forced into hiding or out of service.**

And yet.

The faces of the soldiers marching below.

The terrified eyes of families in the crowd.

Civilians. Children.

*"They didn't choose this. They didn't make the policies. And if I do nothing, they'll pay the price."*

His training instructor's voice echoed from long ago:

*"When the mission gets muddy, focus on the lives at stake."*

He hit **CTRL+ALT+F7**.

The system asked once:

**Confirm destruction of Guardian Shadow and Guardian Lance? Y/N**

**Y.**

###

0954 Hours

Above Constitution Avenue

Two thunderous explosions shattered the sky.

The crowd screamed as fireballs engulfed Black Hawks Two and Three. Debris streaked downward, some pieces smashing into the Potomac River. Others scattered harmlessly over an open field.

Black Hawk One — Guardian Lead — rocked in turbulence but held steady.

Captain Ryerson’s voice cracked through the comms:  
*"Guardian Lead secure. Hostiles neutralized. We’re still flying. God Almighty... what just happened?"*

# # #

Joint Operations Command Tent - 0955 Hours

Alex leaned back from the console, breath ragged.

Sirens howled across the parade route. Secret Service swarmed the presidential platform. Soldiers dove for cover, civilians scattered.

On the screen, the president was shielded by agents. But alive.

Mission accomplished.

Yet the room around Alex was silent. Too silent.

He turned slowly.

Two **Military Police** had entered the tent, hands resting near their sidearms.

"Staff Sergeant Rivera," one said. "Step away from the console. You’re under arrest."

Alex didn’t resist.

*"I saved them."*

*"But at what cost?"*

Chapter 4 — *The Price of Loyalty*

Joint Operations Command Detention Room - June 14, 2025 — 1030 Hours

The cold metal of the chair bit through the fabric of Alex's uniform. His wrists ached against the restraints.

Across from him, a plain steel table stretched into emptiness. No lawyer. No advocate. Just two **Military Police officers** standing like sentinels near the door.

The small clock above them ticked louder than seemed possible. Each second was another reminder: *You may have saved lives, but you defied the chain of command.*

*"I didn't just defy it," he thought. "I smashed it."*

The tent around him felt like a tomb. The monitors were dark now. The data feeds cut off. Silence ruled. **1052 Hours**

The tent flap rustled. A **two-star general** entered, his uniform pressed crisp despite the chaos outside. His nameplate read **Keegan**. Eyes sharp. Expression unreadable.

He sat across from Alex and placed a slim folder on the table.

No introductions. No small talk. Just:

"You disobeyed direct operational protocols."

Alex didn't flinch. "Yes, sir."

"You accessed a discontinued weapons override without authorization."

"Yes, sir."

"You destroyed two U.S. Army helicopters. Killed at least four soldiers."

Alex swallowed. "I prevented the assassination of the Commander-in-Chief and possibly thousands of civilians."

Keegan leaned back. "Or so you claim."

Alex's fists clenched. "Check the flight path logs. The telemetry. The target lock confirmations."

"We are. But the override you used also wiped most of the local data during the kill sequence." Keegan tapped the folder. "Convenient."

*"They're going to bury me," Alex realized. "Bury me to protect themselves."*

The general studied him for a long moment. His next words dropped like lead.

"Staff Sergeant Rivera... are you aware of how politicized your identity has made you? Every decision you make. Every action you take. The media's going to spin this before we've even written the official report."

Alex kept his voice even. "My identity didn't hijack those helicopters, sir."

Keegan's jaw twitched. "We're aware that extremist groups have targeted this administration and its policies. Including individuals sympathetic to your... community."

The word hung in the air like a loaded weapon.

*"Your community."* As if Alex had acted as an agent of the LGBTQIA movement instead of as a soldier.

"Some will say you committed a heroic act," Keegan continued. "Others will say you executed a politically motivated attack to cover up a plot by your allies."

*"My allies?"* Alex blinked. *"They think this was an inside job by queer activists?"*

The general didn't answer.

Alex leaned forward, the cuffs scraping against the table. "Sir. I didn't act for a community. I acted for my country. For the Constitution. For every civilian out there who didn't sign up to die today."

Keegan's eyes softened just slightly. "I know."

The two MPs stiffened.

"But knowing and proving are two different things," the general said quietly. "Your actions saved the president. But you also embarrassed the chain of command, revealed insider corruption, and exposed the Sons' infiltration at a scale we are not ready to admit publicly."

Alex's throat tightened. "So what happens now?"

The general paused. "That's complicated."

He opened the folder. It was empty. A prop. A performance for anyone watching the interrogation feed.

"Two reports are being prepared," Keegan said. "One lists you as a rogue operator. The other names you as a hero."

Alex exhaled. "And which one will the public see?"

The general's gaze hardened. "That depends. On whether you're alive to defend yourself."

**1115 Hours — Outside the Tent**

Shouts erupted beyond the canvas walls. The MPs turned. Keegan stood swiftly.

An aide burst in. "Sir—secondary blast reported! Sons' ground control van — it's gone up. Debris field... significant."

Alex's heart stopped.

*"The Sons knew they were compromised. They've erased the evidence. And anyone who might expose them."*

Keegan looked at Alex. "You were supposed to be transferred to a secure site already. Were you?"

Alex shook his head. "No, sir."

The general nodded grimly. "Then whoever just blew that van sky-high thought you were inside."

*"They wanted me dead."*

The aide's voice dropped to a whisper. "We're getting conflicting reports from field units. Some say Rivera was seen at the blast site. No remains identified."

Keegan didn't miss a beat. "Then as far as the public knows..." He glanced at the MPs. "Staff Sergeant Rivera is either a fallen patriot or a fugitive. We'll decide which."

Alex stared at the general, understanding the unspoken truth.

*"They'll write my ending for me."*

*"Unless I disappear before they can."*

**Chapter 5 — The Story They Tell**

**Department of Defense — Pentagon Briefing Room - June 14, 2025 — 1800 Hours**

The podium stood empty beneath the blazing lights of the briefing room. Rows of journalists packed the space, eyes heavy with exhaustion, notepad screens glowing faintly.

The room had been locked down for hours. No statements. No leaks. Rumors filled the void.

First: A technical malfunction during the parade.

Then: A possible foreign cyberattack.

Finally: Hushed voices in the corridors whispered something more. An insider. Treason. Or a hero.

The doors opened. **Secretary of Defense Marcus Ellison** strode to the podium. His face, usually calm, was hard as armor tonight.

Cameras clicked in rapid bursts.

Ellison spoke without preamble.

*"At approximately 0954 hours today, during the U.S. Army's 250th Anniversary Parade, an unprecedented security breach occurred involving three Black Hawk helicopters scheduled for the ceremonial flyover."*

*"Two aircraft were compromised by hostile actors associated with a foreign extremist militia. An immediate threat was posed to the Commander-in-Chief, senior government officials, and the public."*

He paused only long enough to let the room absorb it. The reporters leaned forward, the air electric.

*"Through the swift and courageous actions of one soldier — Staff Sergeant Alex Rivera — the attack was neutralized."*

Murmurs rippled through the press corps.

*"Sergeant Rivera identified the breach, isolated the hostile aircraft, and activated an emergency override protocol that prevented what would have been a catastrophic loss of life."*

*"We deeply regret that in carrying out this action, four service members lost their lives. They will be honored alongside Staff Sergeant Rivera's extraordinary service."*

*"At this time, Sergeant Rivera's whereabouts remain unconfirmed following secondary explosions at the suspected enemy ground control site."*

*"Efforts to recover Sergeant Rivera, or his remains, are ongoing."*

Ellison lifted his gaze directly to the cameras now, speaking to the nation — and the world.

*"Let me be clear. While our country continues to face ideological division, political extremism, and misinformation, this soldier acted not for politics or identity but out of duty to all Americans."*

*"Sergeant Rivera's actions exemplify the highest ideals of the United States Armed Forces. We honor his sacrifice."*

He closed the folder in front of him.

*"That is all for now"*

The room exploded with shouted questions:

"Is Rivera alive or dead?"

"Was this a domestic terror plot?"

"Did Rivera's transgender status influence the military's initial hesitation to act?"

"Will the President address the nation?"

Ellison held up a hand.

*"No further comment."*

###

**Truth Social — 7:42 PM**

@realRogerCrump

"Yesterday's attack was DISGRACEFUL and would have been a tragedy if not for the quick actions of many GREAT patriots, including Staff Sergeant Alex Rivera. Tremendous bravery!

While I have always said we need the STRONGEST and most CAPABLE people in our military — not social experiments — it seems even in today's very confused world, some can still rise to the occasion when duty calls.

America was SAVED. We will always put STRENGTH and READINESS first. MAGA!"

###

**Marco's Apartment — Washington D.C. - Same Time**

The news played on mute. Marco stared at the scrolling chyron:

**"Pentagon Honors Transgender Soldier in Parade Attack — Fate Unknown."**



Photos of Alex flashed on screen. Official military portraits. Candid shots. His smile soft, his eyes determined.

Marco’s phone buzzed wildly with texts and calls. Reporters. Friends. Activists.

But he ignored them all. His gaze stayed fixed on the television.

*"Where are you, Alex?"*

The room fell silent except for one sound.

A soft, distinct knock at the back door.

Marco froze.

Another knock.

He stood slowly, heart pounding. Crossed the room. Opened the door.

The night air was cool. The alley beyond was empty.

Except for a small, folded piece of paper resting on the doorstep.

His hands trembled as he unfolded it.

**"Safe. Trust no one. Will contact soon. — A."**

**Chapter 6 — *Ghosts and Headlines***

**June 15, 2025 — Morning - Washington D.C. / Nationwide**

By dawn, Staff Sergeant Alex Rivera had become a household name.

News anchors spoke his name with reverence or suspicion, depending on the network.

**FOX News:**  
*"Did this transgender soldier stop a foreign plot or cover for a domestic agenda? Questions remain."*

**MSNBC:**

*"Rivera hailed as hero. Military insiders say transgender troops continue to serve with honor despite political attacks."*

**CNN:**

*"Who is Staff Sergeant Rivera? An exclusive look at the soldier who saved the President."*

Social media split into fevered camps.

**#RiveraHero trended alongside #FalseFlag.**

Some called him a patriot who embodied the best of America's military tradition.

Others — including fringe voices in far-right corners — accused him of staging the event as a false flag to gain political power for LGBTQIA activists.

**Memes flooded the internet.**

**"Rivera the Redeemer."**

**"Traitor or Savior?"**

**"Not All Heroes Wear Capes — Some Wear Combat Boots."**

# # #

**The White House - Private East Wing Briefing**

President Crump sat at the head of the table, arms crossed. Behind him, a gold-framed portrait of Andrew Jackson seemed to scowl at the room.

The acting Secretary of Homeland Security finished his report. "Public perception is shifting rapidly, sir. Even some of your base sees Rivera as a war hero now."

Crump scowled. "They'll forget him by next week."

General Keegan stood silently in the corner.

The President's gaze sharpened. "Is Rivera dead or not?"

Keegan replied evenly. "We have no confirmed remains. Ground units found partial DNA at the Sons' van explosion site. But results are inconclusive."

"Inconclusive." Crump snorted. "Typical."

The room tensed as he leaned forward. "Here's what we'll do. Praise him in public — keep the moderates happy. Behind closed doors, continue the investigation. If he turns up alive, we control the narrative."

The General didn't move. Didn't blink.

*"I won't let you control him,"* Keegan thought. But he said only: "Understood, sir."

###

**Marco's Apartment - Same Morning**

The paper note still rested on Marco's nightstand.

**"Safe. Trust no one. Will contact soon. — A."**

He hadn't slept. He hadn't left the apartment.

The media swarmed outside. Friends begged him to give interviews. LGBTQIA organizations asked him to speak at rallies.

*"I can't."*

*"Not yet."*

On the kitchen table, Marco's laptop sat open. The official Pentagon memorial page for Alex Rivera glowed on the screen.

**"HONORING STAFF SERGEANT ALEX RIVERA — COURAGE IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY."**

A button offered the option to donate to military family charities in Rivera's name.

But at the bottom of the page, a quiet sentence chilled Marco's blood.

*"This memorial will remain active unless or until Sergeant Rivera is recovered alive."*

The government wasn't closing the book.

They couldn't.

Because somewhere out there...

Alex was still writing his own ending.

**Chapter 7 — *The Stillness Before the Storm***

**June 18, 2025 - Location Unknown**

The safehouse was cold. Spartan.

Alex Rivera sat by the narrow window, blinds drawn. A duffel bag rested by the door — clothes, fake ID, cash, a burner phone.

Outside, the world kept spinning.

Protests flared in cities across the country. Some marched in his name. Others marched against it.

Military analysts debated whether he was a hero or a traitor.

Even allies debated whether his actions had upheld his oath or crossed an unforgivable line.

And somewhere far above it all, the man he'd saved continued to rewrite reality with every passing hour.

Alex turned over the dog tags in his palm. His own name. His own life.

*"Do I stay dead? Or come back and fight this next battle?"*

The question wasn't just personal anymore.

It was political.

It was moral.

It was war.

A quiet knock came at the door.

A single, familiar rhythm.

Marco.

Alex closed his hand around the tags. Stood.

The future was waiting.

###

PRESS RELEASE

Department of Defense | Office of Public Affairs - June 20, 2025

Subject: Update on Staff Sergeant Alex Rivera

"Following exhaustive investigation into the June 14th parade incident, the Department of Defense confirms that Staff Sergeant Alex Rivera's actions averted a direct attack on the Commander-in-Chief and thousands of civilians.

While Sergeant Rivera's current status remains officially unconfirmed, he is hereby awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for extraordinary heroism and self-sacrifice in defense of the United States.

The Department continues to treat Sergeant Rivera as Missing In Action until definitive evidence confirms otherwise.

We encourage the public and the media to respect the Rivera family's privacy and refrain from speculative reporting."

###

TRUTH SOCIAL POST

Roger J. Crump @realRogerCrump - June 21, 2025 — 6:04 AM

"We owe a GREAT debt to Staff Sergeant Alex Rivera for his bravery. Some have tried to politicize what he did — VERY SAD!

As I have ALWAYS said, only the strongest, most dedicated Americans should serve, and while I don't support social experiments in our military, even unusual soldiers can do great things when the moment calls.

Sergeant Rivera, wherever you are, THANK YOU. America was saved. ☐☐"

EPILOGUE

Somewhere in the U.S., July 4, 2025

A protest crowd gathered on the National Mall, fireworks crackling above.

Dozens carried signs. Some with Rivera's face.

Some with his name crossed out in accusation.

From the shadows of the crowd, a man in a simple ball cap watched.

His dog tags glinted under his collar.

*"I'm not a hero."*

*"I'm not a traitor."*

*"I'm a soldier. And the next mission has already begun."*

**~END**