Code of Silence

B Alan Bourgeois · Opening excerpt · 1 of 2

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.

Reading sample — continued

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.