

*"A propulsive and action-packed
conspiracy thriller that brims
with authenticity."*

MARK GREANEY

*#1 New York Times bestselling
author of the Gray Man series*

A SILENT HORIZONS THRILLER

RIPTIDE

CHAD WITH
JACK STEWART

ROBICHAUX

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHORS

Praise for the Silent Horizons series

Riptide by Chad Robichaux with Jack Stewart is a sensationally propulsive and action-packed conspiracy thriller that brims with authenticity. Readers of Brad Thor, Tom Clancy, and Vince Flynn will be riveted by the newest exploits of Foster Quinn.

Mark Greaney, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of the Gray Man series

Riptide hits hard—a relentless thriller about loss, betrayal, patriotism, and faith. The details make readers feel like insiders and the action sequences keep the pages flying. Thriller fans be warned: Don't miss this one!

Kyle Mills, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Fade In*

With blistering action, razor-sharp detail, and a storyline that feels all too real, *Riptide* is everything I want in a thriller. Robichaux and Stewart balance heart-pounding suspense with the raw emotion of loyalty and betrayal, making this a powerful follow-up to *Silent Horizons* that hits even harder.

Simon Gervais, former RCMP counterterrorism officer and bestselling author of *The Elias Network*

Explosive, authentic, and deeply human—*Riptide* isn't just a pulse-pounding thriller, it's spiritual warfare at its most gripping. A story that forces us to ask: When everything is taken from you, will you fight for justice . . . or surrender to revenge?

Andrews & Wilson, *New York Times* bestselling authors of the Tier One series and *Tom Clancy Defense Protocol*

Riptide pulls back the curtain on the war being waged on the inside that no one can see: the trauma, the anger, and the seductive pull of vengeance that can consume a soul. But it's also a reminder that redemption is real—that even in the darkest and deepest waters, God's grace reaches deeper still.

Joby Martin, lead pastor of The Church of Eleven22 and bestselling author of *Stand Firm and Act Like Men*

Chad Robichaux is a master storyteller. He and Jack Stewart had me hooked by the first page and choked up at the closing line of the prologue. This captivating story is more than just entertaining—it explores the deep tension

between fighting from virtuous principles or feral emotion. Conflict finds us all. The foundation we choose to fight from matters as it determines the end state by defining what victory looks like. Some things are worth fighting for, no matter how high the cost.

Bradley Geary, Captain (Retired) USN SEAL, author and public speaker, on *Riptide*

Written by a true real-world operator and a Top Gun aviator, *Riptide* stands out for its unmatched realism and tactical authenticity.

Nick Freitas, former US Army Special Forces, Green Beret

Silent Horizons is more than just a military thriller; it's an unflinching look at the clandestine warriors who operate in the most dangerous environments, setting the stage for the battles that follow. Robichaux and Stewart deliver a raw, intense, and authentic experience that pulls back the curtain on a world most will never see. A read you will not forget!

Jack Carr, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Red Sky Mourning*

Silent Horizons gives readers a behind-the-scenes look at the dark side of special operations and the toll it takes on those who navigate the battlefields of spiritual and mortal warfare. A riveting thriller you won't want to put down!

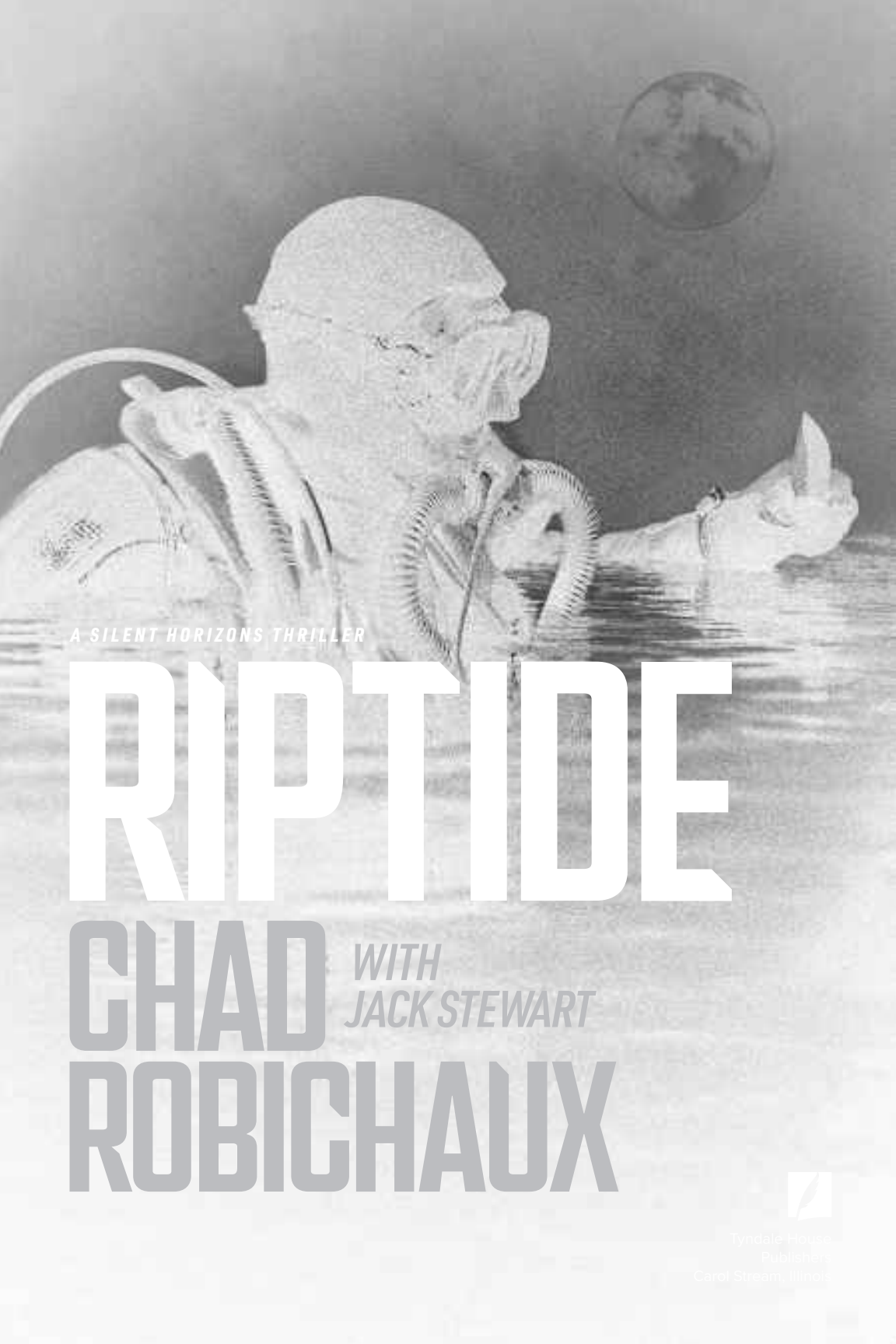
Shawn Ryan, former US Navy SEAL, CIA contractor, and host of *The Shawn Ryan Show*

Chad Robichaux's latest book, *Silent Horizons*, eloquently depicts a warrior's journey on and off the battlefield. It's the human side of the operator that hits hardest and resonates with my own experience. This book doesn't glorify war—it shows what it really means to those who live it. I'm proud to call Chad a friend and fellow warrior that's sharing his journey to help others—maybe even you.

Mike Glover, US Army Special Forces (Retired), founder of FieldCraft Survival and national bestselling author of *Prepared*

Propulsive and inspiring! Robichaux and Stewart clearly know firsthand the world of special operations and the toll it can take on those who serve. They also know how to keep you turning the pages! Absolutely fantastic storytelling.

Marc Cameron, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Bad River* and *Tom Clancy Red Winter*, on *Silent Horizons*



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Riptide

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Riptide is a work of fiction. Where real people, events, establishments, organizations, or locales appear, they are used fictitiously. All other elements of the novel are drawn from the authors' imaginations.

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For those of us who served in Afghanistan, the withdrawal of American forces in 2021 felt like a betrayal of the highest order. We spent two decades engaged in a just war against the Taliban, only to leave in a way that left many of us asking the same questions: Why did we sacrifice time with our loved ones? Why did we waste our youth? Why did we have to suffer physical and emotional scars? And why did we have to lose so many of our brothers and sisters in a war made pointless by surrendering?

This book is dedicated to every person we lost in Afghanistan. But especially to the thirteen Americans who died on August 26, 2021, at the Abbey Gate of Hamid Karzai International Airport.

Marine Corps Lance Corporal David L. Espinoza, 20, of Rio Bravo, Texas

Marine Corps Sergeant Nicole L. Gee, 23, of Sacramento, California

Marine Corps Staff Sergeant Darin T. Hoover, 31, of Salt Lake City, Utah

Army Staff Sergeant Ryan C. Knauss, 23, of Corryton, Tennessee

Marine Corps Corporal Hunter Lopez, 22, of Indio, California

Marine Corps Lance Corporal Rylee J. McCollum, 20, of Jackson, Wyoming

Marine Corps Lance Corporal Dylan R. Merola, 20, of Rancho Cucamonga, California

Marine Corps Lance Corporal Kareem M. Nikoui, 20, of Norco, California

Marine Corps Corporal Daegan W. Page, 23, of Omaha, Nebraska

Marine Corps Sergeant Johanny Rosario Pichardo, 25, of Lawrence, Massachusetts

Marine Corps Corporal Humberto A. Sanchez, 22, of Logansport, Indiana

Marine Corps Lance Corporal Jared M. Schmitz, 20, of St. Charles, Missouri

Navy Hospital Corpsman Maxton W. Sowiak, 22, of Berlin Heights, Ohio

We owe it to them to do better.

**The LORD is a God who avenges.
O God who avenges, shine forth.
Rise up, Judge of the earth;
pay back to the proud what they deserve.
How long, LORD, will the wicked,
how long will the wicked be jubilant?**

PSALM 94:1-3

**The LORD is my light and my salvation—
whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold of my life—
of whom shall I be afraid?
When the wicked advance against me
to devour me,
It is my enemies and my foes
who will stumble and fall.**

PSALM 27:1-2

Prologue

MEDINA, TEXAS
FEBRUARY 2020

Sterling Beaumont sat atop Estrella, his black Andalusian, and surveyed the vastness of his land. From horizon to horizon, encompassing over twenty thousand acres, every tree and shrub was rooted firmly in Beaumont soil. It was the same land his father had been raised on, and his father before that. Sterling felt a connection to the sprawling ranch in a way that made almost every other connection in his life seem meaningless.

Kathy was the one exception.

She had unexpectedly blown into his life in a whirlwind of brunette one afternoon during fall semester his sophomore year in College Station. And nothing was the same after that. Of course, she had been with someone else then—a tall, lanky senior cadet—and had only spoken to Sterling out of courtesy. But her smile had hooked him all the same.

“Come on, Estrella. Let’s get this over with.”

Sterling opened the reins on his right side and nudged the *Pura*

Raza Española, or Pure Spanish Horse, with his outside leg to turn her away from the edge of the bluff, putting both the view and his memories at his back. He hadn't thought much of his time in the Parsons Mounted Cavalry in the years following graduation from Texas A&M University. But every so often, the memories returned unbidden, and he thought back to sitting atop Hank as they traveled from their ranch on F&B Road to Kyle Field.

Estrella whinnied, and Sterling bent forward to pat her neck. "It's okay, girl."

He turned up the collar on his canvas coat to block the frigid wind from making him even more miserable than he already felt, then relaxed his grip on the reins and allowed the mare to walk down the narrow trail. Sterling did his best to ignore the live oak standing tall and isolated in the manicured green pasture, but Estrella knew where to go even without his guidance. He just wished she would take him somewhere else.

Anywhere else.

Estrella tossed her head back and snorted as if sensing his hesitation. Sterling nodded. "You're right. We have to go."

The hoarse scream of a red-tailed hawk drew Sterling's eyes to the sky. He tipped the brim of his hat up to give him an unobstructed view of the raptor backdropped by gray clouds blanketing the ranch. It didn't look like they would unleash rain, but they dampened his already dark mood, nonetheless. Then again, nothing could overcome the sadness brought on by the brilliance of Kathy's life being extinguished in the blink of an eye.

And there had been nothing he could do to stop it.

Despite how clever he was, his mental acumen hadn't been enough. No matter his strength, he had been powerless against it. Despite his family's wealth and his steadfast faith, his billions were worthless, and his prayers went unanswered. Sterling would have sacrificed anything for just one more day with Kathy, but even his

love for her wasn't enough to stay the reaper's scythe. And that shook him to his core.

"I'm sorry, my love," Sterling whispered. The wind carried his words down the sloping hillside to where he had buried his wife fifteen years ago. "I'm sorry I failed you."

Estrella snorted again but didn't stop her steady gait as she carried him to the oak.

Without him having to pull back on the reins, Estrella del Fuego—Star of Fire—came to a stop at the edge of the pasture and dipped her head out of respect for the last Beaumont to take up residence in the family's plot. Sterling closed his eyes and pictured his wife the way he would always remember her—not with the youthful glow of when they had met or the radiance of an angel in white on their wedding day, but how she had looked after giving birth to their only son, Alexander Raymond Beaumont.

Exhausted, worn out, and utterly breathtaking.

After thirteen hours of labor, Kathy had blessed him with the most perfect gift a man could ask for, and the one thing his money couldn't buy. He had inherited his father's billions, a name recognized almost everywhere as one committed to philanthropy and the betterment of his fellow man, and Kathy had given him an heir to carry it forward—a child created from their love and gifted with her piercing blue eyes.

"I'm sorry he couldn't come, but you should see him," he said. "He's grown into a fine young man. Even if he takes after you and has a temper like a spring thunderstorm."

A distant roll of thunder added the exclamation mark to his comment, and Sterling glanced west at the showers moving north on the horizon. He smiled at the storm's divine timing, then swung his leg over the saddle and dropped to the ground. Swallowing back his anguish, he reached up and retrieved the bouquet he had crafted from flowers plucked from each corner of his land.

RIPTIDE

The colors were vibrant. Fragrant purple flowers from a Texas mountain laurel at the ranch's northwest corner. Pink Drummond's phlox from a meadow in the southeast. White bell-shaped Texas madrone from a copse in the northeast. And Kathy's favorite, the Texas bluebonnet, which had bloomed early in the southwest paddock.

Sterling had meticulously trimmed the flowers and tied them together with a thin ribbon of silk, aware that only hours earlier, they had been alive and thriving in the soil. It was as much a tribute to his wife's legacy as it was an appropriate reminder of the fragility of life.

The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away.

Sterling ambled through the grass until the wide oak branches stretched over his head. He removed his Stetson and lowered himself to one knee, remembering when he had done the exact same thing and asked her to marry him.

He chuckled. "You said no. Do you remember that?"

Sterling set his hat on the ground and leaned forward to kiss the top of the marble tombstone. With tears in his eyes, he set the bouquet on the ground and traced the engraved letters of his wife's name.

"I brought your favorites. Got lucky and found some bluebonnets too."

With a soft, sweeping motion, he brushed away the acorns littering the ground and looked up into the tree. It wouldn't be long before it began producing catkins, and he knew that one day they would sprout roots and grow into an equally majestic escarpment oak. Such was the nature of life.

"The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it."

Even after losing Kathy to cancer, he believed that. He knew he would see her again. He kissed his fingers and brought them to the tombstone, then propped his Stetson back on his head and stood.

"I'm sure Alex would've been here," he said. "But he did what my daddy wouldn't allow me to do and is wearing the uniform of an

American soldier. Honestly, honey, I don't know if he could make me any prouder."

He sometimes wondered if his own father would have felt the same swell of pride if Sterling had turned his back on the Beaumont Foundation in favor of putting on a uniform. But he hadn't and would never know the answer to that question.

Another peal of thunder drew his attention westward, where he saw a thin trail of dust being kicked up by a car speeding on their private driveway. The car was still too far away to make out, but there was no question it was headed for the house.

He glanced back at the tombstone with a worried frown. "I miss you more and more each day."

Estrella snorted, adding her own expression of longing, then looked up and studied the distant dust trail. Sterling noticed her focus and nodded. "All right, girl. Best we get back home."

With a heavy sigh, he looked back down on his wife's grave. "From this life to the next, I will love you for eternity."

The mare stepped closer and nudged him with her nose, and he took the hint. Reaching up for the pommel, Sterling swung himself up into the saddle, then steered her toward the trail leading home. As usual, Estrella needed no guidance and quickly accelerated from a walk to a trot to a canter, aware they were in a race against the clock to beat the stranger to the house.

She snorted again, and Sterling craned his neck to study the approaching car. He squinted, then gently coaxed her into a gallop with his heels. "Ha! Let's go, girl."

Sterling rode low in the saddle and reached back for the custom Republic Forge 1911 with blue mammoth marrow grips holstered on his right hip. You didn't grow up on a ranch in Texas without learning to saddle and ride or carry a pistol everywhere you went. But only those with the kind of money the Beaumonts had carried a one-of-a-kind pistol that was as much a work of art as a weapon.

Sterling reached the wide circular drive in front of his house only moments before the nondescript dark sedan. He remained in the saddle with his hand resting on his pistol as the car came to a stop and the driver's door opened.

He relaxed only slightly when he noticed that the man who stepped out wore a midnight-blue coat with the silver bars of a captain on his shoulders and a green beret on his head. The man took a moment to inspect his appearance in the window's reflection, then turned to Sterling with a look of recognition on his face.

"Are you Mr. Sterling Alexander Beaumont? Father of Alexander Raymond Beaumont?"

He knows exactly who I am.

"Depends who's asking."

The Army officer straightened his coat and stepped forward. "I am Captain Bryan Campbell from Company A, Fifth Battalion, Nineteenth Special Forces Group in San Antonio. I have an important message to deliver from the secretary of the Army. May I come in, Mr. Beaumont?"

Sterling inhaled sharply and felt his neck flush with the sudden fear of what he knew this visit was about. But he cleared his throat before responding. "You may deliver it here."

The captain looked up at Sterling, sitting tall in the saddle, and hesitated. "The secretary of the Army has asked me to express his deep regret that your son, Alexander, was killed in action in Afghanistan on the eighth of February. Upon completing a key-leader engagement at the Sherzad district center in Nangarhar Province, the combined American and Afghan force came under fire. Your son fought with courage but was killed in the ensuing firefight. The secretary extends his deepest sympathy to you and your family in your tragic loss."

Killed in action.

Sterling had no idea three words could carry such weight. But he'd

stopped listening after hearing them. Only one word at the end of the officer's message broke him free from his paralysis.

"Family? Alexander is the only family I have."

The officer looked uneasy, but the shock of hearing those three little words disappeared. Even through Sterling's anguish, all that was left was a gut-wrenching sadness and sympathy for a man not much older than his son, forced to carry the burden of delivering such a difficult message.

He swung a leg over and dropped to the ground. "Do you drink whiskey?"

"Sir?"

"Whiskey," Sterling repeated. "Do you drink it?"

"Yes, sir."

He gestured to the house. "Then come inside and tell me how my son died."

ONE

CAMEL 33
AIR FORCE C-17
PRESENT DAY

Foster Quinn stood, wedged between the bulkhead on the port side of the cargo jet and one of the two forty-one-foot boats mounted on a Low Velocity Air Drop System platform. Each Combatant Craft Assault, or CCA, was powered by twin diesel engines that could propel the monohull at speeds of more than sixty miles per hour. He studied the complex rigging needed to carry the expensive boats from the back of the Air Force C-17 into the water five thousand feet beneath them and marveled at the effort it took to deliver two boats and twelve men to that exact spot in the Straits of Florida.

It wasn't Foster's first time conducting a military free-fall operation, or even his first time jumping into the water. As a former Force Recon Marine and assaulter with the Naval Special Warfare JSOC

task force, Foster had trained almost exclusively in a maritime environment. But it was his first time doing it not wearing the uniform of a United States Marine.

He craned his neck to look beyond his stick, comprised of eleven other men, at the jumpmaster, who was positioned closest to the ramp. They all wore the same thing, olive-drab dry suits with their fins attached to their shins with eighty-pound cotton tape and Ops-Core FAST SF high-cut helmets with goggles pulled down to shield their eyes.

The jumpmaster held a fist down at his side with thumb extended, then raised it overhead in an arc. “Stand by!”

Each man in front of Foster repeated the hand signal and shouted command as a drogue chute deployed from the rear of the cargo jet and stabilized in its turbulent jet stream. Fifteen seconds later, a twenty-eight-foot extraction parachute deployed and pulled the first CCA clear with a *clack-clack-clack* as the platform raced down the cargo jet’s rollers. Ten seconds after that, the second boat followed.

With the cargo area clear and no longer feeling cramped, the jumpmaster pointed to the ramp, and the line of men moved steadily toward the rear, where they dove headfirst into the air like lemmings. When it was Foster’s turn, he didn’t hesitate and followed the other jumpers in his stick—arms extended overhead and legs spread with his knees bent.

As he fell below the cargo jet’s altitude, the wind hit his body and tipped him over, but he arched his back and stretched his arms long and wide to quickly correct into a stable position, then reminded himself of a parachutist’s four priorities during free fall.

A parachutist pulls.

A parachutist pulls at the designated altitude.

A parachutist pulls stable at the designated altitude.

A parachutist never sacrifices altitude for stability.

From the altitude they had jumped, he had approximately twelve

seconds until reaching the designated altitude to pull his rip cord. At that point, he would be at four thousand feet over the water and close to a terminal velocity of over one hundred and twenty miles per hour. Things happened fast when jumping from a lower altitude, but like every other jumper in his stick, Foster had hundreds of jumps under his belt and followed the procedures they had drilled into him from the start.

As the other jumpers began pulling their chutes, Foster glanced at the ALFA digital visual altimeter on his left wrist and confirmed his deployment altitude. He completed his wave-off signal and reached back with his right hand to grab and unseat the bottom-of-container pillow. Fully extending his arm, Foster tossed his pilot chute into the wind stream, causing the bridle to pull the curved pin from the closing loop and initiate the deployment sequence.

Foster couldn't see what was happening, but he felt the deployment bag leave the container on his back, then sweep overhead as his body swung from horizontal to vertical. Tension from his risers unstowed the suspension lines from their retainer bands, and within seconds, the lines had fully extended and pulled the main parachute from the deployment bag. The main canopy inflated with the weight of Foster's body falling to earth.

But it didn't feel quite right.

He looked up and noticed a number of lines over his main canopy.
A partial line over.

He knew there was no option to land the main canopy. Or even attempt a controllability check.

Perform cutaway procedures immediately.

Foster arched his body, looked down, and gripped his cutaway pillow with his right hand and reserve rip cord with his left. But he froze when he saw another chute directly beneath him. For a moment, he thought to reach up for his rear risers and steer away

from the other jumper but knew he was too late. He spread his arms and legs wide, hoping to bounce off the canopy and its lines.

But he was falling too fast.

The impact jolted him, and he lifted his arms in front of his face, taking in his altitude subconsciously.

Three thousand feet.

He knew the emergency cutaway decision altitude was eighteen hundred feet, with a hard deck of one thousand feet to leave time for reserve chute deployment. Even with the installed Skyhook system, the reserve could deploy in two to four hundred feet, but anything less than one thousand was a gamble no jumper wanted to take.

As the canopy underneath him collapsed and engulfed him in a cocoon of silk and parachute lines, he lost all sense of direction, speed, and time. He knew the clock was working against him, but as some of the crusty recon veterans liked to say—he had the rest of his life to clear the malfunction.

Using a hand-under-hand method, Foster tried pulling himself clear of the lower canopy, knowing the jumper beneath him would likely cut away first and leave him stuck in the tangled mess to plummet into the water. His heart thundered in his chest, and he dug deep into his hidden reserves of energy to clear himself of the entangled lines and cut away from his malfunctioning main chute.

Just when he thought he would never see the ocean or sky again, he saw both. And he saw the terrified face of the SEAL beneath him, his right hand gripping his cutaway and reserve handles as he waited patiently for his teammate to clear himself. Foster gave him a subtle nod, then rolled into clear air and regripped his handles.

Foster arched his back vigorously while punching the cutaway pillow away from his chest, then immediately doing the same with his reserve rip-cord handle. He felt the pilot chute catch air and extend the two-inch-wide high-drag bridle. The free-stowed suspension

lines deployed and extracted the reserve parachute from the free bag. Foster felt an instantaneous *snap* as the canopy deployed.

He exhaled.

Looking up, Foster saw a partially inflated reserve chute and continued with his post-opening procedures—releasing the steering lines from the deployment brake setting to the full flight setting. If he had more altitude, he would have performed a controllability check—not that it would have done him any good—and he quickly oriented himself to the drop zone.

For as chaotic as the last several seconds had been, he appeared to be coming down almost exactly where he expected in the deep blue water where the Gulf of Mexico met the Atlantic Ocean. But because the other jumpers all had good chutes, he would beat them to the water. He glanced at his altimeter.

Two hundred feet.

Foster wanted to turn into the wind but instead released his chest strap and focused on flaring his canopy. He lifted his eyes to the horizon—where two sleek CCAs bobbed in the water, awaiting their crew—and braced himself for the water entry. No matter how many times he had jumped into the water, it always caught him off guard when the featureless surface played tricks with his mind and made him think he was higher than he actually was. Only this time, he knew the water would come even quicker.

Any second now . . .

No sooner had he completed that thought than his feet plunged into the water and the rest of him followed.