

September 12, 2001
1000 Hours
Double M Ranch
Beaver Creek, MT

Jackson MacKenzie heard a knock at the front door. Since he was the only person in the house, he left his office on the first floor to answer it. His wife, Cathy, was in town with their friend and fellow retired Navy doctor, Frank Howard, helping with a patient who broke his leg falling off a horse on a neighboring ranch. *Glad it's not me, or I'd never heard the end of it.*

An Air Force major in a class A uniform snapped to attention when Jackson opened the door. "General MacKenzie, permission to enter, sir?" he popped off with gusto.

"I'm retired, but sure." Jackson stepped aside to allow the man into the entry hall. "This way to my office." He waved the man forward, went to his office, sat on the edge of his desk then glanced at the major's name tag. "To what do I owe the pleasure, Major Wallace?"

Wallace held out a large manila envelope with *Classified – Top Secret/Eyes Only – Lieutenant General J.J. MacKenzie – USMC* stamped on the front. "I have a message from the President."

"Why not a phone call?"

"After yesterday, he didn't feel the lines are secure."

Makes sense. Neither would I. Jackson pulled the paperwork, held together by a metal binder clip, out of the envelope. He skimmed through the first four pages. "I'm being recalled to active duty in the Marine Corps along with my executive officer Colonel Harry Russell. My wife, Cathy, is under recall to the Navy with a promotion to Captain, and the Army is getting Brigadier General Chris Patterson."

"Yes, sir. The attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon are a new kind of war. The President wants our tactics master back in the saddle for your advice."

"Please, Major. Surely someone else can take that mantle now."

"I don't know, sir. The President wants you, Captain MacKenzie, Colonel Russell, and General Patterson in DC ASAP. There's a Gulfstream III waiting for you at the Billings Logan International Airport, fueled and ready to go."

"Isn't all air traffic shut down?" Jackson asked, thumbing through the extensive paperwork.

Wallace shook his head. "Not for you, sir. Since you'll take the controls, all the pertinent information, maps, flight plan, classified call sign, and code words for transit through the no-fly zones are in the packet. This is a priority and time-sensitive, sir."

"Understood." Jackson laughed at the classified call sign listed for him, *Zane Gray*. Someone, probably as a joke, had resurrected the one they used while working for the CIA all those years ago. After setting the folder on the desk, he dialed Chris Patterson's home phone number. "Chris, get over to my house. The President pulled the plug on our retirements."

"What!" Chris exclaimed. "I can guess why."

"Yeah. There's an Air Force courier in my office. Tell Harry to get his butt over here. They yanked his too."

"Don't have to. He's here with me. We were in the middle of a meeting discussing a new client. Be there in five."

Jackson hung up and dialed the number to Dr. Frank Howard's office.

"Beaver Creek Clinic, Dr. MacKenzie speaking," said Cathy.

"Honey, get home ASAP."

"What's wrong?" she asked.

"Nine-eleven. I'll explain when you get here."