

their insignia had been stripped away. Even the camouflage they wore belonged to a foreign state.

‘Just doesn’t feel right, not having Her Majesty’s crown on me,’ Blake had grumbled. The team had laughed, but Matt knew what he meant. He’d been involved in a couple of secret missions before, sure, but there was something different about this one.

All this for one man? And what if something went wrong?

When he’d posed that question to his commanding officer, the older man had glared at him.

‘Failure is not an option,’ he’d said.

Matt exhaled, closed his eyes for a moment, and stretched his neck, psyching himself up for the imminent attack. He

consoled himself with the thought that at least they *were* landing, not jumping out with parachutes.

‘Sixty seconds!’

He heard the Sergeant pull back the starboard sliding door of the fuselage, then the port. The wind whipped through the gaping holes, and when he opened his eyes, they began to water. He slipped goggles over his face, and then stood and nodded to the medic. ‘Come on, Thompson. Time to dance,’ he shouted, the roar of the engines whipping his voice away as quickly as he’d spoken.

The young man nodded and leapt to his feet, his eyes wide.

Matt turned to the rest of the team. ‘Okay, you’ve rehearsed this enough times over the past twenty-four hours. Now it’s for real.

Everyone knows their job. Get on with it. Get out. Get back here. Understand?’

‘Yes, sir!’

The men lowered night vision goggles over their faces, and then reached above their heads for the hand straps dangling from the airframe as the gunner aimed his weapon towards the building that loomed below them.

Matt leaned forward until he could peer out the starboard opening and got his first glimpse of the granite-hewn prison they were about to break into.

The two lookout stations that had once towered over the prison walls were now derelict, crumbled from decay and exposure to the frigid elements, whilst the perimeter walls appeared deserted.

Evidently no-one expected anyone to break

out – or break in – from the desolate location.

As the helicopter dropped from the sky, its wheels bounced on the ground, the pilot executing a textbook manoeuvre before he slowed the rotors.

‘Go, go, go!’ Matt urged as he stepped from the aircraft, keeping his body hunched over from the rotor wash above him.

The helicopter had landed in a large walled area, which Matt knew to be the exercise yard of the prison. His feet scuffed up dirt and small stones as he ran.

He didn’t look back – he didn’t need to. He knew his men would be right behind him, falling into position, covering him and the aircraft while he led the smaller team, including the medic, towards their target.

There was room in the cabin for one

stretcher patient only.

The freezing temperature turned his breath to steam as he ran across the bare earth, his fingers already turning numb in the thin mountain air. He flexed his hand around his weapon and brought it up to his chest before he threw his shoulder against the far wall, turning to provide cover fire if required.

As Blake slid to a halt next to him, he glanced over towards the abandoned guard towers positioned along the perimeter and frowned.

‘Do you see anything?’

‘Negative, sir.’

Matt tapped the microphone he’d stuck to his body armour with black electrical tape. ‘Alpha One, confirm area appears deserted, per intel.’