

09/07/2013, 11:00



8 days have passed since our missions against the Syrian air defences. They were an intense and tough set of missions and we've enjoyed a few days of rest since - with nothing but a couple of training flights to occupy our attention. However it now looks like the vacations over... we're due to go back out this afternoon.

I attended a briefing this morning with Lt. Col Lincoln, Poodle and a few other squadron pilots, this began as ever with the intel briefing - delivered by Major Daniels.

Daniels began by detailing the situation around Homs. Following a number of JSTF strikes over the last week the Syrian IADS around Homs has been all but destroyed and we now enjoy air superiority over the city. With that said there are still sizable numbers of Syrian IR SAM systems and AAA in the area but in the main they are not preventing the JSTF from preventing Syrian aircraft operating in the area.

For the last two days the JSTF have been able to maintain a constant presence over Homs, this has allowed the SDF to regroup and to start to fight back against the SAA lines more effectively. Current assessments are that the SDF will have the strength to break out of Homs in a matter of days and that the threat to the road and rail routes through the 'Homs Gap' will likely make the Syrian Government more desperate in their actions against the SDF. This has been seen in attempts by the SyAAF to break through the JSTF defensive screen and attack SDF targets in Homs, but up to now these attempts have been fruitless.

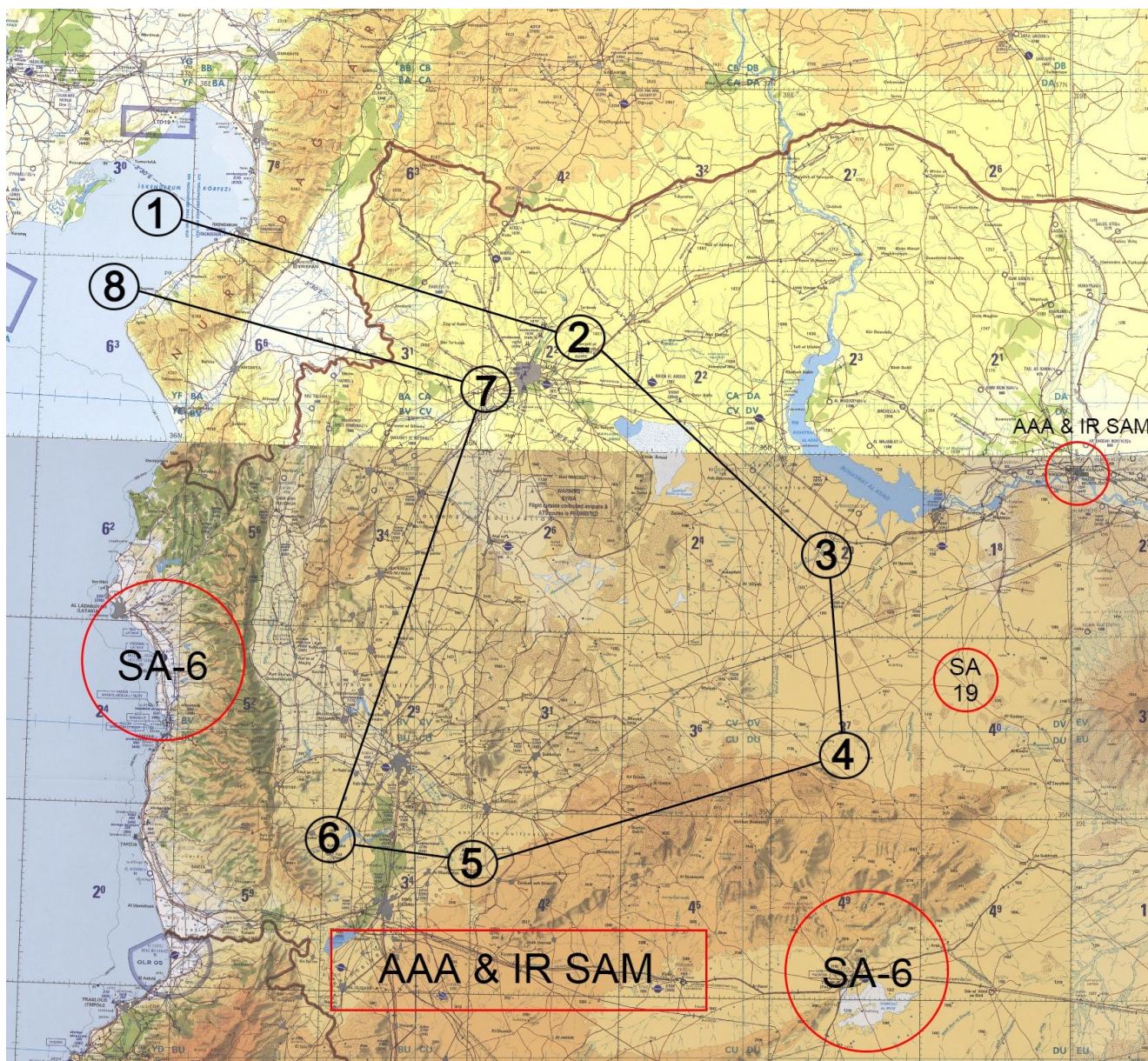
Although staying clear of Homs, since offensive action against Syrian targets began the Russians have started to take a close interest in our activity. Despite their low aircraft availability the Russians have managed to launch a number of flights and begun harassing JSTF aircraft operating in Syria. As our squadron has seen for itself the Russians have been intercepting and forming up on our aircraft, generally getting in the way and making a nuisance of themselves. Intel assessments don't believe the Russians are looking to do anything more than give us a solid reminder that they're here and watching things closely but I have to say that it's made a number of our pilots feel uncomfortable.

In the northeast of Syria the battle against the SIA appears to be progressing well. The Turks have finally got tougher on the SIA, stepping up their aerial campaign. This has proven to be effective in helping deny territory to the SIA although rumours remain among the pilots on base that the YPG are still being targeted near the Turkish border. When asked about this Major Daniels refused to commit to an answer. Closer to Raqqa the SDF have reached the southern banks of the Euphrates and are poised to begin their assault into the city in the coming days. The YPG are also advancing north of the Euphrates and are expected to close towards the city limits over the next 24 hours.

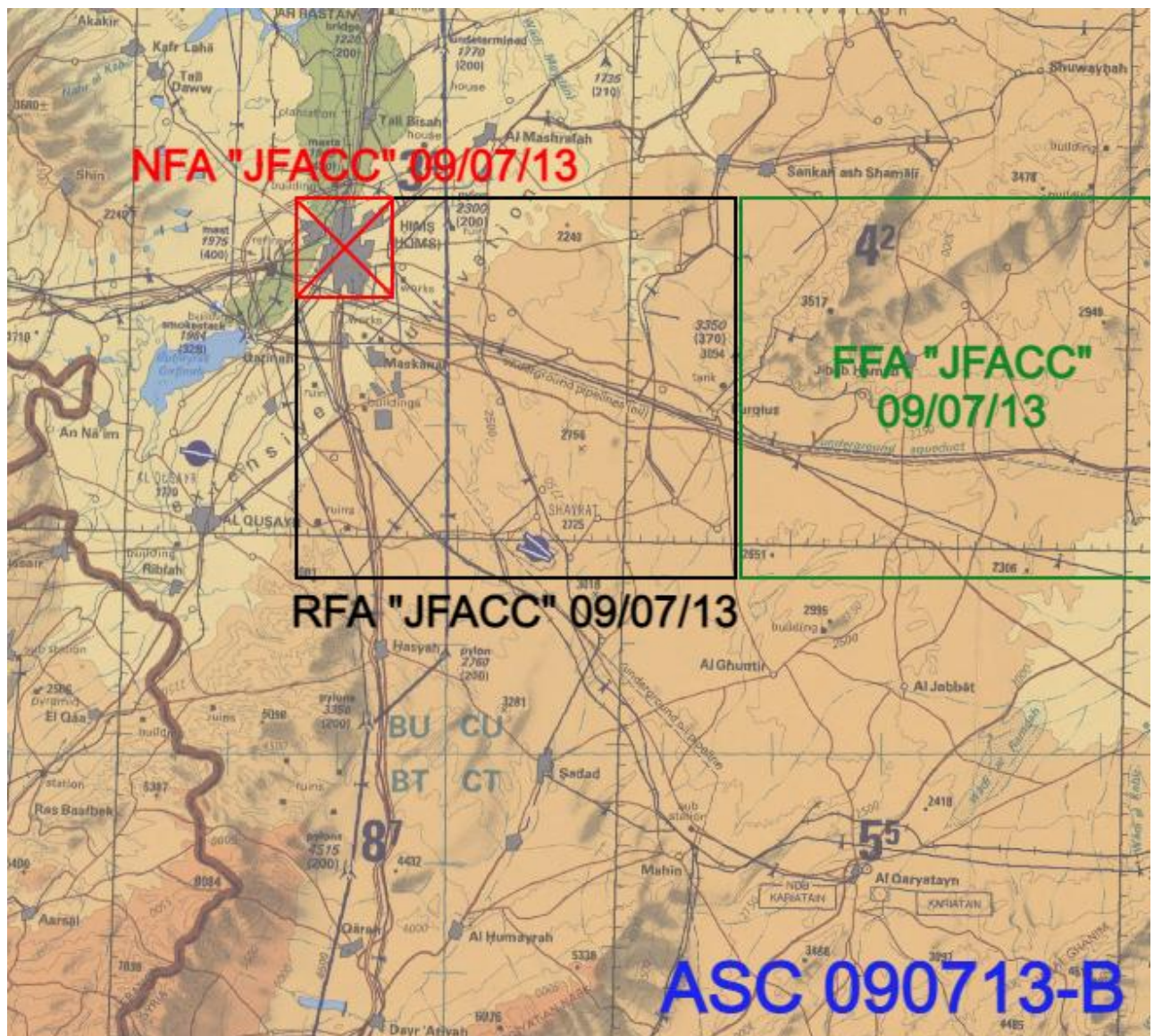
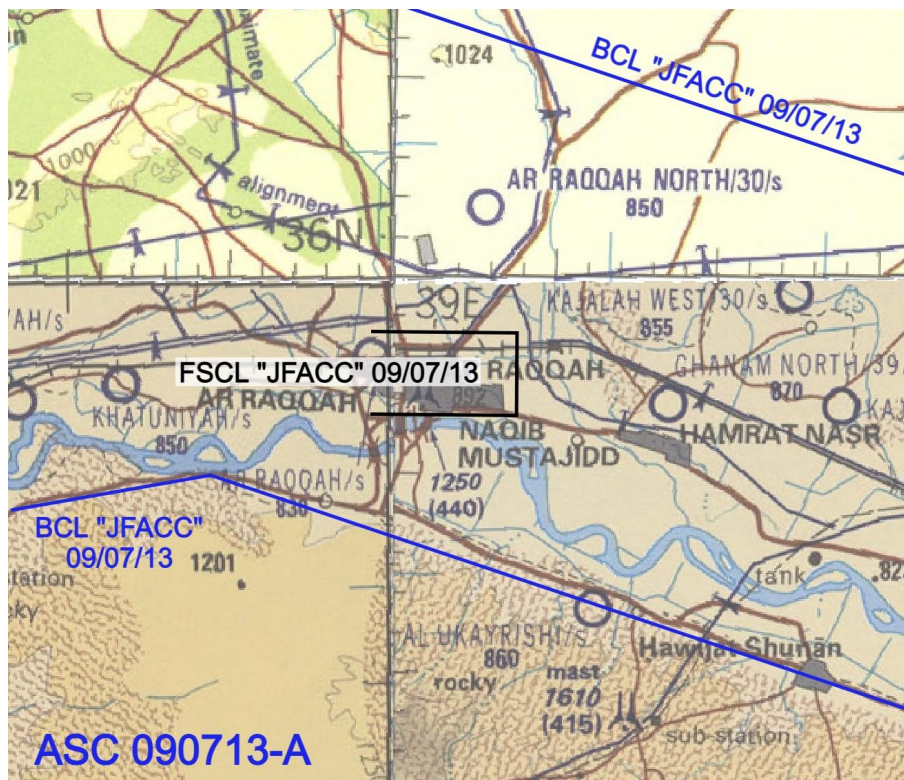
Captain Edwards then stood to deliver the weather briefing, we are looking at high scattered clouds today with moderate winds that gain strength with altitude.

Lt. Col. Lincoln then stepped up to brief the Red Devils's sorties for the day. After the excitement we've seen over the last week, today's flights look relatively benign in nature - all will be standard patrols of the no fly zone. We will be following a similar route to previous patrols although we will venture further south than previously, with our route taking us over Homs. All procedures will be standard and for today's sorties I will be in the number two position, flying alongside Poodle. As usual we will be keeping close contact with Sentinel throughout the flight and will be prepared to respond to either incursions into the no fly zone or to requests for CAS.

We'll be flying a mixed loadout today with Poodle carrying just air to air weapons but my loadout containing air to ground weapons as well. This means we'll be prepared to handle all situations that arise whilst on patrol across the STO.







The briefing finished with a threat analysis. Our strikes against the Syrian air defences has lessened the threat along Sierra considerably, with the SA-6 at Palmyra now the only radar guided SAM left along the no fly. There are however still plenty of pieces of AAA (both low and medium altitude) and IR SAMs deployed around Homs and Raqqa so care should be taken if at any point we are required to respond to calls for CAS. Based on the current activity there is an increased threat of encountering Syrian air to air threats around Sierra, especially in the Homs region. Previous attempts to reach Homs by the Syrian air force have involved either Mig-21, Mig-23 or SU-24 aircraft.

After the intensity of the last few missions I have to say it's good to be back on a standard patrol again, I'm hoping for a quiet flight but I also know that with every passing day and new development the likelihood of that keeps getting smaller. "Be ready for anything" Poodle told me in the briefing...I have to say, that as usual, he's probably right.