



27/08/2013, 06:00.

I don't know where to start with this entry, things are moving fast...too fast.

So guess I'll start closest to home. The JSTF is leaving Incirlik, well most of us are anyway, later today we will be departing Incirlik on our missions before landing at airbases in Jordan. The reasons for this move...well there's a few of them.

One of them is that it's a sensible geographical move, given where we will be operating in the days ahead, but we'll come to that in more detail shortly. Tension with the Turks is another, it seems our strategic goals in the region are not entirely aligned with those of Turkey - and I know that command has had some strong opinions at the ease in which Russia was able to ferry supplies through Turkish airspace. There have also been rumors flying around that Turkey might be close to closing their airspace to JSTF flights into Syria. The final reason - safety of course...no-one here feels safe anymore after what happened to Poodle.

So a move to Jordan it is, which as acting XO has kept me very busy the last few days. I wish I could say that this was all that was keeping me awake at night, but of course there's still a conflict going on in Syria.

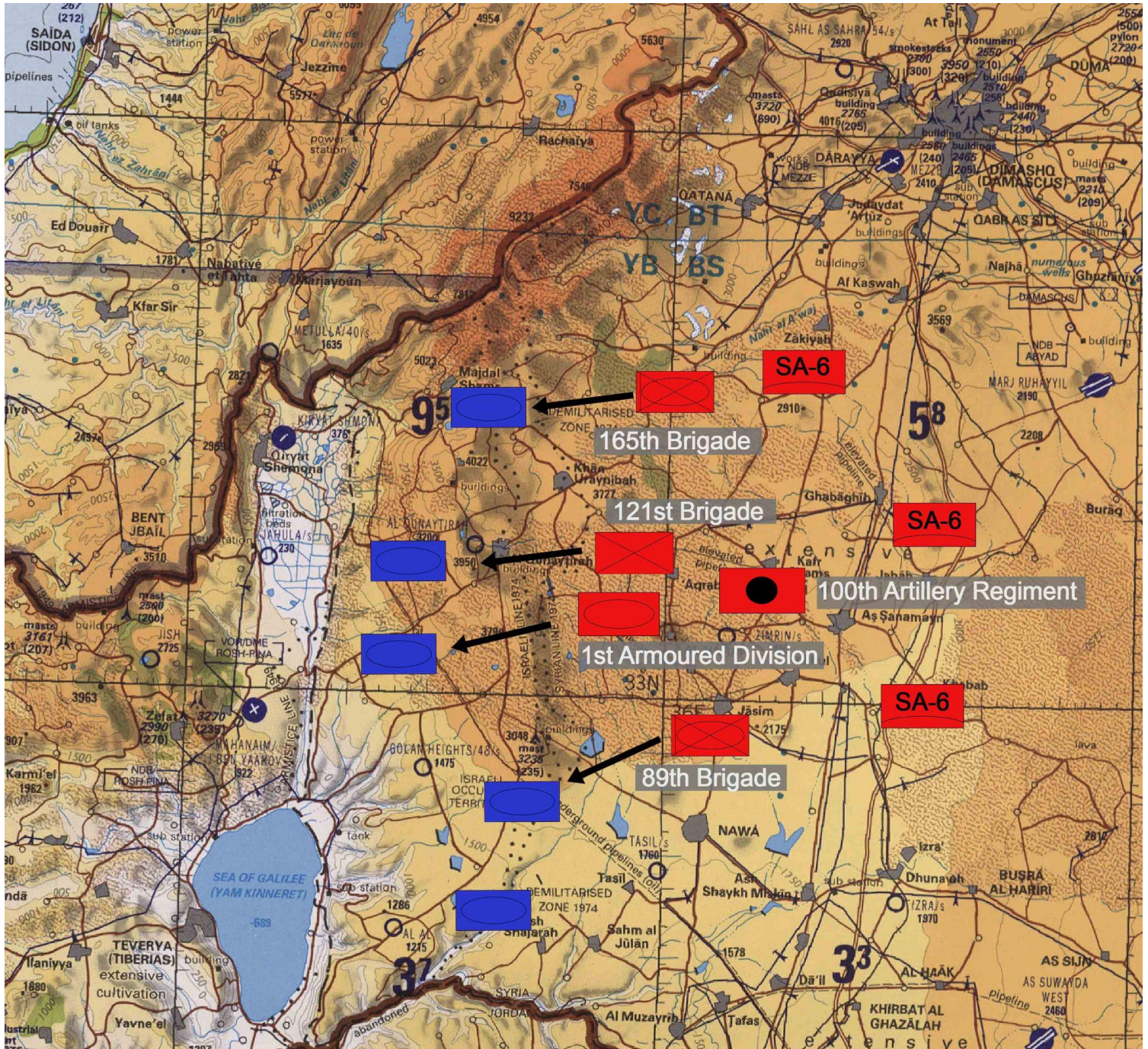
I attended this morning's briefing at 06:00, held in one of Incirlik's small briefing rooms, which was packed to capacity.

I listened intently to the intel brief as Major Colvyn began to speak. Colvyn started by outlining the major events of the last week. Just over a week ago the JSTF undertook major battlefield interdiction efforts on the SAA forces attempting to outflank the SDF positions, these strikes were for the large part, very successful, stopping and turning back the SAA forces as well as bottling up Hezbollah in the Bekaa Valley. This enabled the SDF to consolidate and stabilise their positions, before counterattacking towards Damascus. The SDF made decent progress before things ground into a stalemate and the frontline is now positioned just 20 miles northeast of Damascus, things here show little sign of changing soon as the SAA funnelled it's forces back out of the Bekaa to reinforce their lines near the capital.

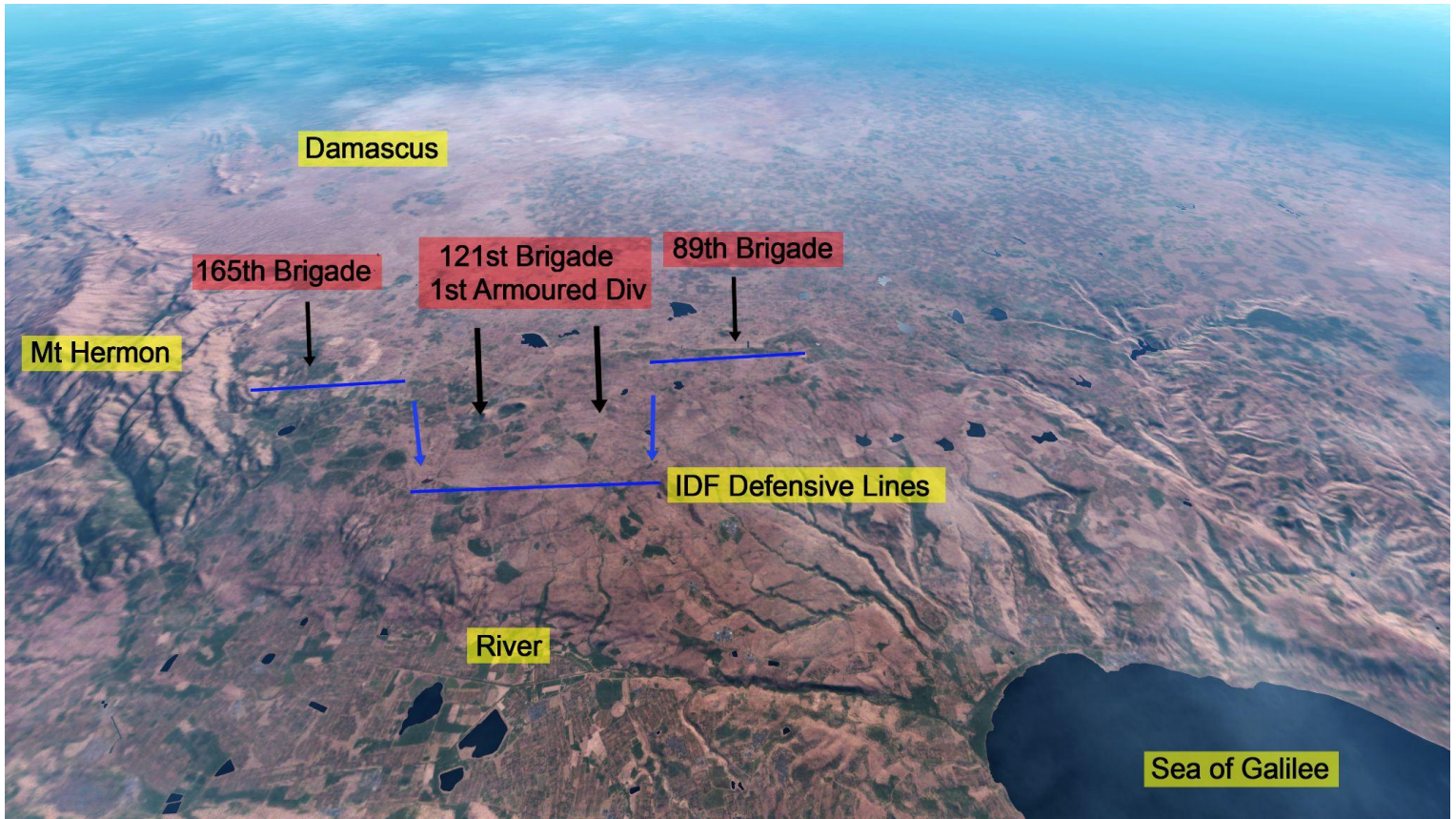
This was for the most part expected and these moves surprised no-one. But what did take everyone by surprise was what happened next...and what happened next was an attack by the Israelis into Syria. Colvyn gave us the impression that this was a complete surprise to the JSTF, and that the IDF had not consulted with anyone, not even the Americans, over it's plans. The reasons why the Israelis would do this? Well several according to Major Colvyn - the first of which is that the Syrians appear to be allowing Hezbollah free movement around Syrian controlled territory. This means Hezbollah forces roaming unimpeded near the Golan Heights border, putting many Israeli settlements firmly in range of Hezbollah

rockets. Second, the Israelis appear to have sensed an opportunity to swing the outcome of the Syrian civil war in a direction they consider favourable to them - that being the removal of an old adversary in the Syrian government, a move that would ultimately also seriously weaken Hezbollah. So it was against this backdrop that IDF armour poured out of the Golan heights 3 days ago, intent on destroying Syrian military forces south of Damascus.

The attack did not go according to plan. Underestimating the Syrian strength following the Russian resupply, the IDF found itself with an unexpectedly bloodied nose, their attack hampered by strong defensive positions and significant air defences moved into the area by the Syrians. The resulting Syrian counterattack has caused the IDF real problems.



Attacking along a 10 mile front the Syrians have managed to penetrate some 3 miles into the Golan Heights, forcing the IDF defensive line back with a combination of the elite 1st Armoured Division (T-72) and the 121st (Infantry) Brigade. On the flanks of the attack mechanized infantry (BMPs) have managed to tie down the Israeli forces, preventing them from supporting the under pressure centre.



Colvyn continued, expanding on the situation on the Golan heights. Assessments are that the Syrian objectives are most likely the bridges over the Jordan River, should the SAA capture these bridges they will be able to cut off the IDF forces on the Heights from reinforcements in Israel. There is no expectation that Syria will try to push any further into Israel - this cannot end well for them, military or politically - but re-taking the Golan Heights and destroying a significant portion of the Israeli army are certainly enticing goals.

Major Colvyn ended his intelligence briefing there, handing over to Colonel Rawls to lead us through the operational details of today's missions. Rawls took to the podium, a determined look on his face, "Israeli forces", he told us, "have made a miscalculation and gotten themselves into some trouble. Now you may be sitting here thinking it's time we go help them...but...that is not the aim of today's sorties. Not directly anyway". No one in the briefing uttered a sound, we were all gripped by curiosity. Rawls continued, "The IDF has not requested our help, nor have we offered it, now the Israelis were possibly a little hasty in their attack but we have every confidence that their forces on the Golan Heights will ultimately prevail. But out of their adversity an opportunity has presented itself". Rawls went on to outline the situation as assessed by the CAOC - we have at least 4 brigades worth of the Syrian war fighting machine, out in the open, and away from the heavily protected Damascus area. Furthermore, they were in the process of throwing themselves

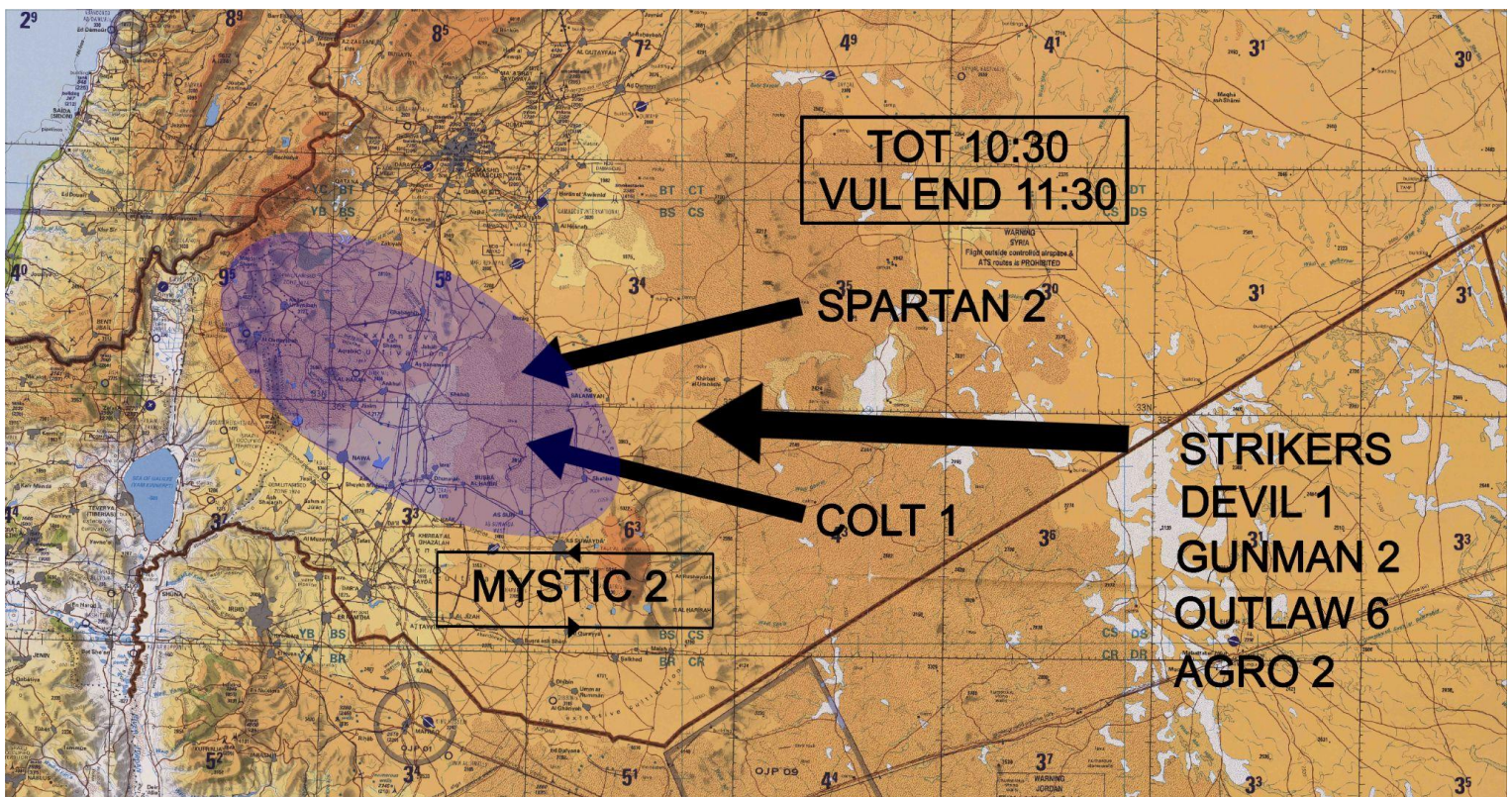
head on into a formidable fighting force in the IDF, this presents a golden opportunity for JSTF aircraft to catch the SAA out in the open and inflict some serious damage on some of the most capable units in the Syrian military.

Our mission then, will be to attack and attrit the SAA forces in their rear areas as they mass for more attacks and attempt to move onto the Golan Heights. However this will be a challenging task, Syrian mobile SAMs, mainly SA-6 have formed an interlocking missile umbrella over the battlespace, whilst SA-8s are reported to be moving with the Syrian formations. It was against this threat that the IAF struggled to support the initial IDF assault and subsequent defence.

We will not be working directly with the Israelis on this operation, but clearly our mission will support their fight. Importantly, and Rawls was crystal clear on this point, we are not permitted to engage any target in the Golan Heights itself - this is strictly an IDF and IAF operating area.

Rawls continued to brief the operation, the JSTF has gained air superiority over the east of Syria, thanks in part to recent attacks on Palmyra and Sayqal airbases. This means we now have a large, safe airspace from which to marshall our forces and push to our targets, avoiding Damascus as we do so. Texaco and Arco will both be holding refuelling tracks in this area.

Cover for today's mission will be supplied by Spartan 2 (EW), Colt 1 (SEAD/DEAD) and Mystic 2 (OCA). The strikers will be Devil 1, Gunman 2 (A-10), Outlaw 6 (F-15E) and Agro 2 (Tornado).



The supporting elements have a TOT of 10:30 and will have a vul time of 1 hour. Upon completion of their mission all aircraft will land at their assigned base in Jordan, either King Hussein Air College or H4. The proximity of these airfields to our AO has greatly simplified the fuel situation, allowing us far greater time over the target.

Rawls, his briefing over, stepped aside to allow Captain Edwards to carry out the weather brief. The weather across the region will present us with challenges today - a heavy overcast at around 7000 feet MSL will potentially force our flights down to lower altitudes.

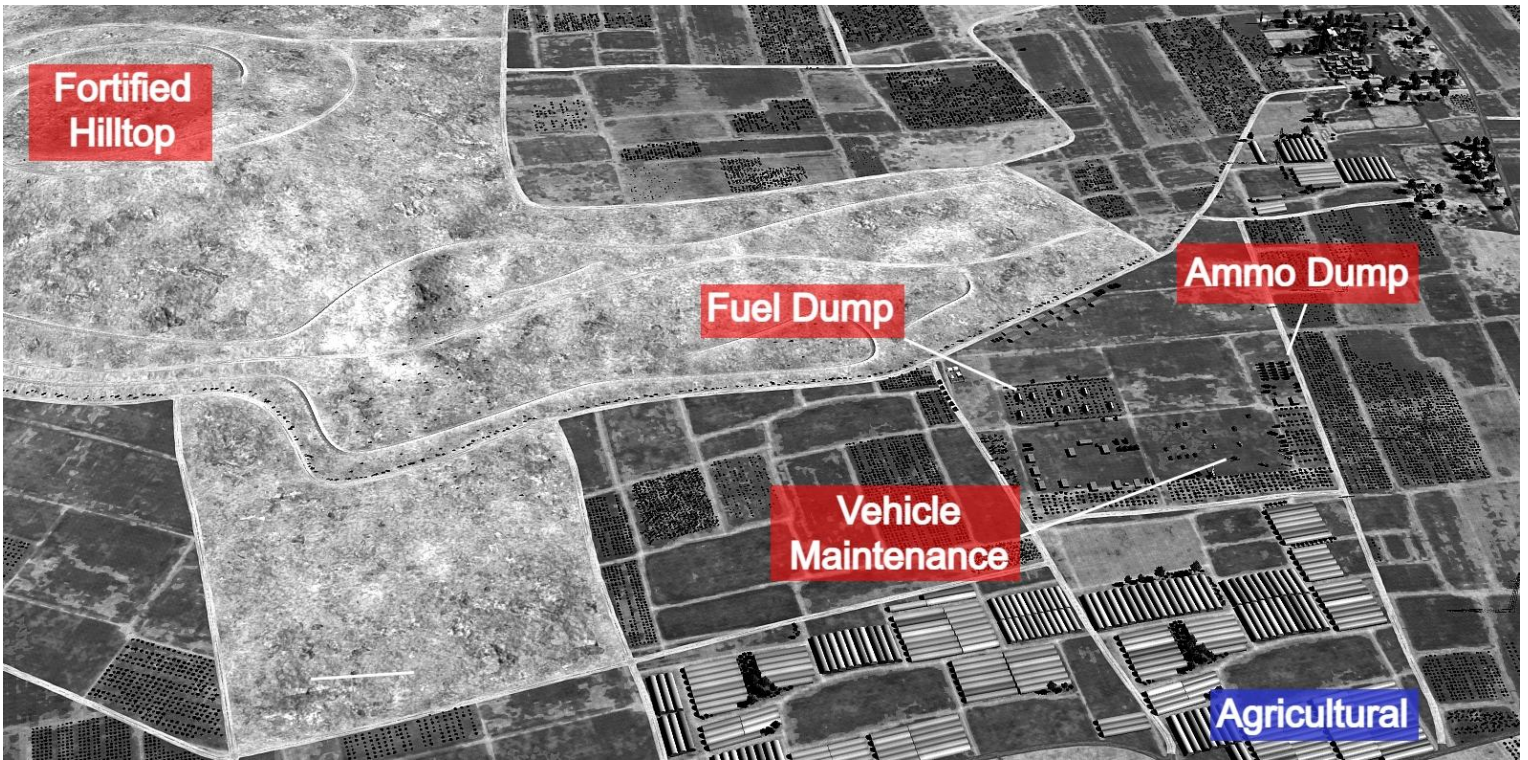
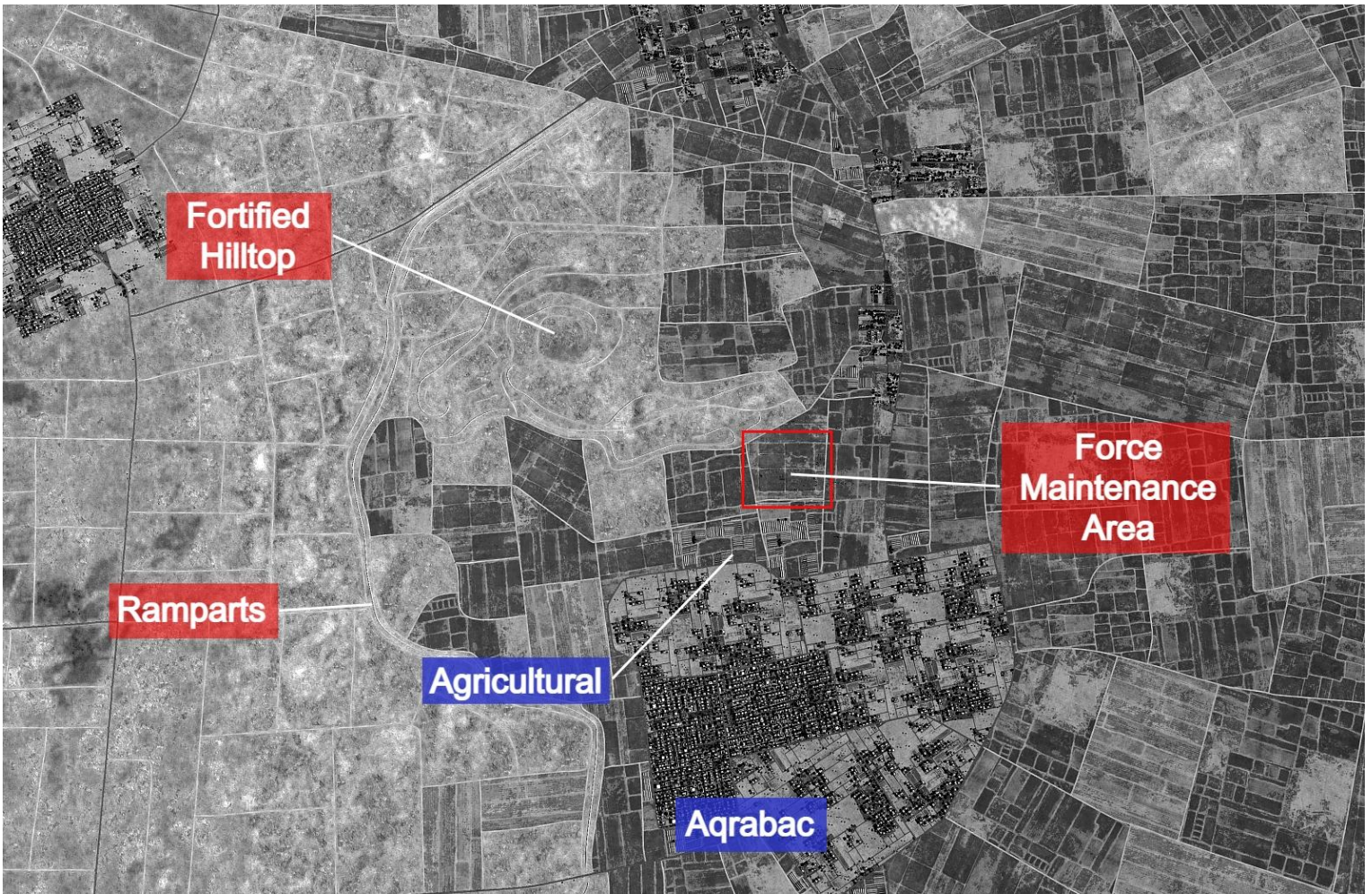
Once the briefing finished we were dismissed, at this point I found myself in a different briefing room, alongside Newt, Link and E-Boy. Link began to brief us on our specific mission for today.

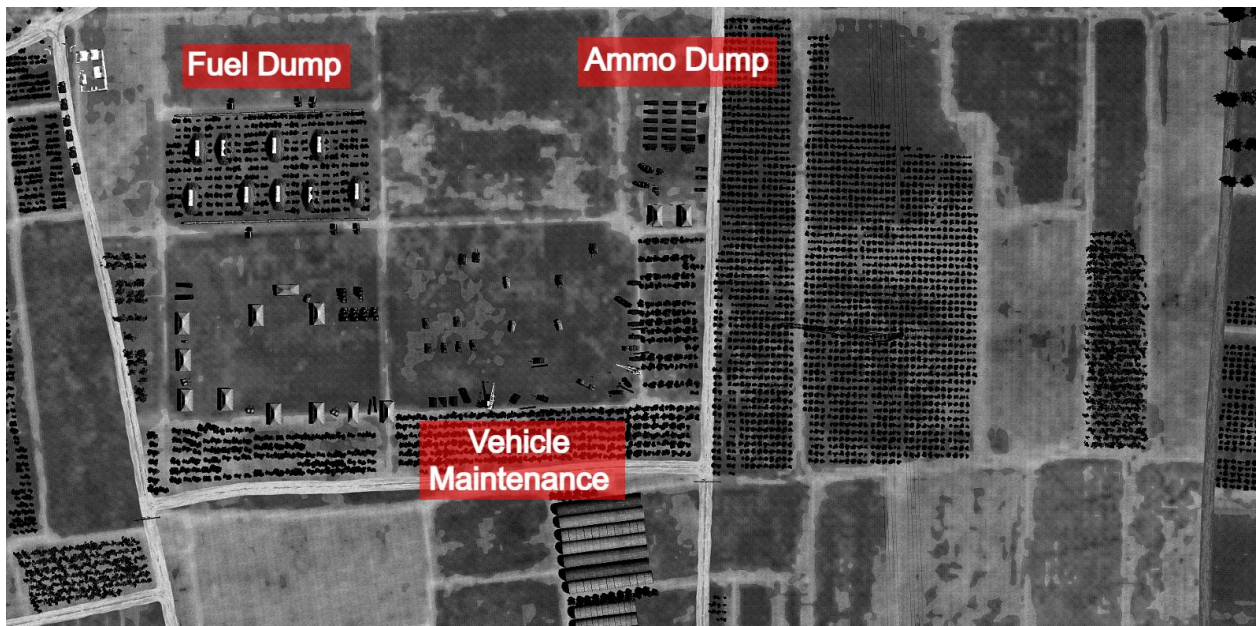
Devil 1 (Link, myself, Newt and E-Boy) will depart Incirlik as standard, before transitioning to Syria though the Gold Corridor and following our flightplan out to eastern Syria where we will rendezvous with Arco to refuel. Once refueled we will push to our target.

Link and E-Boy have their own target assigned. My flight (myself and Newt) has been assigned an SAA Forward Maintenance Area (FMA) as it's primary target. This is a forward deployed fuel, ammunition and repair point for Syrian armour. Our task is to get in and inflict maximum damage on the target, taking out the fuel and ammunition supplies in the process, along with any other targets of opportunity.

The FMA is located on the northern side of the town of Aqrabac, and is on the southeastern side of a fortified hill, 8 miles east of the frontline. A constant stream of vehicles arriving at and departing the site has been observed over the last 24 hours - these consist of a mixture of supply vehicles, fuel trucks and armour.

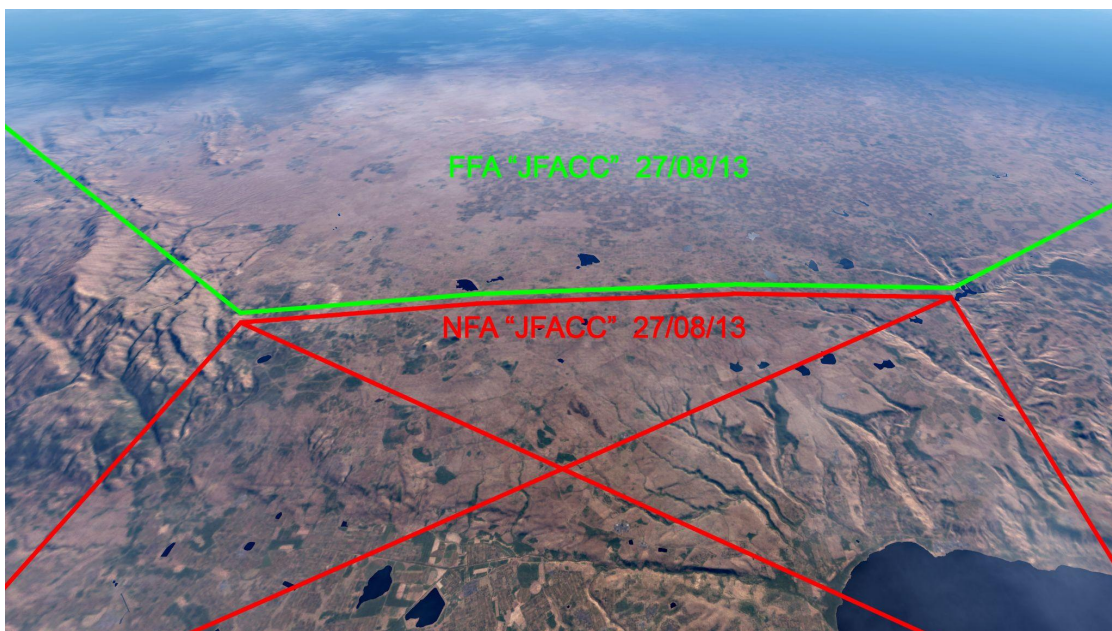




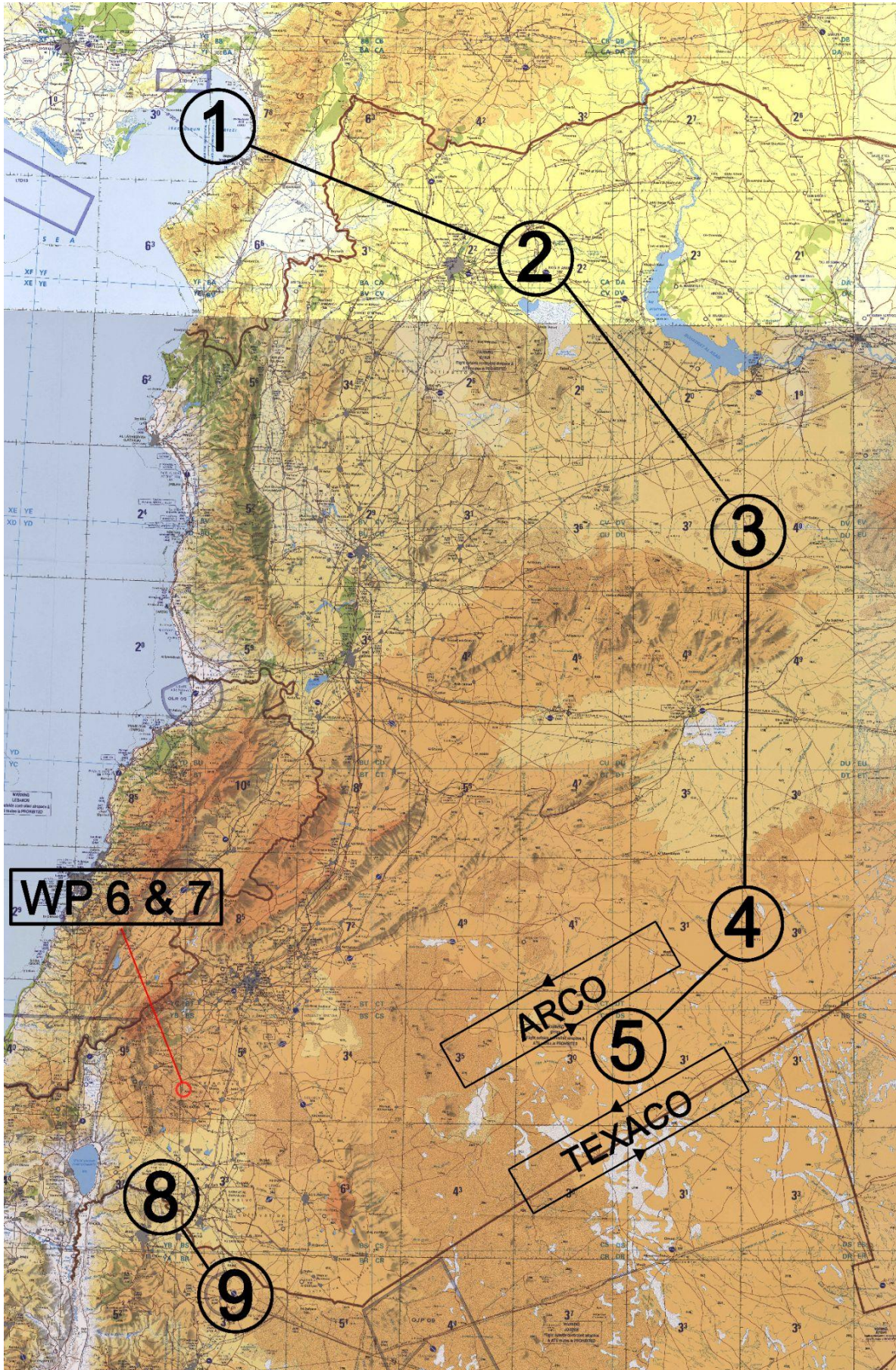


The northwest corner of the FMA contains a fuel dump, partially buried amongst the trees, the southeast corner appears to be a servicing and repair station for armour and the eastern access road borders the ammunition storage area. Waypoint 6 has been assigned to the fuel dump and waypoint 7 to the ammo dump. Within my flight I will be targeting the fuel dump, Next the ammo storage. Once we have hit the primary target our secondary objective is to attack any SAA targets of opportunity within the FMA or the wider designated free fire area. An E-8 JSTARS, callsign 'Searchlight' will be supporting this operation by tracking SAA vehicle movements. and will be feeding potential target locations to Sentinel.

A free fire area has been declared in all of Syria south of Damascus, terminating at the border with the Golan Heights, this border should be easily identifiable given it's high perimeter wall, guard towers and numerous outposts. South of the border wall is a no fire area - this is Israeli territory, although Syrian armour will also be present in places. Any Syrian armour in this area will be the responsibility of the IDF and IAF and we must not engage.



Once ready to terminate the mission, we will proceed to waypoint 8 and enter Jordanian airspace before contacting and landing at King Hussein Air College (waypoint 9).





Loadouts for this mission have been influenced by a shortage of advanced weapons again, at least for us. We are without LGBs, although in today's weather they would not have been much use. Much more disappointingly we are without JDAMs again, meaning today we will be hauling unguided Mk-82 Snakeeyes, Mk-20s and AGM-65F Mavericks. The proximity of King Hussein AC to the battlespace means we are finally able to lose a fuel tank and carry just weapons so we're at least able to carry a significant war load today. Bingo is set at just 2700 lbs, plenty for the just 50 or so miles from the AO to the airbase even at low level and high speed, should we need to make a quick escape.

As always we closed with the threat briefing. The weather and weapons loadout poses a major challenge today, meaning in all likelihood we will be required to get low to engage our targets. This of course means a greater risk from AAA and MANPADS/IR SAMs. We can expect the usual mix of ZU-23, ZU-57-2, S-60, ZSU-23-4, SA-18 and SA-9 within the AO protecting Syrian positions and formations. Reports of SA-13 have also been received and SA-8 are also thought to be offering close protection for some Syrian formations.

The Syrian SAM network remains a major threat, although one which we are now well versed with dealing with. Spartan 2 and Colt 1 will be working to jam and suppress the air defenses in the area and as ever we should pay careful attention to our position. SA-11s continue to operate around Damascus and are the most capable threat we will be facing. Less capable but still dangerous, and highly prevalent across the battlefield are the SA-6s deployed south of Damascus.

Rivet Joint flights have detected at least 6 SA-6 emitters operating in the area between Damascus and the Golan Heights. These highly mobile units have formed a tight missile umbrella over the frontlines - they will be susceptible to Spartan's electronic attack, but as ever should we stray too close to one they will be able to overpower and burnthrough the jamming. Given the number of Syrian SAMs in operation in a confined space, the Syrian Air Force has up to now remained fairly quiet, choosing to remain on the ground and leave clear targets for their ground based defences.





With the briefing over I had a few hours to finalise my plans. I am once again responsible for planning the strike myself, although there are a lot less options available to me than last time. Precision forms an important part of my thinking - Newt and I will need to carefully watch where we fly to avoid stumbling into the WEZ of any SAMs. To this end we should be glued to our RWRs - both SA-6 and SA-8 offer a significant threat over the front. We should also aim to coordinate our attacks carefully, if attacking at low level we will be putting ourselves at risk so we should mitigate this by attacking from different directions in a very short time period. If possible I will attempt to survey the target defences before approaching the FMA - the presence of the large hill at the target may yet offer some protection - to determine the best attack direction.

As I settle into planning this mission, I cannot help but think back to my arrival in Turkey and that first flight with Poodle. Things then were a lot simpler, this whole operation was supposed to be about enforcing a no fly zone and when called for, dropping bombs on the SIA in support of allied forces. The things we've been required to do during our mission out here are almost beyond belief; regular skirmishes with the Syrians and Hezbollah, attacks over Damascus, strikes in the Bekaa Valley and now supporting Israel on the Golan Heights. How things have changed over the past 2 months! I don't yet know how the rest of this conflict will pan out, and I have no idea what the ramifications for the region will be. But, as I write this last entry before packing the last of my gear for it's journey to Jordan, I can't help but reflect on my experiences with Persian Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. Conflicts, even when 'well intentioned' have consequences. The ultimate fate of our Syrian adventure is yet to be written.

Flight Lt. David Hill,  
27th August 2013, Incirlik Airbase.

### \*\*\* Player Notes \*\*\*

Part 2 of this mission will once again start behind the tanker.

This mission will again have an element of attack planning. Your primary consideration will be the way in which you utilise Newt. You will be given the option of having Newt attack from either the north, south, east and west. When Newt is on your wing and not attacking he will be able to give you SAM warning calls, these will not be available once you order him to break off and attack.

Your two main options will be to either:

- Attack one at a time to give you the benefit of Newt as a look out - but two separate attacks will make the defence of the target easier for the SAA.
- Attack at the same time - but care must be taken to coordinate the time and direction of your attack. This approach will more likely overwhelm the defences but you will lose Newt as a missile lookout. Should you also get the timing wrong, and arrive over the target too far apart then you will lack surprise and the defences will be more ready for you.

To assist the player's coordination, for each attack direction Newt will use a point 5 miles away from the target as his IP and will call 'in' when 5 miles out and approaching the target.