

November 17th, 2011.

Operation Rapid Eagle continues at pace and the relentless march of the Regimental Combat Teams continues. So too does our role in supporting the ground element, and we saw a classic example of this two days ago during the patrols our forces made through the green zone east of Mashiz. Basij forces launched coordinated ambushes on RCT 5 and 1st Recon as they advanced on Mashiz, a number of serious troops in contacts occurred and our Det B Harrier pilots were pushed to the limit to provide critical CAS to our troops.

Ultimately though, our Marines won out, the Basij could only slow them and while they did manage to cause casualties amongst the advancing forces, they were unable to prevent Mashiz from being secured yesterday.

Earlier today, Ein-Stein and myself were back out patrolling over the Mashiz area again, once again providing support to RCT 5 and 1st Recon as they pushed out from Mashiz. All was quiet, with very few threats present to the ground force.

But speaking of threats, the Scud threat to FOB Juliet is very real. Two days ago we had a Scud impact just west of Juliet, no damage or injuries but far too close for comfort. The Patriot battery deployed at Juliet is being kept real busy that's for sure.

So after we returned from today's flight and debriefed, we made a quick stop for food and then found ourselves heading back towards the briefing room. Ein-Stein and I were the first pilots to arrive, and we made ourselves as comfortable as we could in the rickety chairs as we waited for the other pilots to arrive. Already present were Captain Parkin and Major Daniels. After a short while Baz and Noble, quickly followed by Mother and Chief finally made it through the door of the office, having come straight from their debrief following a patrol out towards Rafsanjan.

"Christ almighty!" exclaimed Chief as he walked in, "You look terrible...and smell even worse".

"Thanks Chief" I replied, "You're not that fresh yourself". And to be fair, we were all in terrible condition, soaked with sweat and stinking to high heaven.

"Ok, ok settle down" said Mother as he grabbed a seat near the front of the room. "We're on another quick turnaround here, Captain Parkin can you give us the met brief for overnight please".

"Certainly Major" said Parkin as she rose to her feet. "Bad news I'm afraid, the weather front you've had to contend with the last few days remains, which means these clouds are here to stay for a few more days. We're looking at scattered or broken clouds tonight at around 14,000 feet, winds are expected to be quite calm however, maybe around 5 knots max at lower levels".

After delivering the unwelcome news - we were all keen for this cloud to finally clear, Captain Parkin departed and Major Daniels then rose to begin his intel brief. He started to fill us in on developments around Kerman Province. RCT 7 have met stiff resistance on their approach to Kerman, with the mountainous terrain hindering their progress. Resistance has been made up of mainly IRGC units, defended as we learned recently by both SA-8 and SA-15, which is restricting the available air support in this sector. RCT 5 have secured Mashiz and the surrounding area, although pockets of resistance persist from Basij fighters. RCT 1 is in position and ready for it's assault on Rafsanjan.

Daniels reported that the city is defended by both IRGC and conventional Iranian armour, with intelligence identifying Chieftain, T-72 and ZTZ-96 MBTs in the vicinity of Rafsanjan. The number of Basij present in the city is unknown. Turning to the SCUDs, Daniels told us that they are believed to be operating somewhere north of Kerman City, but remain out of reach until the CAOC tasks some missions to deal with the air defences around Kerman and make space for coalition air to go on a SCUD hunt.

After completing his update Daniels departed and Mother began to speak.

“Ok pilots, I know we’ve had a busy few days but things are about to get even busier. RCT 1 is in position and is preparing to push on Rafsanjan tonight, Det B, as I’m sure you expected, will be supporting this push”.

“We will be operating in three flights of two, these are myself and Noble, Baz and Einstein and Mike-Mike and Chief. We will be hitting a variety of pre-planned targets through the night in support of the attack as well as remaining on station after to provide on-call CAS”.

“Rafsanjan is defended by several SAM systems, with SA-6 and SA-8 detected in the vicinity of the city, these will be eliminated ahead of our arrival. It’s going to be a very busy 24 hours for us and to support with keeping us in the fight longer we will be making use of the FARP that’s been established at Rayan”.

Mother went on to describe the missions that both he and Baz will be leading. After a while, the focus turned to the mission Chief and I will be undertaking.

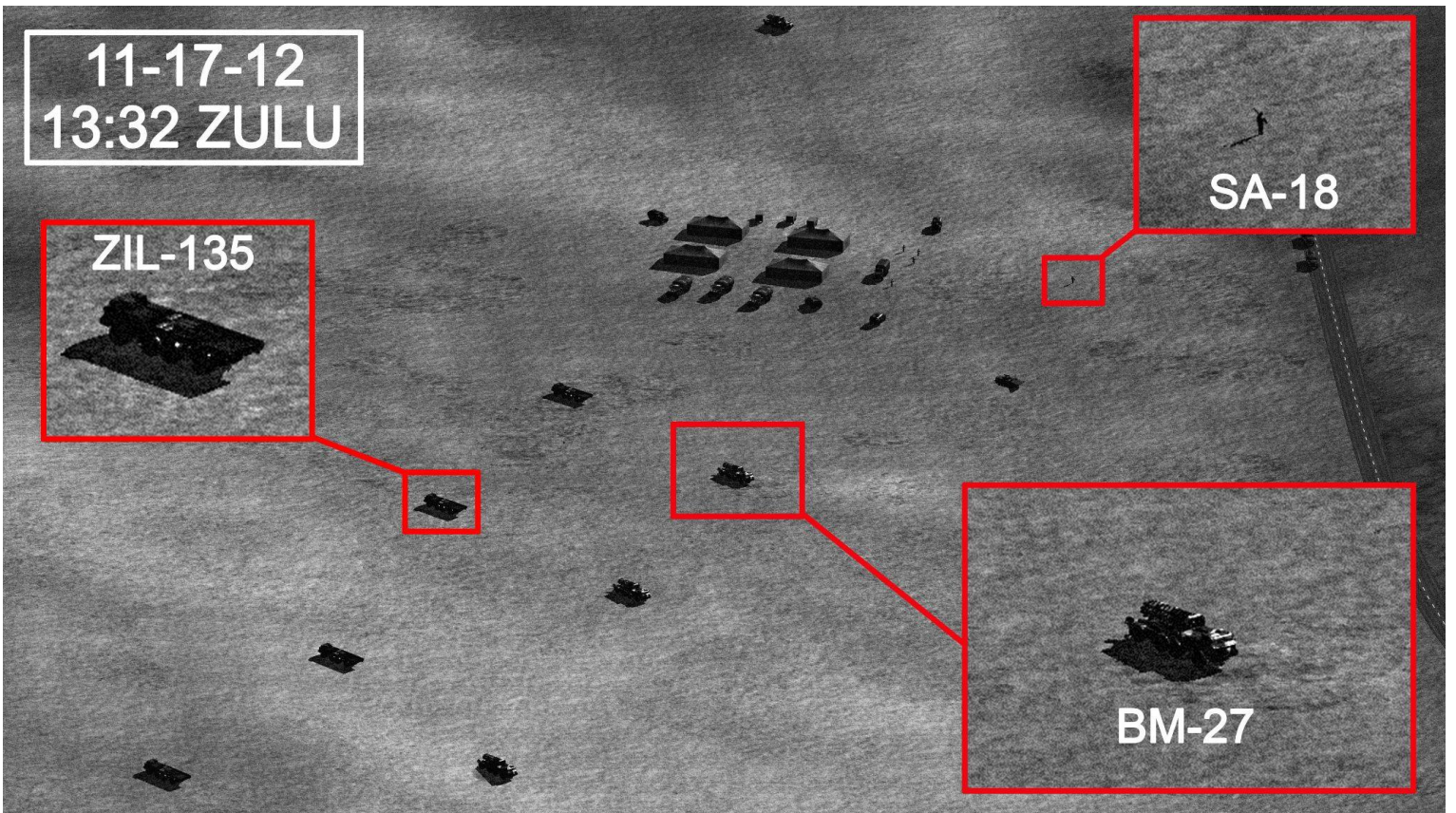
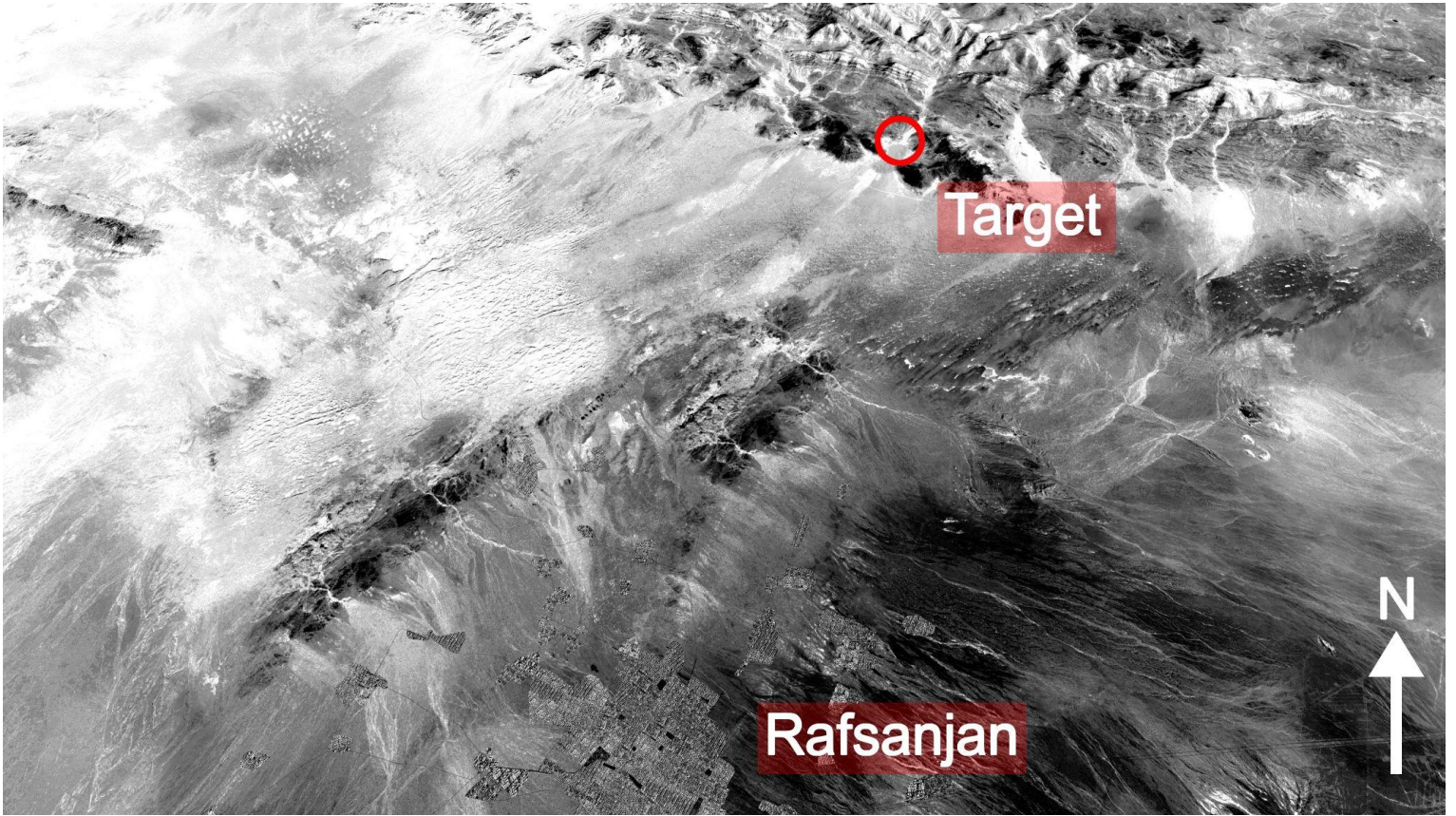
“So onto Mike-Mike and Chief, your target will be an IRGC rocket position in the mountains 15 miles northeast of Rafsanjan. The IRGC has a battery of BM-27 Uragan MLRS stashed away up there and any Marine forces that try to advance past Rafsanjan will be well within their range. Your job is to take out those launchers”.

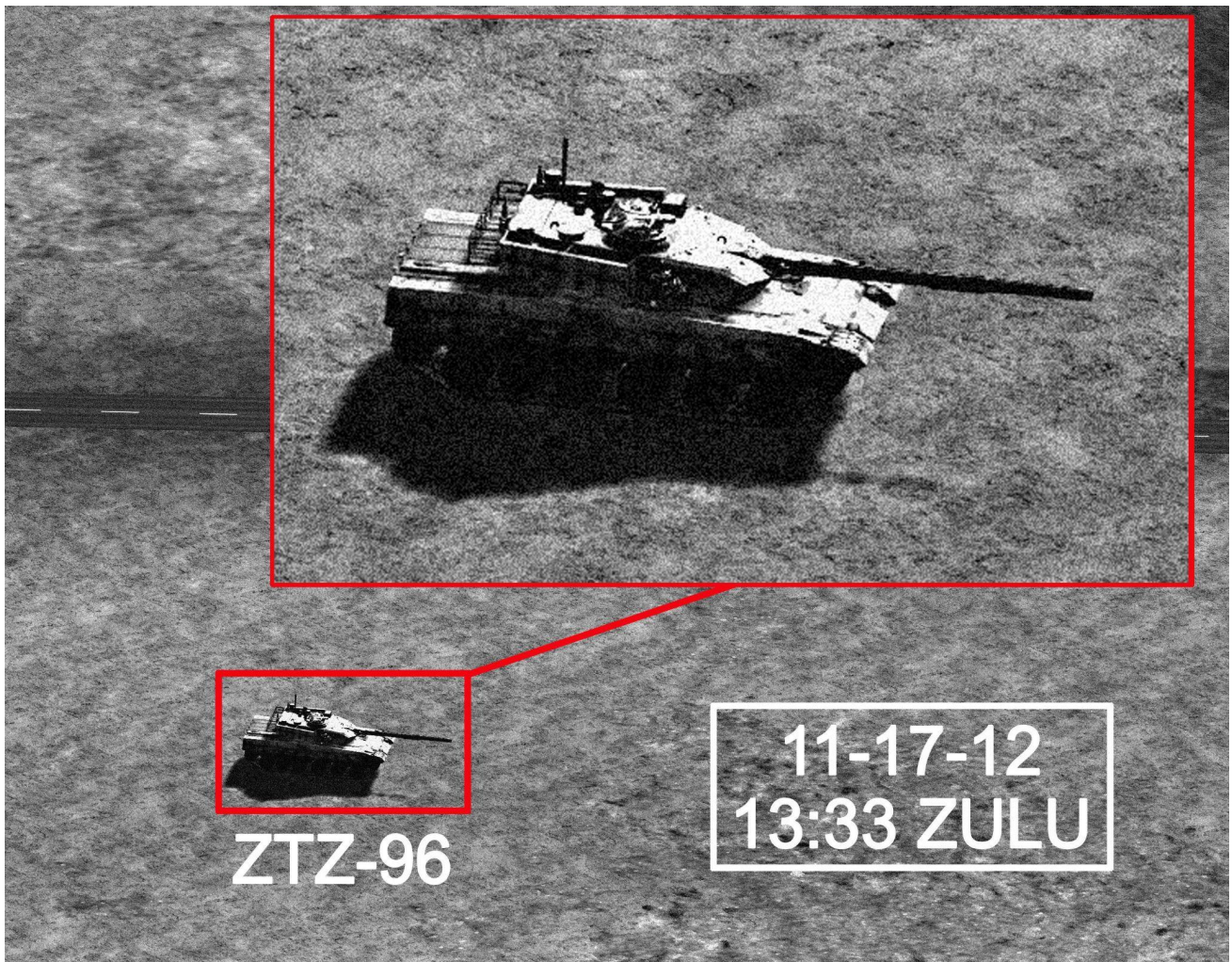
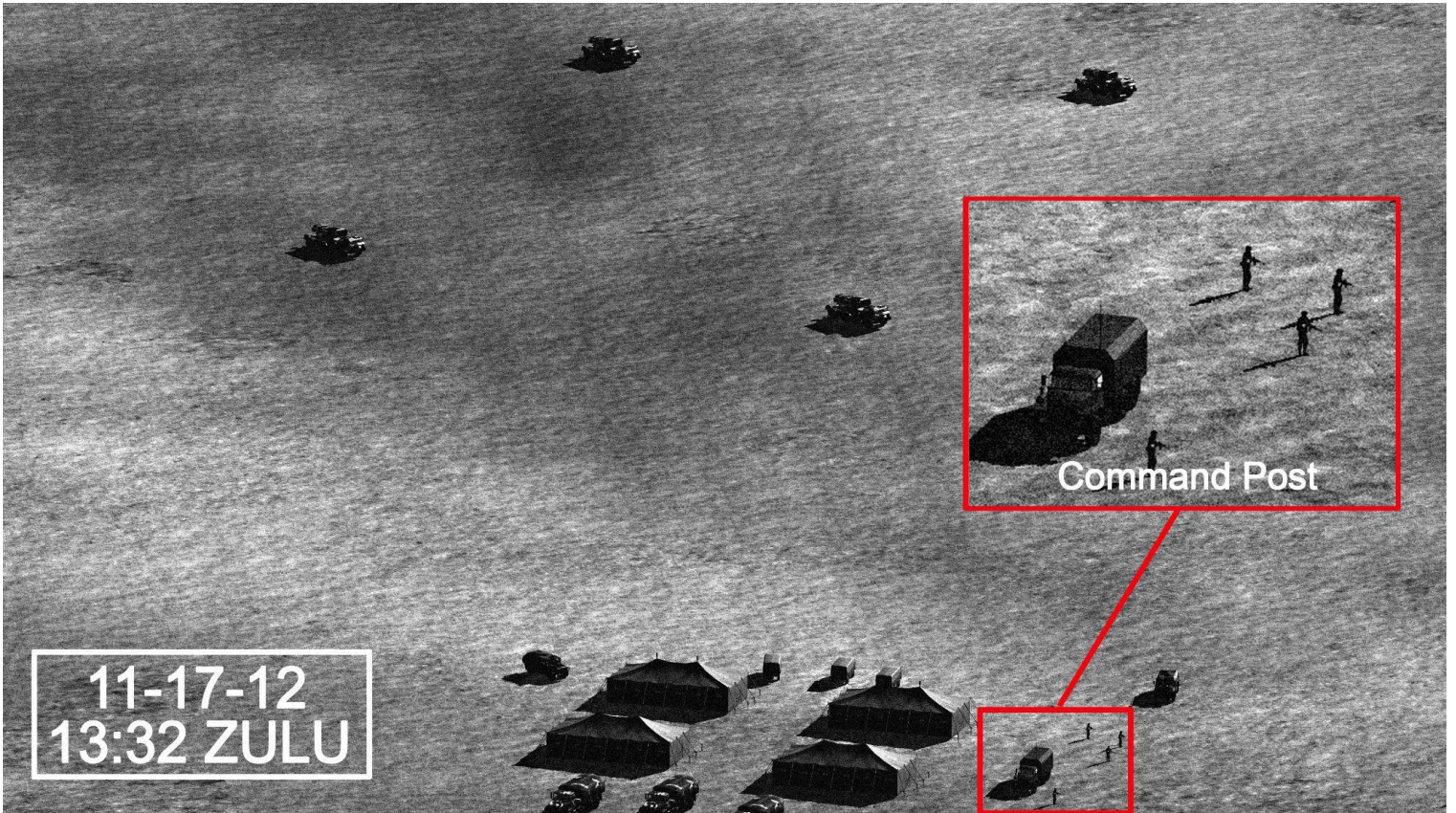
“How high are those mountains boss?” asked Chief.

“The peaks are between 8,000 and 9,500 feet MSL,” Mother replied, “The target location is at an elevation of 7,100 feet MSL”.

“Oh great” I responded despondently, “With broken clouds at 14,000 feet as well, not a lot of room to work in again”.

Mother went on to describe the target in more detail, sharing the recon photos the Navy had obtained for us. At least 8 BM-27s have been identified at the site, along with a command and control position and logistical support elements. A number of ZTZ-96B main battle tanks were also identified defending the road into the mountains. SA-18 MANPADS were also identified as present at the site.





Our primary target will be to eliminate the BM-27 launchers. Our Secondary target is to eliminate the command post and any armour in the proximity of the site.

We pressed Mother for more details on exact target positions and defences. Unfortunately the lingering cloud has made any definitive information hard to come by, with snapshots by the recon flights beneath the clouds our primary source of intel at the moment.

Known defences at the target site are SA-18 MANPADs, and the recon flight also picked up emissions from a AAA radar, likely a ZSU-23-4, although this was not visually confirmed. No SAM emissions were detected in the vicinity of the target, although the SAM systems (SA-6, SA-8, SA-15 and HAWK) towards Kerman City and north of Rayan will pose a threat if we stray off course. To support against this SAM threat, Navy EW and SEAD flights will be present throughout the night's operations.

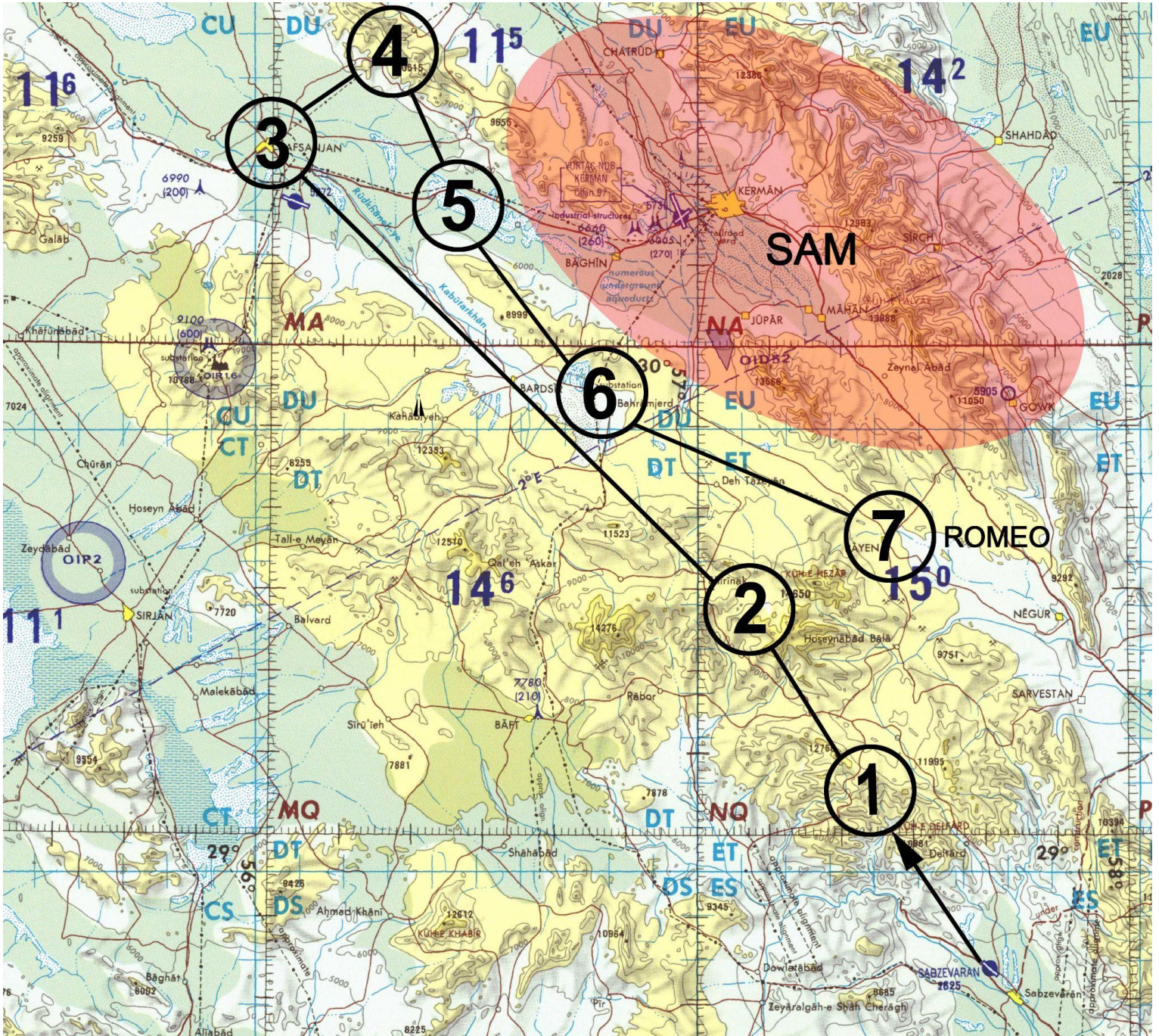
We finished up our briefing covering how our mission will flow.

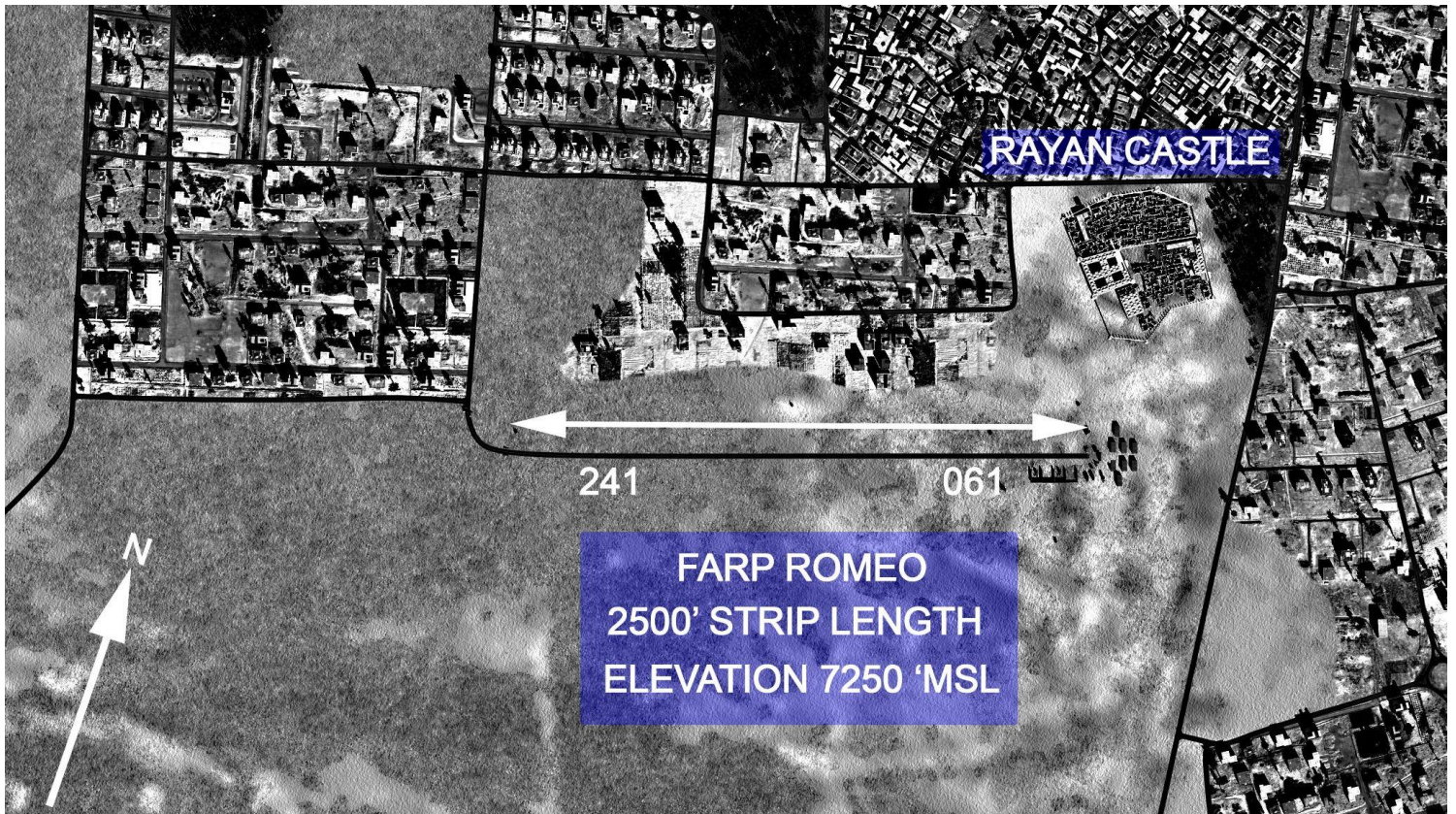
This will be my first night mission here in Iran so I should remember to make sure the crew chief packs the NVGs for me. We will be operating on internal fuel only on this one, making use of the Harriers unique ability to operate from a FARP to allow us to carry more weapons. Our loadout will be 2 Mk-20 Rockeye CBUs, 2 pods of APKWS and 2 laser Mavs. This will allow us to target a mix of light and armoured targets and from a stand off range when required - although the topography of the area may make this a challenge.

Once airborne our flight will form up over waypoint 1 and we will proceed on our flight plan. Chieftain will give us the final go/no go on approach to waypoint 3, which is our IP over Rafsanjan - 15 miles from the target. Rafsanjan should be cleared of threats by this point but it would be wise to avoid getting too low over the city in case of a Basij with a MANPAD.

Major Shaw was not present at today's briefing, but Mother did have details on the air support restrictions laid down around Rafsanjan. Outside of a 10 mile ring centred on Rafsanjan is a free fire area, within 10 miles of the city a restricted fire area applies.

Once we have finished over the target area, we will egress via waypoint 5, taking care not to stray too close to Kerman City and it's SAM sites. FARP Rayan is located at waypoint 7 on the southern side of Rayan Castle.





The landing strip length is 2500 feet, running on a heading of 241 or 061. Due to the high field elevation a vertical landing is not advised and there will be adequate room for a slow landing approach. Once I land at Romeo I will proceed to the refuel and re-arm area, where I will be hot fuelled and new weapons uploaded. Once the jet is ready I will get airborne again via a short take off. FARP Romeo is at an elevation of 7250 feet MSL so this will be a max performance takeoff using water injection, and I'll need every inch of that 2500 foot strip.

Once airborne I should return to Rafsanjan and report back on station. Daylight should be breaking as we re-approach Rafsanjan, where we will be tasked with providing armed overwatch and on-call CAS for RCT 1. Once we hit our bingo fuel again we will return to FARP Romeo, where will be refuelled and placed on ground alert for any further tasking later today.

The briefing then began to wrap up and one by one the flight crews left to prepare for their missions. Me and Chief spent the next few hours examining the topography of the target area, the cloud cover and high mountains are undoubtedly going to make this a challenging mission. Even more so in the dark, but this is what the Night Attack Harrier was designed for and we will need to use all the advantages the systems on the aircraft give us.

Takeoff is 05:00.

*** PLAYER NOTES ***

This will be a 2 part mission, with part 1 ending once parked up at FARP Rayan.