

November 20th, 2011.

It's been two days since I returned from my stint at FARP Romeo to the relative luxury of FOB Juliet, if a tent in the desert can be considered luxury, but it certainly beats the austere conditions at Romeo.

My time operating out of Romeo was exciting, with three combat missions carried out in a short space of time, as we were called into action to combat Iranian armour and artillery in the vicinity of Kerman City. These missions were not simple and we faced far heavier air defences than we'd seen before up to this point. We also had a major run in with the Basij, as militia fighters roaming the desert northwest of Kerman came into contact with a team from 1st Recon Battalion.

Following these missions, we returned to Juliet for a well earned night's rest, before we were back in action again yesterday, carrying out CAS for the RCTs as they advanced on Kerman. Things were busy on the ground for the troops, but there was little trade for us in the air as the ground element steam rolled it's way through the Iranian defences. A return to Juliet meant we were back in the firing line of the Iranian Scuds, but thankfully all remained quiet overnight. The Patriots continue to do their job, as they did two days ago when they took out the inbound missiles when I was taking off.

I awoke this morning to find a solid overcast had moved in during the night. Meeting up with the rest of the det in the mess for breakfast, Baz told us that during the night he and Chief had to abort their attack runs due to the poor visibility and were unable to deliver the support they wanted to. Let's hope that isn't a bad omen for the day ahead.

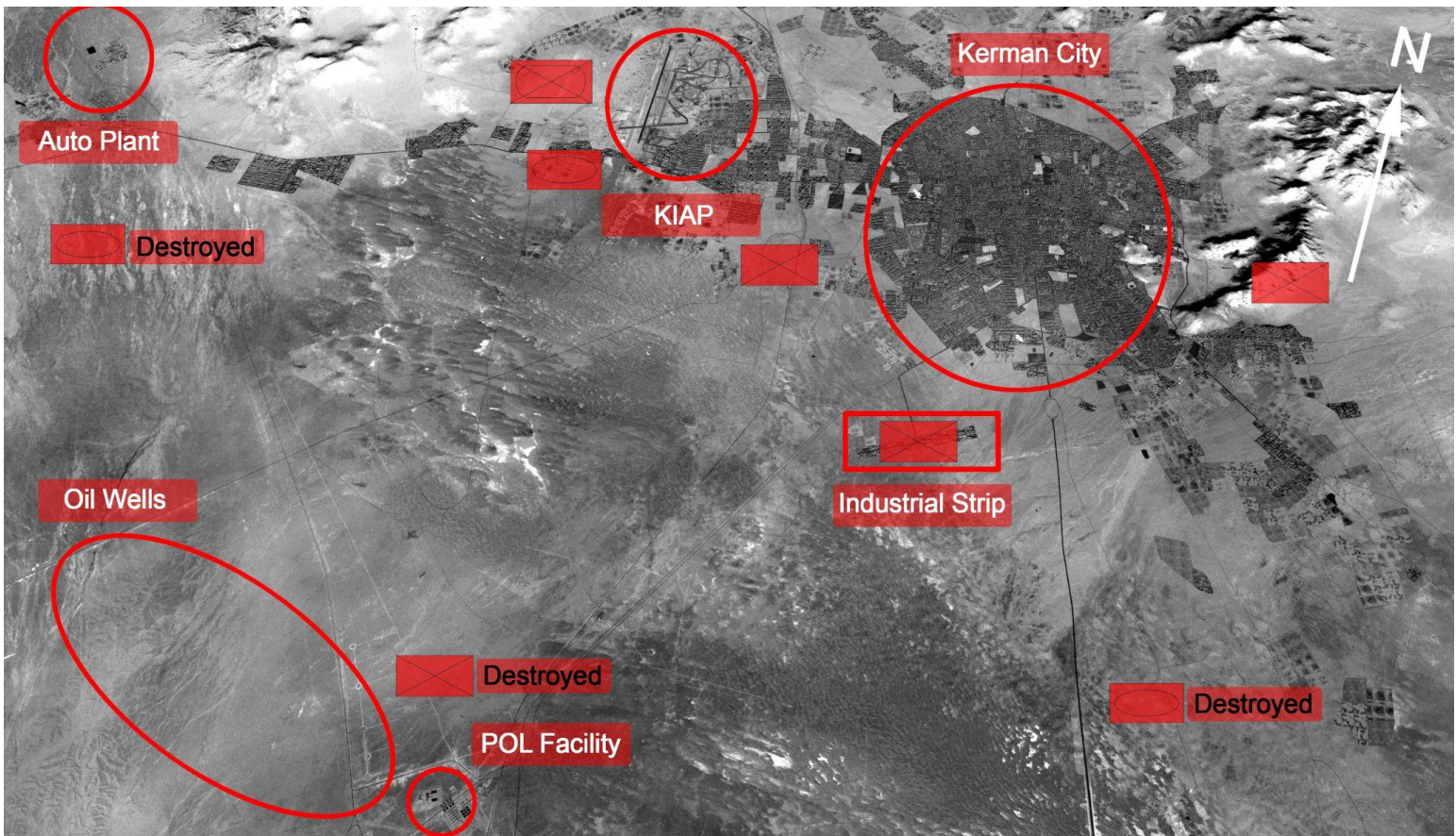
Following chow, we reported to our dilapidated briefing room at 07:30, a crowd was already gathered and as soon as we were seated, Mother kicked things off by inviting Captain Parkin to give the met brief. The Captain rose to her feet and gave us the news on the weather, a solid overcast is currently present over the Kerman AOR at 13,000 feet, although this may break up a little as the day progresses. Winds are light and the cloud doesn't like it's going to shift anytime today.

Once Parkin had concluded her brief, she was replaced by Major Daniels who began to deliver the intel brief.

"Ok morning everyone," began the Major, "The situation on the ground is moving fast as the regimental teams close in on Kerman City and start to tighten the noose, so I'm going to do my best to bring you up to speed on what we know about the remaining enemy forces in the field".

"Major Shaw will no doubt be in a better position to fill you in on the progress the ground combat element has made, but there are a few relevant pieces of information I need to share with you".

The Major brought a map up on the screen at the front of the room.



“Over the last 72 hours, our forces have steadily pushed on Kerman from 3 directions. From the west, through the valley from Rafsanjan. From the south, pushing up from Mashiz. And from the southeast, pushing through the valley from Bam. Along the way we have destroyed a significant number of Iranian formations, including an IRGC armoured formation blocking the road from Bam and a significant number of armoured units in the valley from Rafsanjan. RCT 5 killed or captured what is believed to be a brigade sized force that were holding the POL facility south of the city”.

“We now believe the regular Iranian army units in the area have been attrited to the point of ineffectiveness, leaving what is believed to be the remnants of the IRGC in the region left defending the city. As you can see on this map we have armoured units and mechanised infantry defending Kerman International Airport, with infantry dug in around Kerman’s southern perimeter and occupying the suburbs close to the airport, the industrial strip south of the city and the high ground east of Kerman”.

“The vast bulk of the Iranian military is holding the perimeter of the city, we have little indication of military units within the city at this point, however the militia presence in the city is expected to be heavy...how heavy remains an unknown quantity still”.

Mother interjected at this point, “The route to the northwest of the city is still open, we saw Iran try to bring reinforcements through this route a few days ago. Do we have any indications of additional forces being funnelled into the area?”

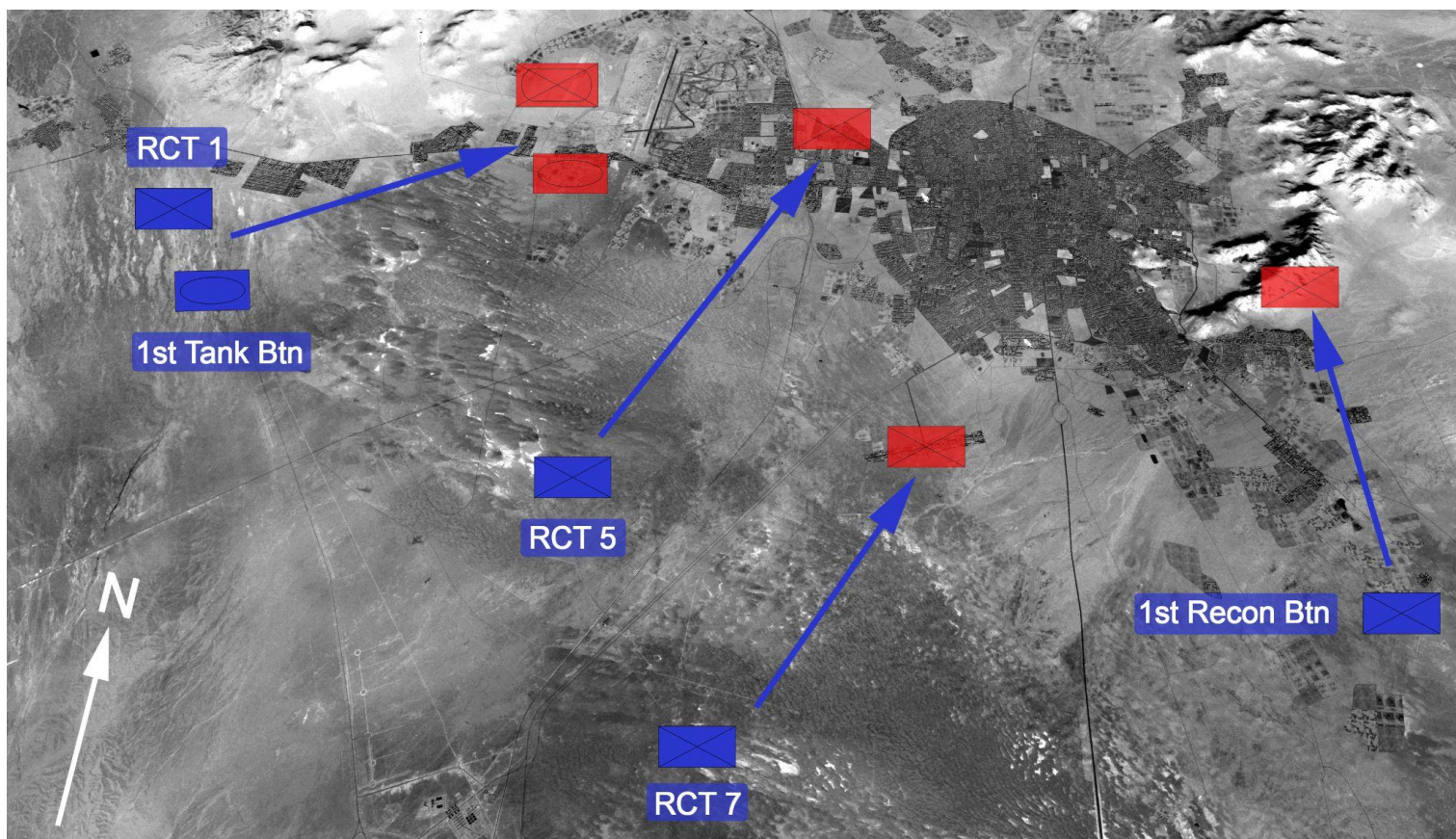
“Negative Major”, replied Daniels, “In fact if anything it’s the opposite. We’ve seen more units leaving via this route than arriving, and with the damage to the roads, bridges and rail routes in the area, it’s pretty hard going at the moment. V Corps is still pushing north at pace towards



Tehran, this is undoubtedly tying down what Iranian forces are left up north, and we view the likelihood of reinforcements to Kerman to be low”.

The drew the intel brief to a close and the ALO, Major Shaw then began his brief, beginning by bringing a second map up on the screen.

“The GCE of 1 MEF is poised and ready to move on Kerman City. But before we can enter the city and begin securing it, we must first take 4 objectives for stage 1 of our attack”.



“First we will need to take the high ground east of the city, this will be the task of 1st Recon. The industrial strip south of the city is being occupied by a large IRGC force of infantry, this will be the objective of RCT 7. RCT 5 will clear the suburbs connecting Kerman City with the airport, once the airport road is held they will then push north and set up a blocking position north of the city. In addition to this we will have Marine Special Operations Teams on the ground northwest of the airport clearing out suspected Militia strong points at ‘The Farms’. Finally, RCT 1, supported by M1A1s from 1st Tank Battalion, will assault and capture the airport. Once all objectives are secured, we will begin preparations for phase 2 - the advance into Kerman itself”.

“Marine air, with some Air Force support will be hitting hardened defensive positions ahead of the ground force, we will of course have a round the clock on-call CAS presence during this operation as well”.

Noble raised her hand for a question. “Yes Lieutenant?” Shaw responded.

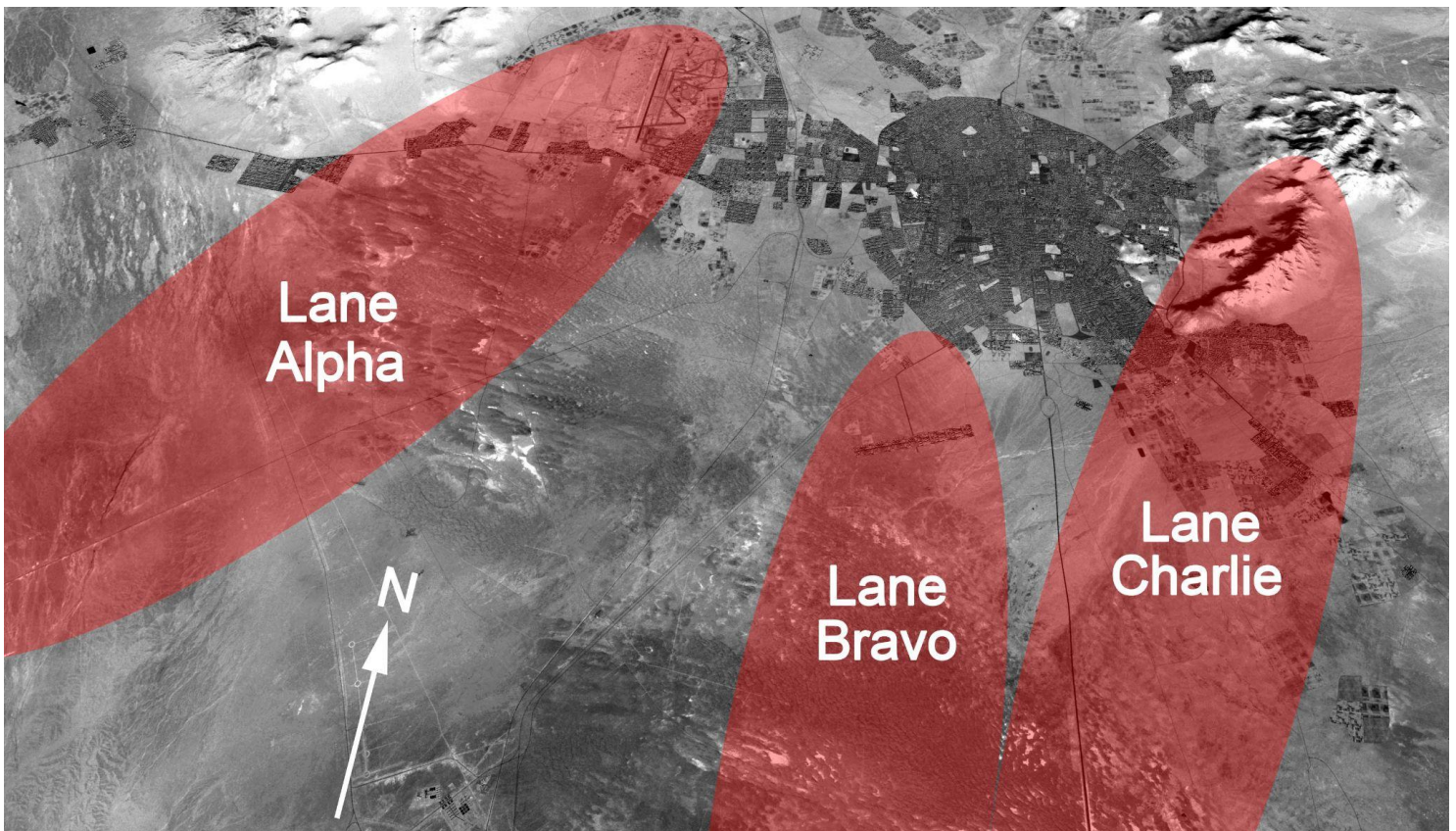
“That’s a lot of troops on the ground in quite a small area, I assume we are going to be under tight restrictions for this one?”



“That’s correct” said Shaw, “We are implementing a restricted fire area within 10 miles of the city, with the exception of any pre-planned targets. Multiple Sandman teams will be embedded with all the RCTs and 1st Recon, plus we’ll have Wolf on airborne FAC duty again, so you can expect plenty of communication with FACs”

“What about fire support?” asked Ein-Stein.

Bringing up a new slide, Shaw explained. “We’ll have fire support available for 1st Recon, RCT 7 and RCT 1. RCT 5 will be attacking into a semi urban area, so we will not risk using indirect fire here. What this means is that fire support will be used in these lanes shown here, supporting attacks on the airport, industrial strip and high ground. Steel Rain will coordinate with Chieftain to ensure deconfliction in these lanes during fire missions, during which the minimum altitude inside these fire corridors will be 17,500 feet MSL. So if you get notice of an incoming fire mission, then stay clear of these areas below angels 17.5. We will also have an AC-130 working within lane Charlie, supporting 1st Recon’s push onto the high ground”.



Shaw finished up his briefing and departed the briefing room. Mother then took over the remainder of the briefing.

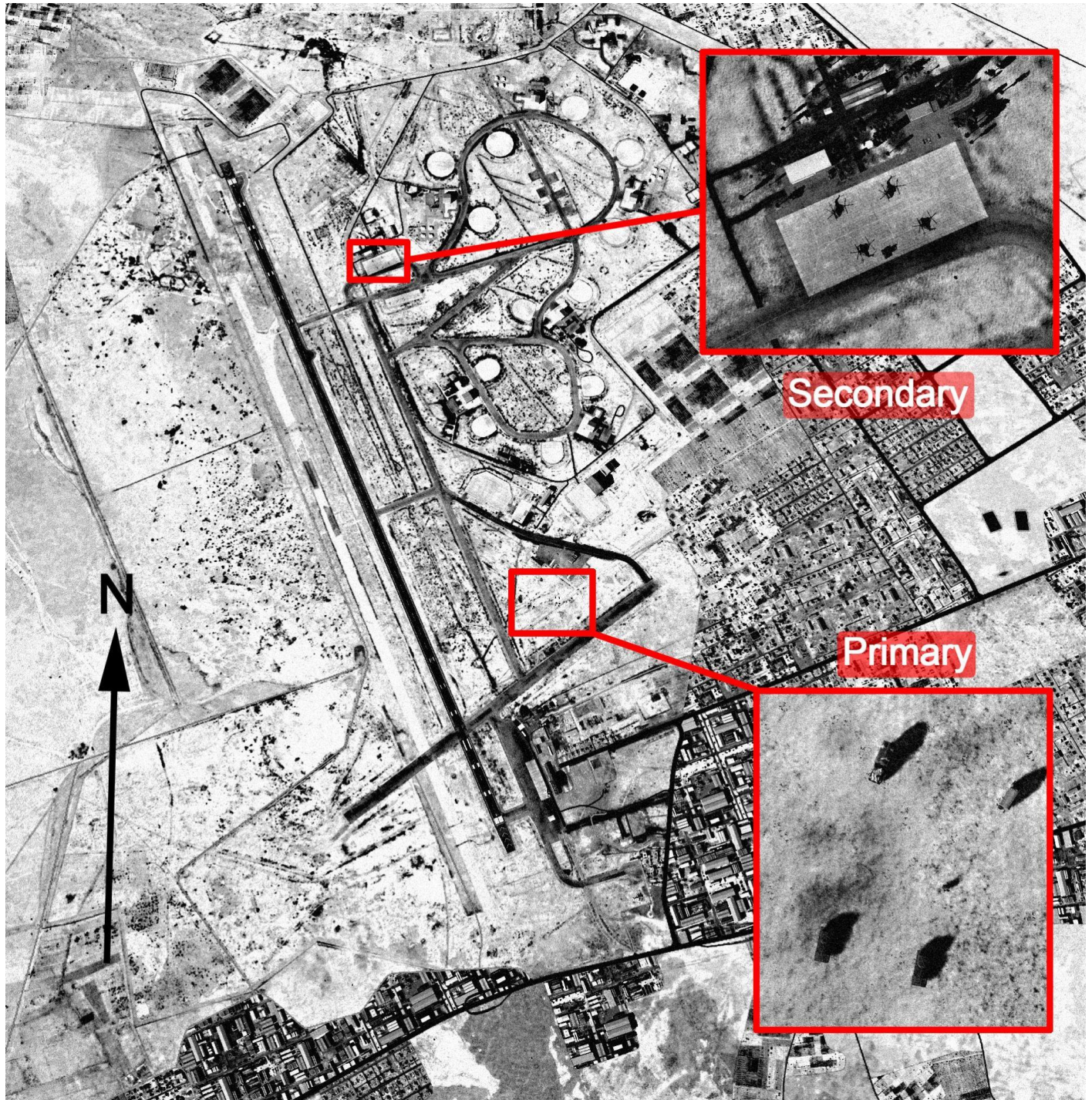
“The ground assault on the airport will commence late this afternoon, at 16:15 local. We will be flying in support of this attack. All 6 Harriers in the detachment will be going up for this one, split into 3 flights. First flight will be myself and Noble, second flight will be Baz and Chief, third flight will be Mike-Mike and Ein-Stein. Our primary mission will be to strike armour and artillery located at the airport ahead of the initial assault. Following this we will enter the CAS stack and provide on-call support as requested”.



“Now as you know we have more jets than targeting pods in the detachment, so we will be equipping the flights led by myself and Baz with pods, Mike-Mike and Einstein, you’ll be without”.

Mother went on to brief the target sets for his and Baz’s flights - armour dug in on the southern side of the airport. Following this he moved on to the targets for myself and Ein-Stein.

“A battery of 2S1 Gvozdika self-propelled guns has also been identified at the airport. Your primary objective is to eliminate these guns, located at the southeast of the airport. Your secondary objective, if circumstances allow, will be 4 Mi-8 transport helicopters, located on this ramp towards the north of the airport”.





“The guns are deployed in two groups of two, supported by their logistics vehicles. Mike-Mike you will target the pair of guns to the west, Ein-Stein the guns to the east. To assist with your target acquisition, waypoint 5 will be set over each of your primary targets, and waypoint 6 over your secondary target. Your loadout for this mission will be 4 Mk-20s and 2 Mk-82s alongside the gun”.

“Now as Major Shaw pointed out, our pre-planned targets are already cleared to be attacked, but other than that remember we will be in a restricted fire area. We have a lot of Marines on the ground in this area, so no attacks without the proper controls first being in place”.

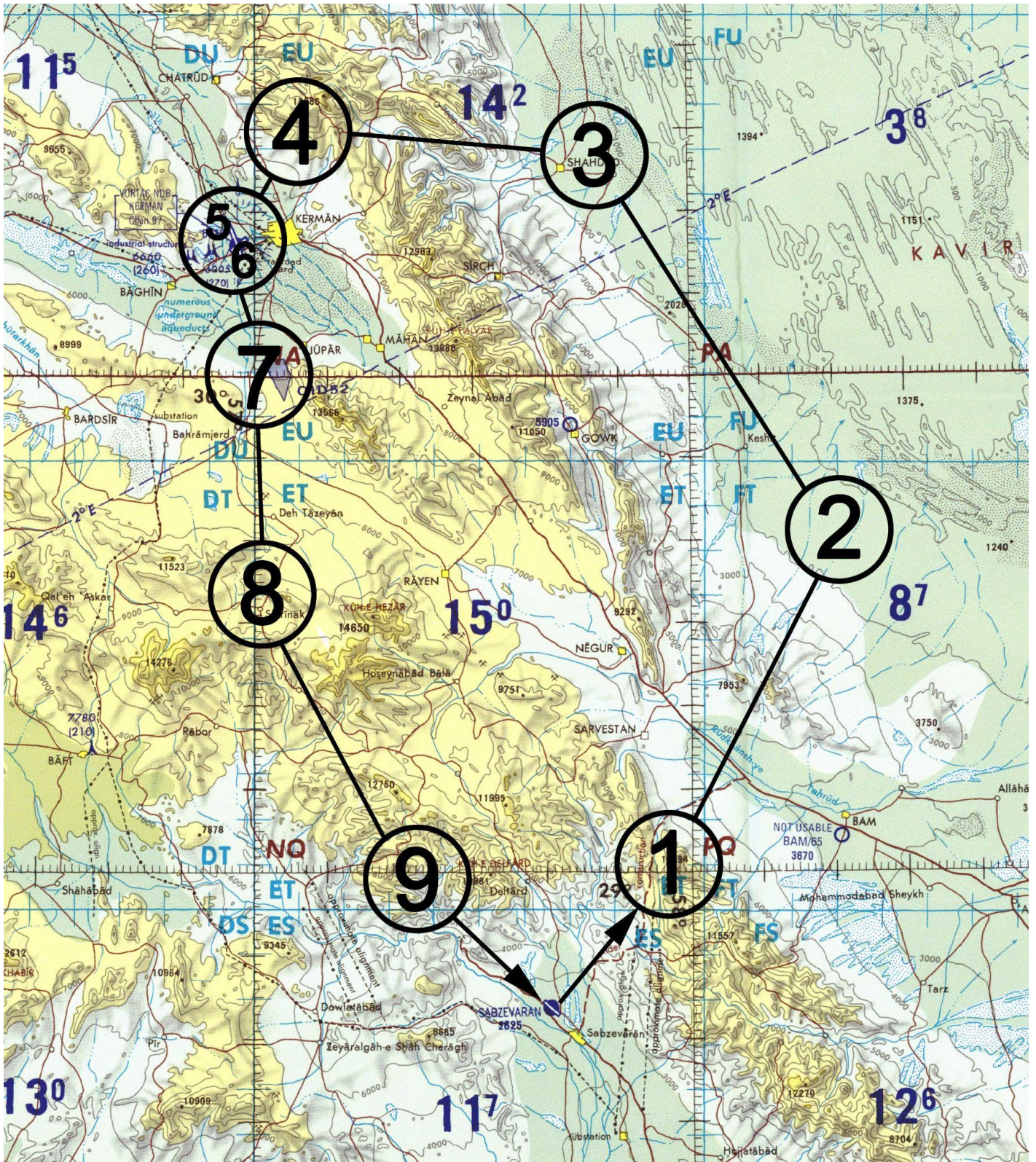
Mother then went on to describe our mission flow. Once airborne the 3 flights will rendezvous at waypoint 1, from here we will proceed to waypoint 2 before turning northwest for waypoint 3 at an altitude of 8,500 feet MSL. This altitude will ensure the mountains shield us from any radars still active around Kerman airport, especially the harder to track down mobile SA-6s, helping us maintain the element of surprise.

The Air Force will be providing 2 F-16 Wild Weasel flights to support this attack. They will be tasked with eliminating for good the HAWK battery at the airport, along with any SA-6s they can locate in the area. The Weasels have a TOT of 16:00, and we should not pop up above the mountain range before this time.

Once the Weasels have destroyed their targets, we will proceed to waypoint 4 - our IP located north of Kerman. From here all three flights will split and run in on their target sets.

Mother’s flight will lead the attack, running straight in from the IP, while for deconfliction the other two elements continue west. 30 seconds later, Baz will break in for his run, 30 seconds after that I will lead my element in for our attack run.

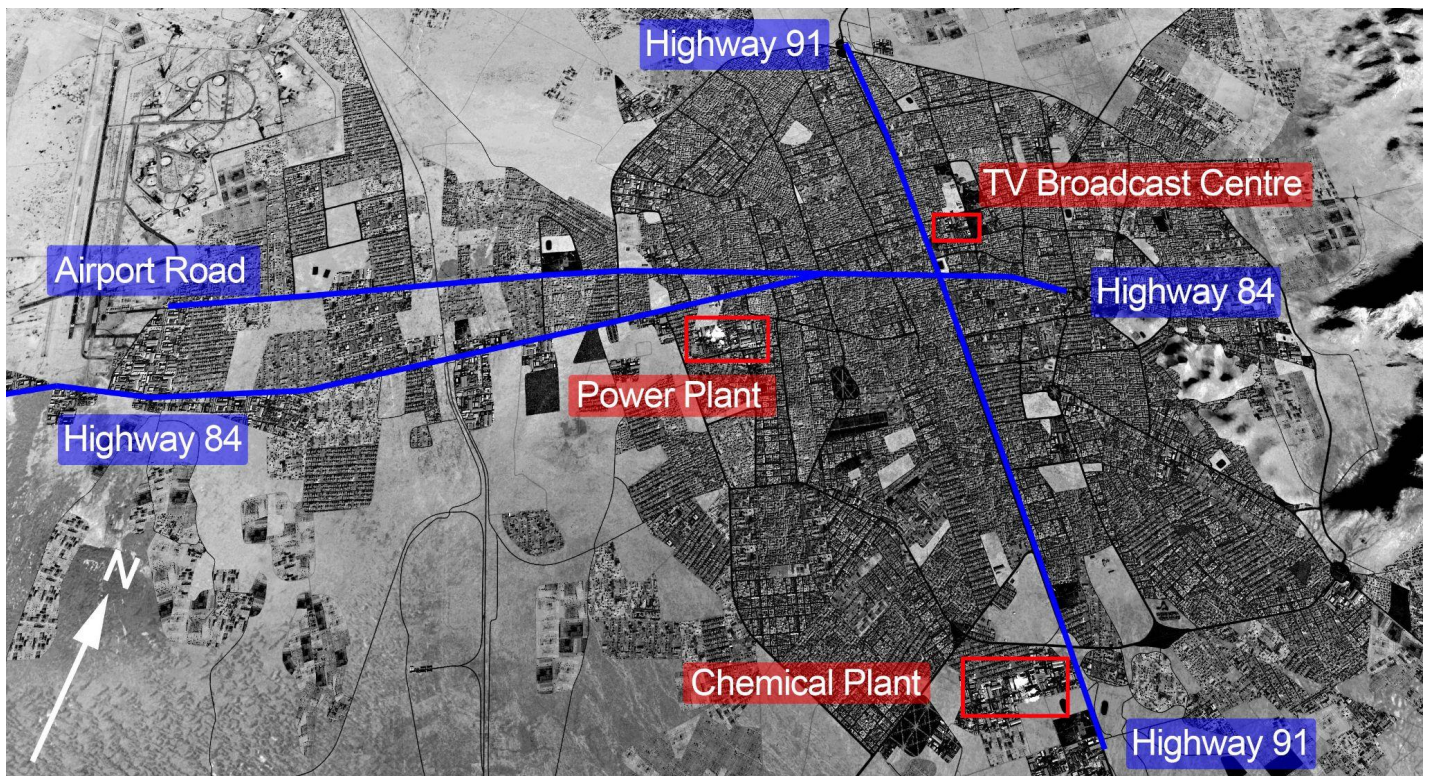
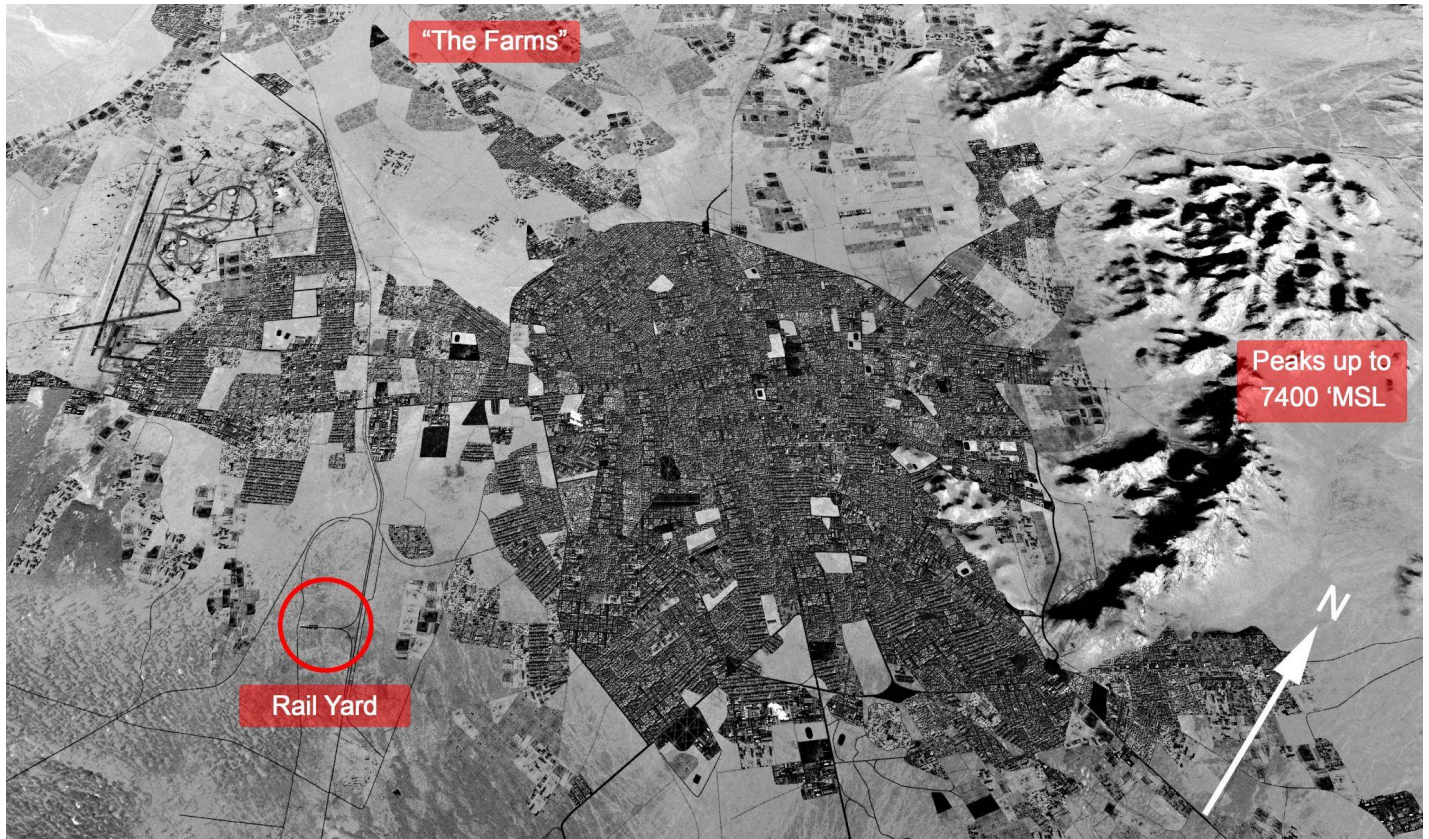






Once we have destroyed our targets, we will hold in the CAS stack, located at waypoint 7 above the POL facility. We will have Marine Hornets hitting hardened targets at the airport as well so we will need to be clear of the airport when they are over the target unless we want bombs dropping through our airspace. Bingo fuel is 2,800 lbs, giving us around 4,500 lb to use over the targets.

We were also issued maps of Kerman City, highlighting key landmarks in the area.





Mother concluded the briefing with an assessment of the threats we will be facing today. Kerman is defended by a HAWK battery and at least one SA-6 battery. These will be dealt with by the Weasel flight. We should also stay sharp for pop up threats such as SA-8s or even previously undetected SA-6s.

There are a number of short range air defences present at the airport. AAA consists of S-60 and ZU-23 guns, and unconfirmed reports are flying around that a ZSU-23-4 is also present. MANPADS should, as always, be presumed to be present in the target area. The city itself also contains a number of AAA batteries and will likely pose a significant MANPAD threat.

We should take care when attacking the target, Ein-Stein and myself don't have the luxury of a high altitude, guided delivery, so we'll have to get lower and closer to the danger. That means we'll need to keep our speed up, not fly straight and level in the target area, and vary our attack directions. The low cloud cover will make it harder to spot targets from altitude, but it will also be our friend, masking us from any hostile eyes below. That got me and Ein-Stein talking about using the cloud to hit and run targets, popping below the layer to drop ordnance then ducking back through it before any air defences can pick us up visually.

Finally the briefing concluded and we were left to each go over the final planning for our elements.

Up to now we've only seen Kerman City from a distance, we expect it to by far be the most heavily defended location in our AOR.

It makes me kind of excited to finally go there.