

LAST OUT - WEASELS OVER SYRIA II

August 28th, 2013.

Well that was an intense mission, they weren't kidding when they said the Syrians had put a missile shield over the frontline. After a tough fight, Boomer and I landed here at Muwaffaq Salti in Jordan, where we've had a few hours to stretch our legs as the crews got to work on rearming and refueling the jets.

Shade and Bug also landed shortly after us. I managed to catch up with Bug, who was not impressed with Shade one bit, "A convenient malfunction" as Bug described it, referring to Shade's equipment failure keeping him out of the fight. Maybe, maybe not...I'm not so sure. It could actually just be a coincidence and I'm starting to get the feeling Bug really has a chip on his shoulder about Shade.

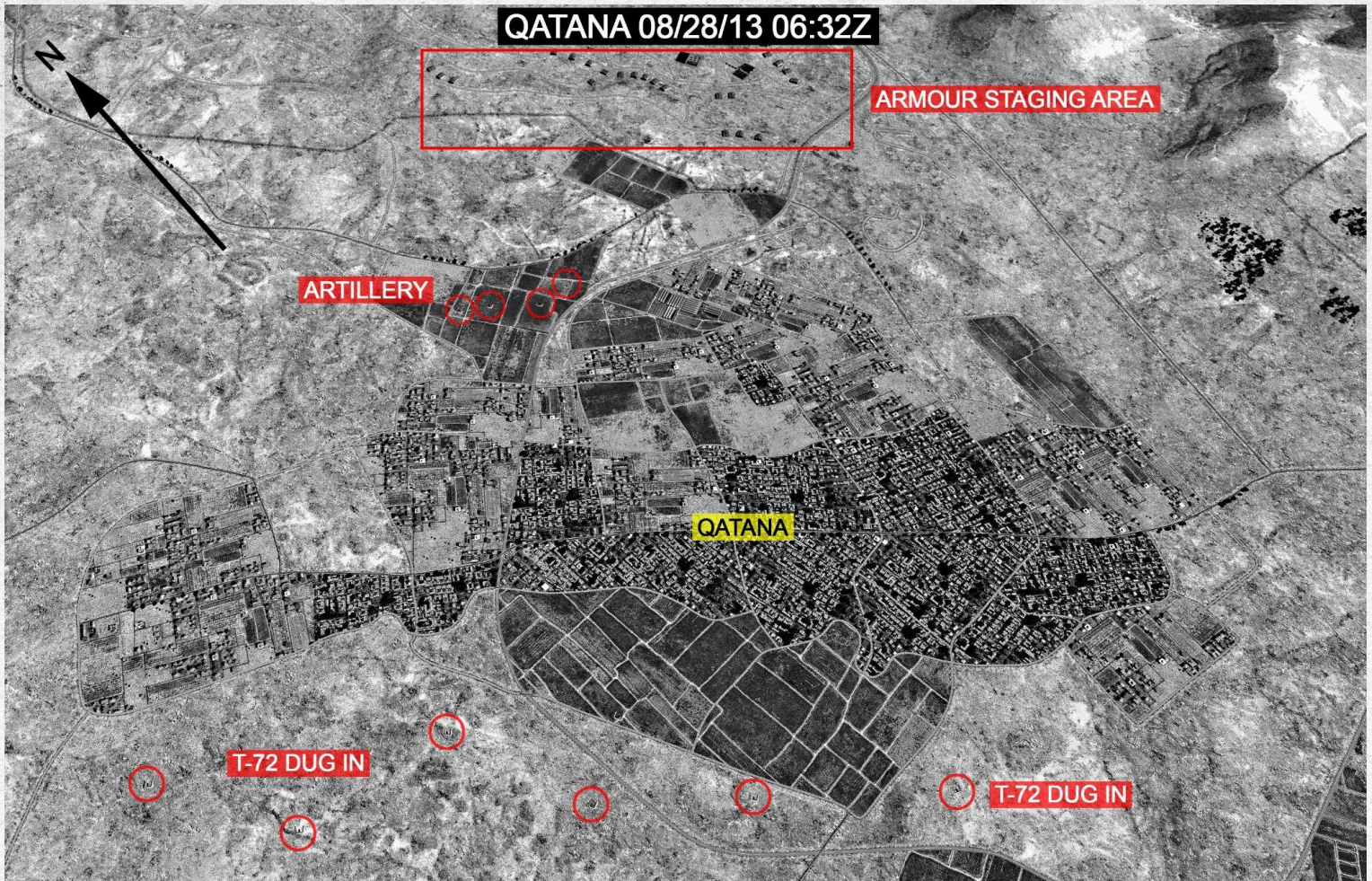
Popeye, Tank and Ghost also landed here about 30 minutes ago following their vul over the frontline. They gave us a quick update on the situation they left, having picked up where Sword 2 and Sword 3 left off.

It sounds like the three of them had a pretty successful time of it and they reported the AOR out towards the Golan Heights now almost cleared of SAMs. We were in the process of beginning to plan our operating area for our second vul when Popeye received new instructions directly from the CAOC.

The CAOC had sent intelligence about a large Syrian Mechanized formation, consisting of a mix of T-72, BMP-2 and BTR-80, approaching the Syrian/Lebanese border west of Damascus. This was likely the remnants of the large force deployed to the Bekaa Valley in the Syrian push north and are probably being pulled back south to support the ongoing battle with Israeli forces.



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Advanced elements of the Syrian force have been identified digging in around the town of Qatana, seven miles southwest of Mezzeh airbase, with the rest of the force still transiting across the Lebanese border. North of Qatana is what appears to be a storage and assembly area for the Syrian armor, it is expected the formation will rearm and refuel here before pushing south. The CAOC does not intend to allow that to happen.

Initial JSTF attacks against this force have achieved only limited success, due to the heavy air defense escort the formation is moving with. Our det has therefore been tasked with eliminating the air defenses protecting the ground force, opening the way for the JSTF to go to work and smash the Syrian force before it can join the fight. As previously arranged, Rock 3 will be joining us to provide support in this mission.

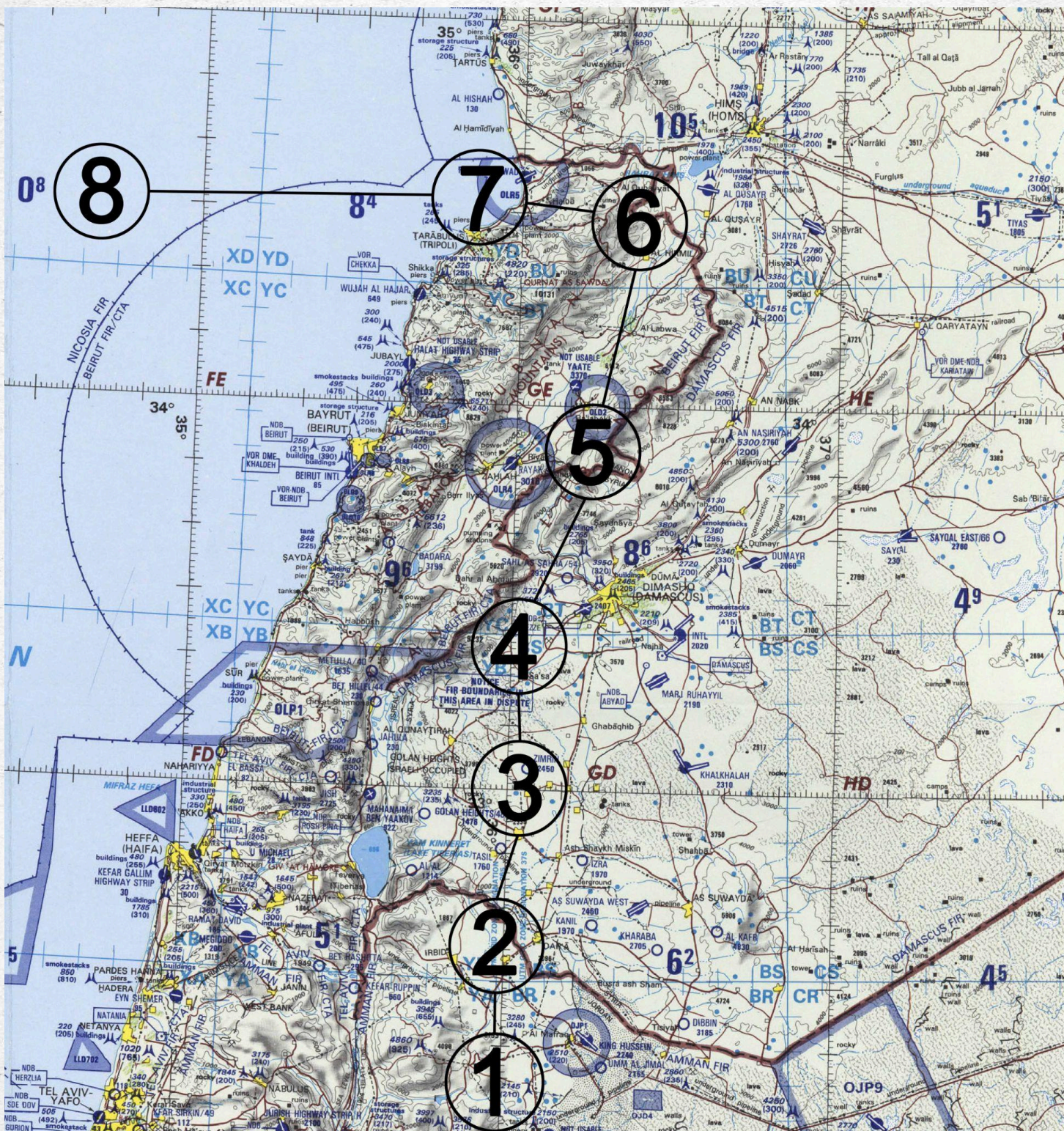
We are due to take off again at 08:20Z, I will depart Muwaffaq Salti with Boomer and proceed back into Syria. We will rendezvous with our EW support Spartan 4, and our CAP Bear 5, at waypoint 2, which marks the Syrian border. Both will then escort us into Syria and Spartan will provide a standoff jam against any SAMs in our AOR. Spartan will anchor at waypoint 3, which is also our IP. This area has already been cleansed of SAMs and should now be low in threat.

Waypoint 4 marks the town of Qatana, which is the current forward limit of the Syrian force we're attacking. Once on station we will work to locate and kill any air defense threats in this area. Our Strike Eagle partners, Rock 3 will also arrive on station at 08:40Z, receiving targets from Sword 2 as they arrive.

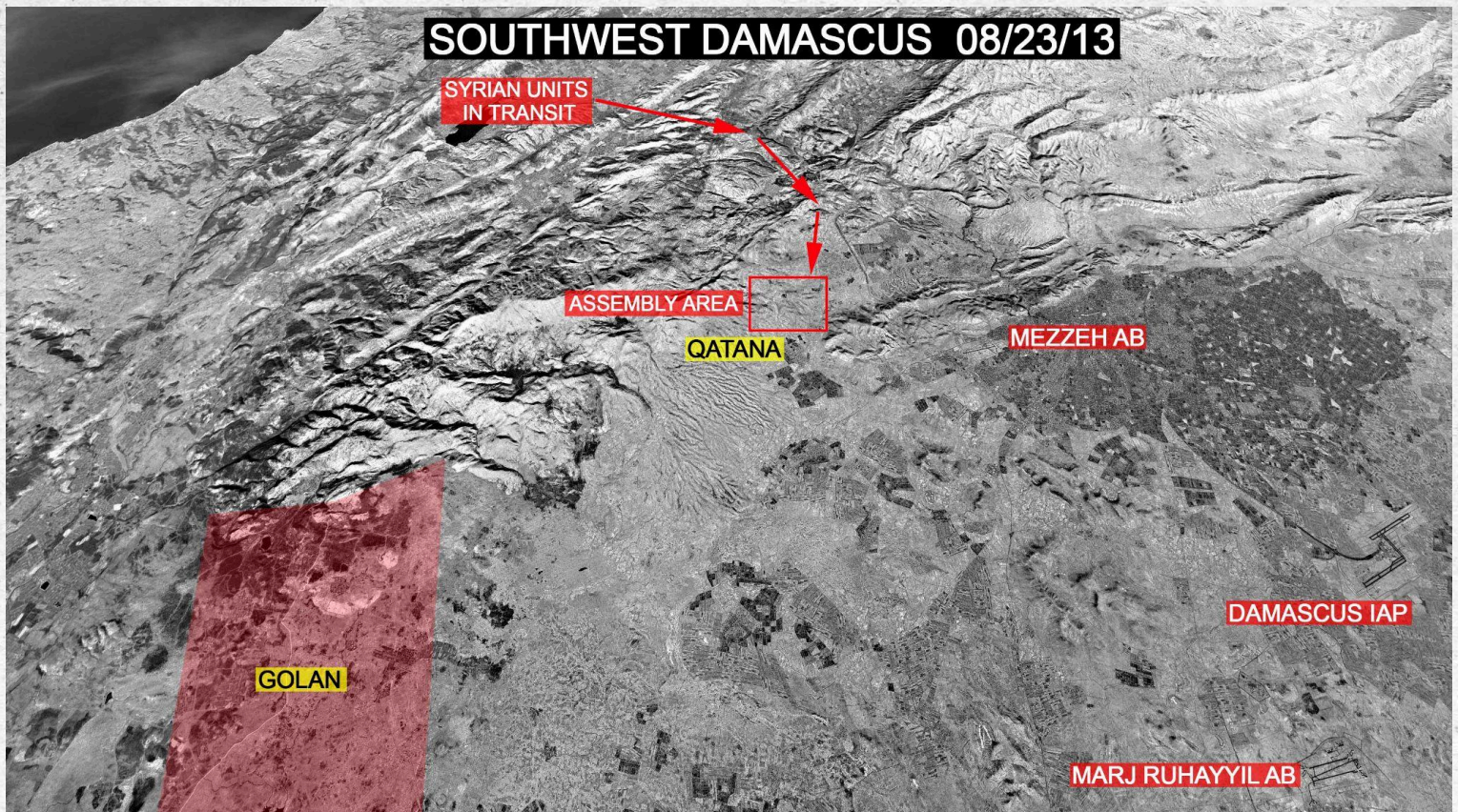
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We expect to have some good hunting today, by taking a combined approach with the Rocketeers we will leverage the F-16s superior SAM hunting and suppression capability with the Mud Hens huge bomb load and should be able to do some real damage to the Syrian air defenses in the area.

Once our vul is over we will rally at waypoint 5 before returning back home to Akrotiri.



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The previous flights operating in this area have reported heavy mobile air defenses moving with the Syrian ground forces. We should anticipate a mix of SA-6, SA-8, SA-11 and SA-15 as well as the usual variety of AAA, MANPADS, SA-9 and SA-13 at low level. We should keep clear of the Syrian air bases around Damascus as well, as they will contain significant SHORAD.

Bingo fuel from the target area is 3,500 lb.

With the details of our second vul ironed out, we returned to the ramp to find the aircraft ready to go again, both of us equipped with two HARMs. We updated our kneeboards with our new mission details and stepped back to the jets.

There's another tough fight ahead of us, the Syrians have their backs against the wall right now and we suspect they will fight like hell because of it. The Russians still loom large in the background as well and remain an unknown quantity, especially when it comes to Israel. There's still so much uncertainty out here and Syria still has a long way to go until it sees peace again. This is bigger than any one group of pilots, but maybe, if we can finally deliver a killing blow to the Syrian air defenses, we might just start to see the path to ending this war.