

FIRST IN - WEASELS OVER SYRIA

29th June, 2013

Today we finally took our first run at the Syrian IADS. Tasked with a mission to support our Rivet Joint suck up the 'trons from the Syrian Sam network deployed south of no fly Sierra, we flew two flights of Weasels into the heart of the Syrian SAM belt. The ELINT obtained from our provocation of the Syrian SAMs will be vital in helping the CAOC plan what happens next, and given the difficulty we're having in enforcing the no fly zone, we expect we'll be returning to this area soon.

Following this morning's mission and subsequent debrief, we had a few hours of downtime at H4 before we were called in to a late afternoon briefing ahead of another mission tomorrow.

Once we were all seated in the briefing room, we were given the met brief for tomorrow by Captain Johnson. Clouds are expected to start moving in overnight, driven in by a new easterly wind, Johnson said we should expect broken clouds at around 12 or 13,000 feet. Winds are expected to be around 5-10 knots at the surface, building up to 30 knots at altitude.

Captain Johnson left after delivering the met brief and was replaced immediately by Popeye. Major Norris, having already delivered an intel brief this morning was not present.

"Ok Weasels" Popeye began, "This morning we had our first taste of the Syrians IADS, and it was a test we came through with flying colors. Vacuum gained some valuable intel on the composition and location of various elements in the Syrian air defense network deployed around no fly Sierra, this is information we are now going to exploit".

"At dawn tomorrow we will kick off a 24 hour operation to nullify the northern sector of the Syrian IADS. This will be a major JSTF operation, the objective of which is the establishment of air superiority over northern Syria, in order to better protect the SDF forces and civilians in Homs. During the course of the next day the JSTF will conduct widespread attacks on Syrian radar positions, C3 nodes and launch sites in the north. Our detachment is slated to participate in a number of these strikes".

"Why attack just the northern sector?" asked Tank, "Usually we'd expect a more widespread attack across Syrian air defenses, go for a knockout blow".

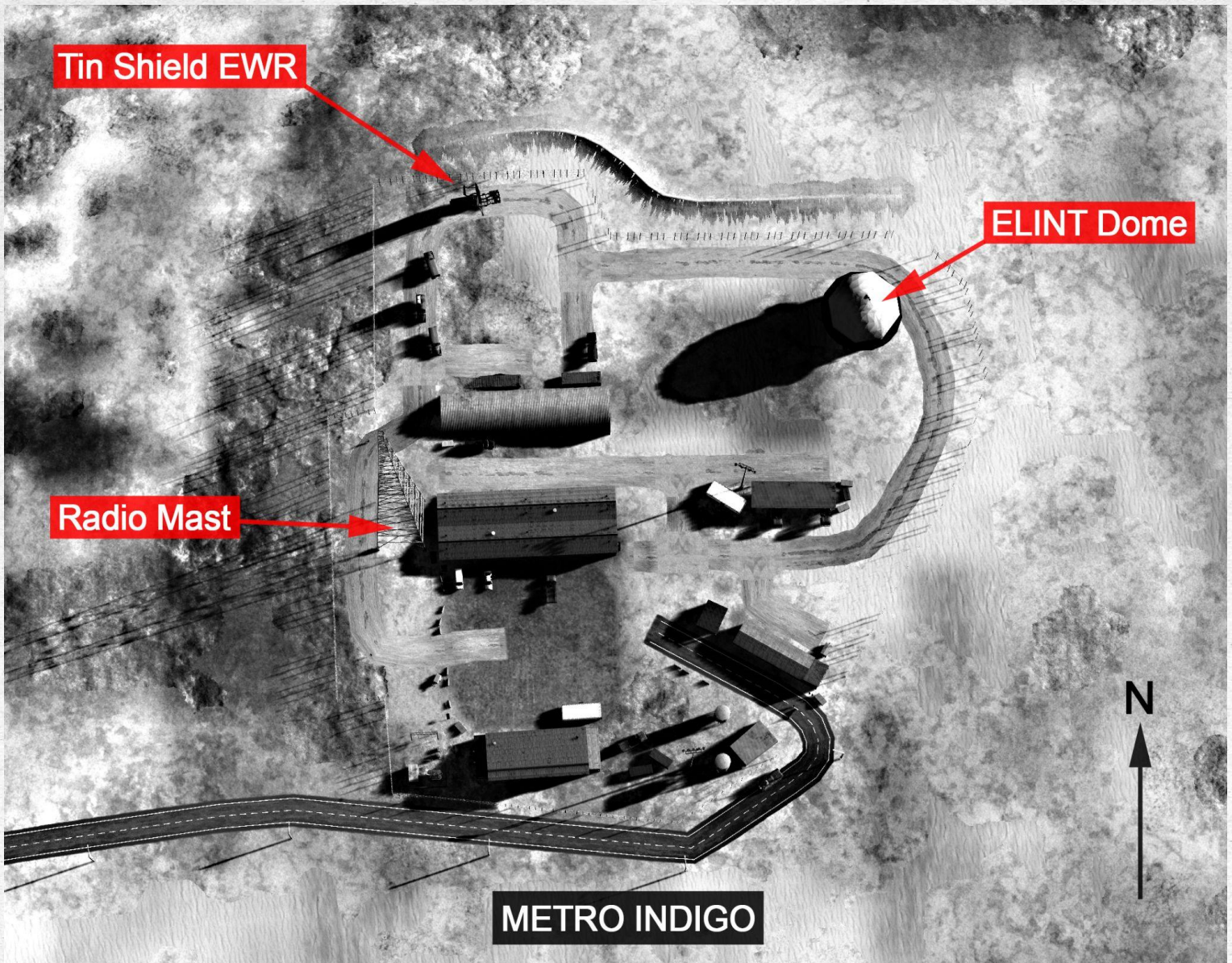
"We don't have the resources for that yet", replied Popeye. "This whole operation is still spooling up, and we don't have the overwhelming firepower we want to be able to dismantle all the Syrian air defenses. Plus it would be a significant escalation, and with the Russian's involved that looks like a step too far at this moment in time. For now we just need to secure the north and gain air superiority over the no fly zone".

"Copy Popeye", Tank responded.

Popeye brought a slide up on the screen at the front of the room.

"We will be spearheading the attacks tomorrow. Departing at dawn we will take a 6 ship of Vipers and attack this target..."

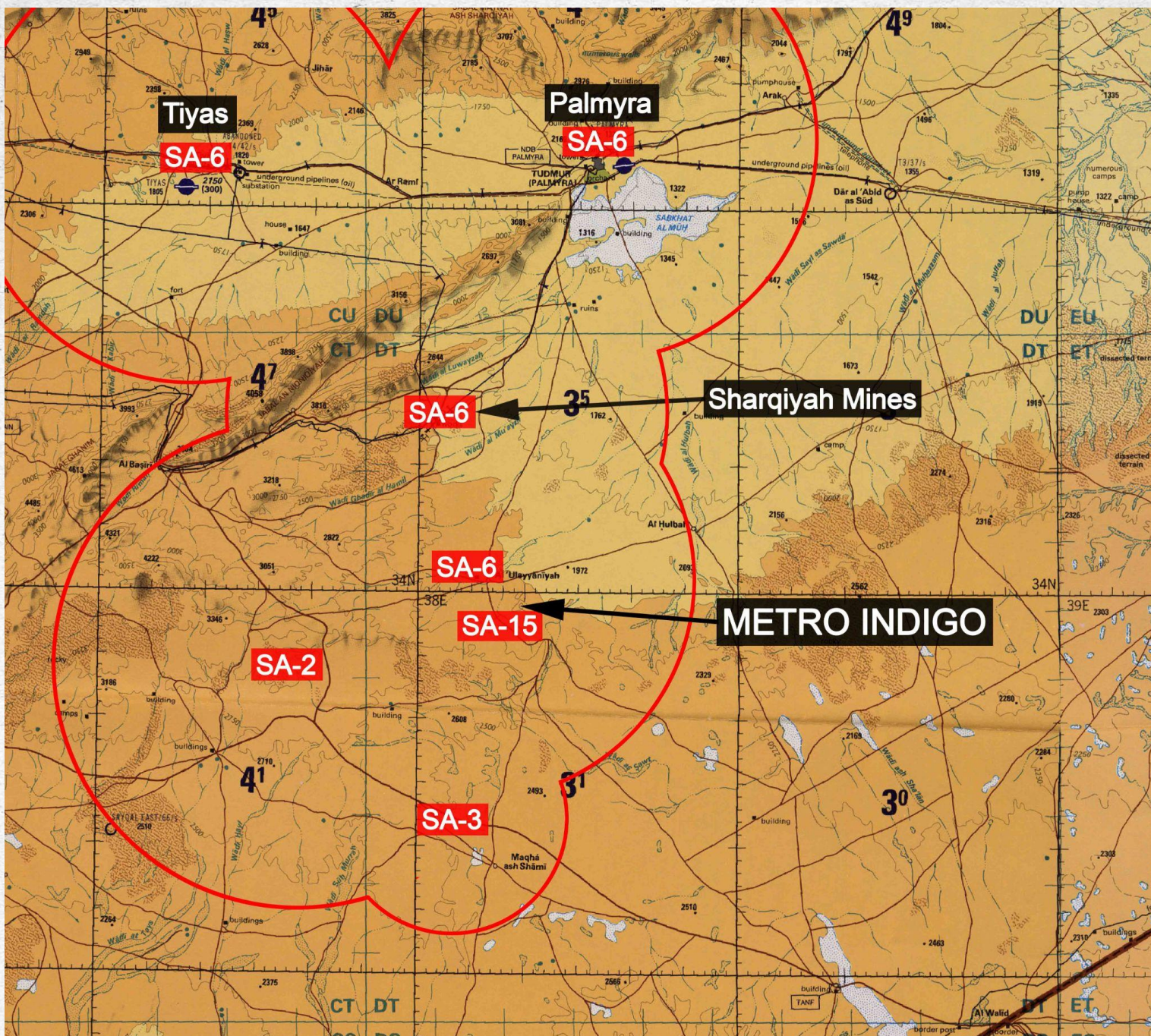
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"This is 'Metro Indigo', a Syrian listening post and EW radar site, located 35 miles south of Palmyra. Metro Indigo houses the Tin Shield radar we've been picking up on our RWR gear, along with signal and electronic intelligence gathering equipment. The elimination of this target will help blind and disorientate the Syrian air defenses ahead of the main JSTF attacks, coming from the north out of Incirlik".

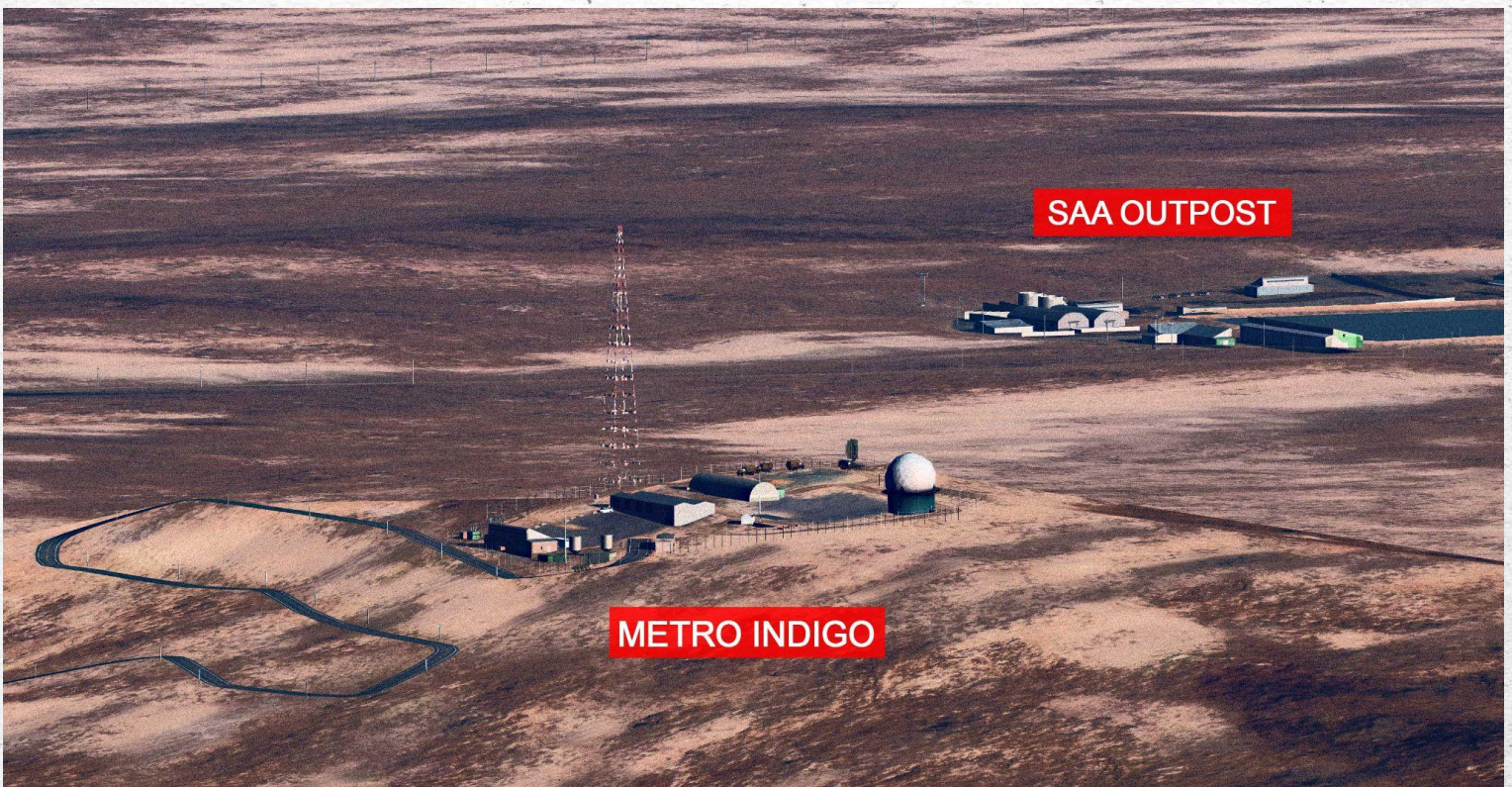
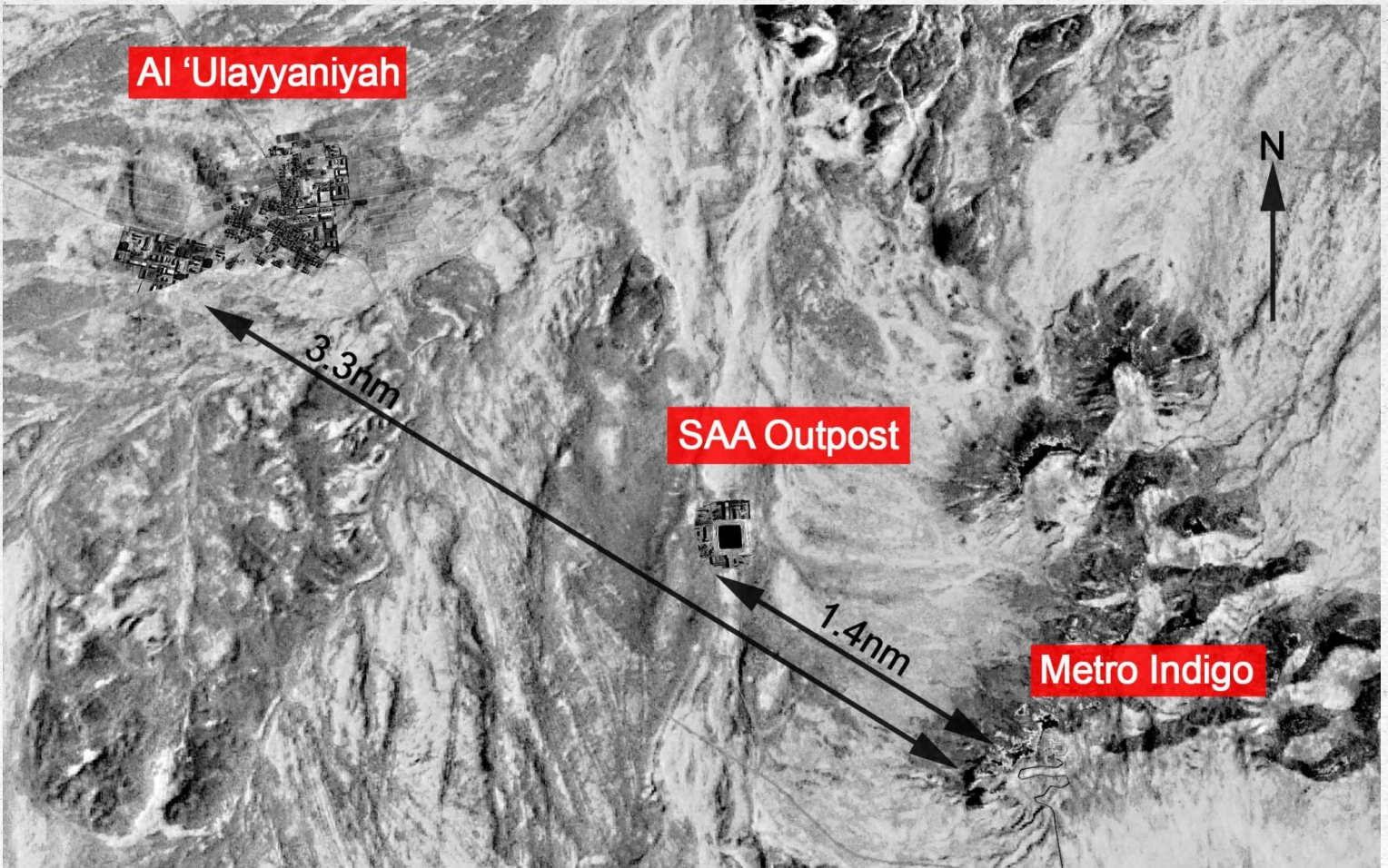
"Our mission will be to penetrate the airspace around Metro Indigo, neutralize the SA-15 on point defense and then strike the three targets marked here. Metro Indigo is well defended. As I said, an SA-15 is known to be in the immediate vicinity of the facility, although as it's highly mobile an exact position will not be known. This makes a standoff attack less likely to succeed. Intelligence gathering by Vacuum and other assets also reveal an SA-6 located close to the target at the town of Al 'Ulayyaniyah. 15 miles to the northwest are the Sharqiyah Mines, Vacuum has shown there to be an SA-6 in this area as well. Area defense is provided by an SA-2, located 19 miles southwest of Metro Indigo, and this is backed up by an SA-3, 17 miles south of Metro Indigo".

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“Further to this, an SAA outpost lies 1.4 miles northwest of the target, at least 3 S-60s have been identified here. A Fire Can radar and KS-19 AAA guns have also been identified at Al ‘Ulayyāniyah, which is 3.3 miles northwest of the target”.

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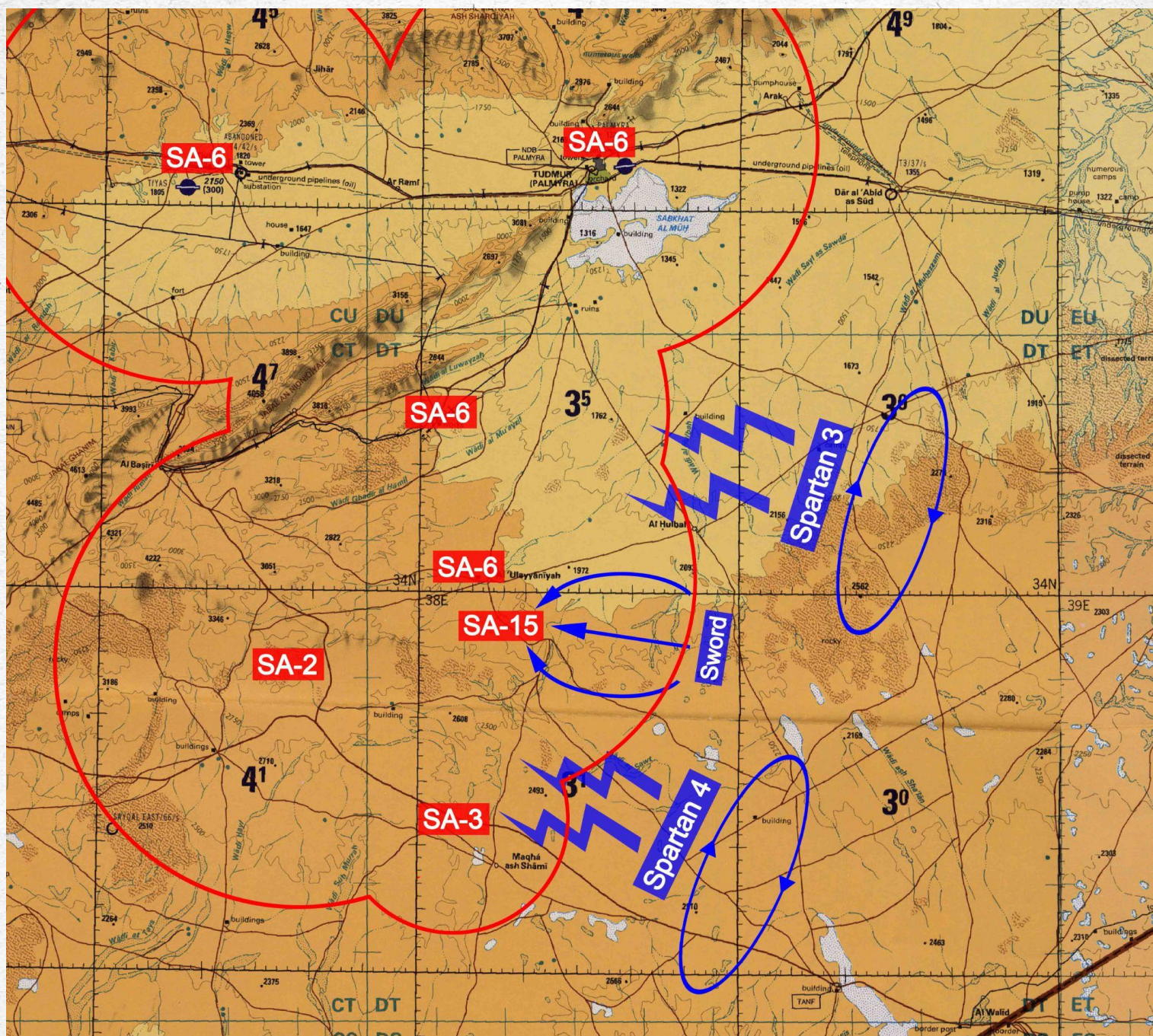
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"That sounds like pretty hostile airspace" remarked Ghost, "We getting some support?"

"Indeed we are" replied Popeye, "Two flights of Growlers, callsigns Spartan 3 and 4, will be supporting us. They will set up in orbits east of the target and will perform a standoff jam against the SAMs in our operating area. This will enable us to penetrate the airspace and approach Metro Indigo. The jamming will be less effective on the SA-15 however so we will be targeting this ourselves with HARMs. As you know, the SA-15 is a potent system against incoming missiles so we will need to saturate it with HARMs from multiple axis to ensure it's suppression or destruction".



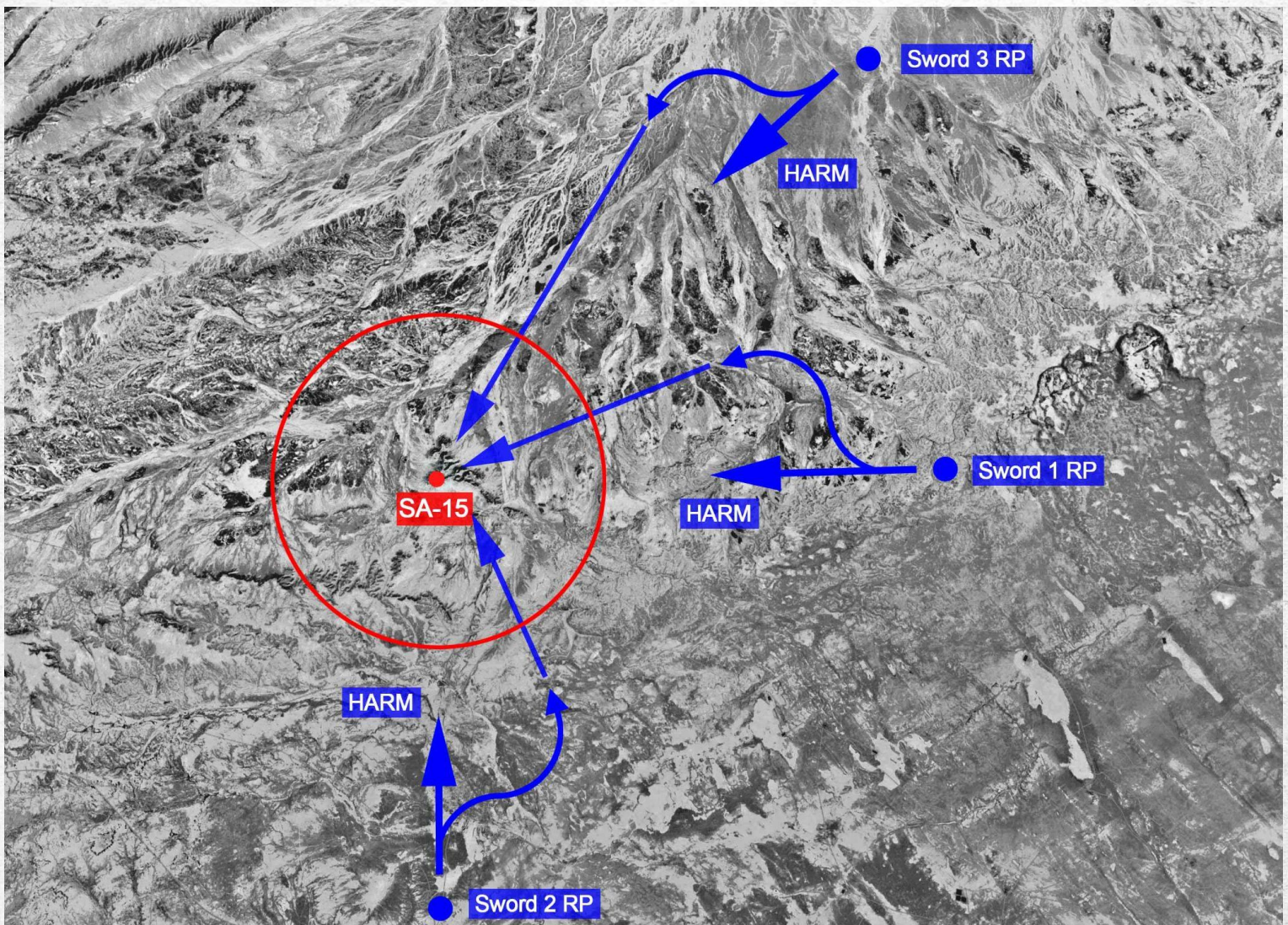
"Spartan have a TOT of 02:53 Zulu, their vul time will be 15 minutes. We will need to penetrate the airspace, neutralize the SA-15 and hit our aim points within that time frame".

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Having outlined our mission, Popeye then dug into the details.

We will be operating as a six ship, paired into three flights - Swords 1 through 3. These will be the same pairings as in today's mission so Bug will once again be my wingman in Sword 2. Departing H4 airspace we will rendezvous at waypoint 1 before pushing north into Syria. We will fence in and turn northwest at waypoint 2, switching to our strike frequency - Blue 2 - as we do so.

Waypoint 3 lies just outside of the SAM envelope, we will use this as our IP. TOT for waypoint 3 is 02:53 Zulu, our EW support will last 15 minutes until 03:08 Zulu. At waypoint 3 the three Sword flights will split, with Sword 1 proceeding towards the target from the east, Sword 3 arcing for an attack from the north and my flight - Sword 2 - arcing south. We will then each turn back into the target and at our release point (waypoint 4) - 10 miles out from Metro Indigo - launch 1 HARM per aircraft for a total of 6 HARMs from 3 directions. To ensure we saturate the SA-15 we must release our HARMs within 10 seconds of each other. Once our HARMs are away we will each make a turn to our right to avoid entering the SA-15s MEZ and arc around the threat ring until the SA-15 is taken down. At this point Sword 1-1 will push into the target, followed thirty seconds later by myself and then Sword 3-1, thirty seconds after that.



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As we push into the target I will capture my target in the targeting pod and then destroy it with my GBU-12s. My target is the Tin Shield radar.



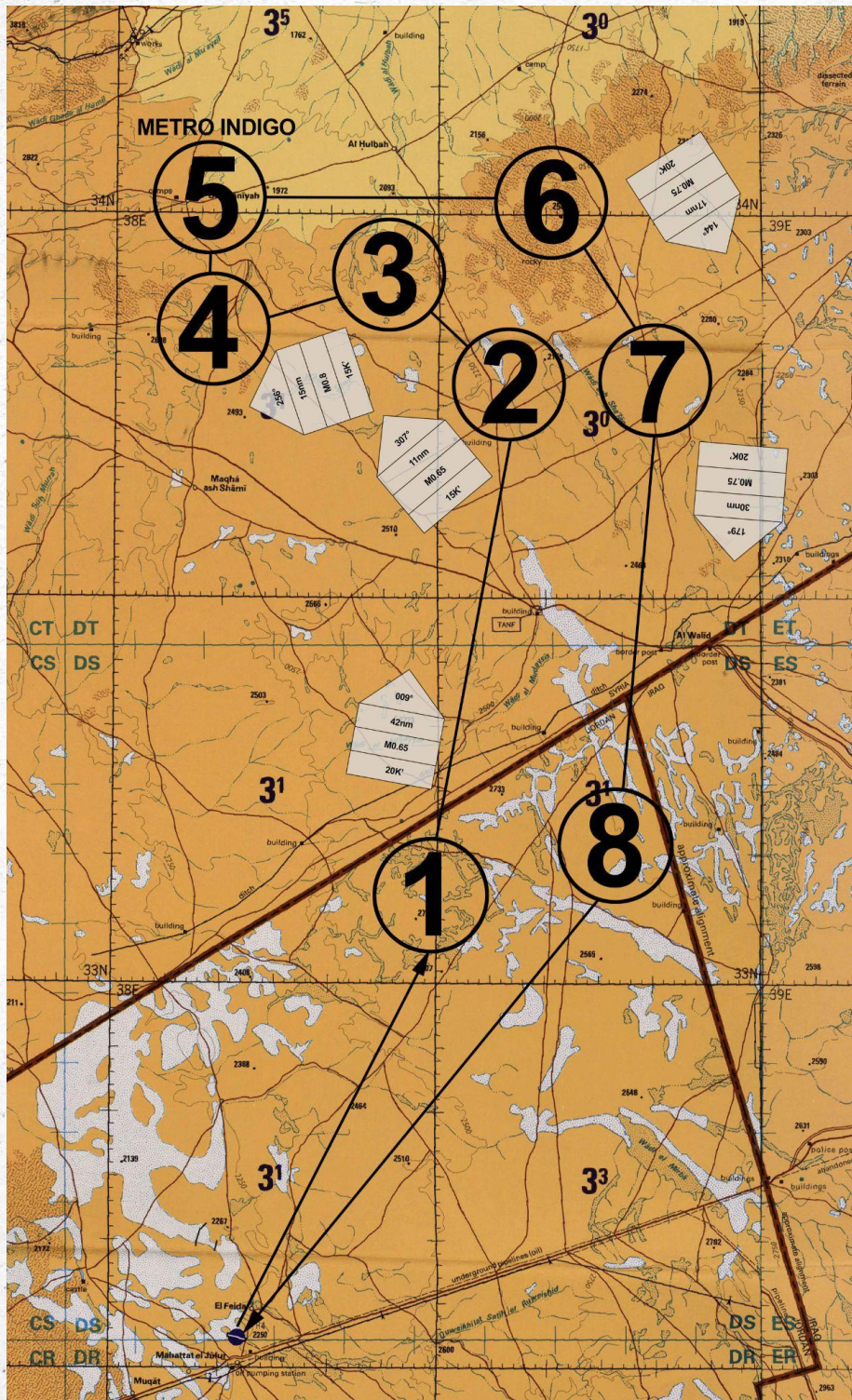
Popeye will be targeting the radio mast and Tank the ELINT dome. This will be highly contested airspace, with numerous SAMs and AAA guns within engagement range of our targets. Making more than one pass over the target will be dangerous so speed and accuracy will be vital. For deconfliction we will push at 30 second intervals.

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As the flight leads push into the target our wingmen will cover us with additional HARM launches at the other SAMs in the area. Ghost will target the SA-6 at Sharqiyah mines, Rotor the SA-2 and Bug the SA-6 at Al 'Ulayyaniyah.

Once we have eliminated the targets we will egress east and rally at waypoint 6 before we RTB.

Loadouts for the flight leads will be 1 HARM and 2 GBU-12s. Our wingmen will each carry two HARMs. Bingo fuel is 3,500lb. There will be no tanker support on this mission as the target location means the nearest safe airspace for a tanker will be further away than H4.



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As always the briefing concluded with analysis of the threats we will face. The airspace we will be operating in today will be very dangerous if we lose our SA and get out of position. Spartan's jamming will protect us from the SA-2, SA-3 and SA-6s so long as we don't get too close to any of these systems. Should we stray too close then we can expect the radars to burn through the jamming, exposing us to a firing solution from the SAM site. This means we will need to ensure we follow our planned attack carefully, it has been designed to keep us at a safe distance from the threats.

The SA-15 poses a great threat to our aircraft, thankfully it's very short legged so we can easily keep clear of it's MEZ until our HARMs have done their job.

Once we push to strike our targets we will be exposed to AAA fire (both guided and unguided) as well as potential MANPAD fire if the clouds force us below the layer, so we should keep our speed up and avoid flying a predictable route as we ingress on the target. The longer we spend over the target the greater the threat to our aircraft so we should also avoid loitering overhead, with just one pass being the safest option. Our ingress will bring us closer to the SA-6s located near Metro Indigio, this is why these will be targeted with a second volley of HARMs once the SA-15 is neutralized, therefore it will be important that I release my HARM as briefed - if I fail to do so then Bug may have to fill in for me to ensure the SA-15 is adequately saturated with shots. This will leave him unable to also take his shot at the SA-6.

A flight of F-15s will be on CAP northeast of our target area in case any Syrian aircraft attempt to get airborne and interfere with our operation, although intel indicates this is unlikely to happen based on current Syrian behavior.

Although the briefing then ended we each lingered for some time to further study our role in the mission. This will be a challenging mission to execute, with timing and coordination paramount. Every task I perform will need to be done right, first time. There will be no second chances on this one.

We step at dawn, takeoff is 05:37.