

# LAST OUT - WEASELS OVER SYRIA II

August 25th, 2013.

It's been a quiet few days since our last mission into Syria. Last time out we were protecting F-15Es as they attacked Syrian artillery north of Damascus, it was a tough mission, with the Syrian air defenses not yet showing any sign of relenting. We tangled with numerous SA-6s in the area, at times it feels there's an endless number of Syrian SAMs still available to confront us.

But it was another mission we walked away from. Although at times it doesn't feel like it, we've got to be making an impact out here in Syria, and even if the air defenses are remaining resolute we're making sure that our strikes get through, which has got to be having an impact.

Back at Akrotiri we had some excitement on base yesterday with a new detachment joining us here in Cyprus. This detachment saw 4 US Marine Hornets arrive to add additional resources to the JSTF, the support will surely be welcomed, and Boomer was really excited to welcome some fellow Marines. We've not yet seen much of the new arrivals, they've been resting after an epic journey to the middle east, but we're all looking forward to catching up with some old squadron mates of Boomer's soon.

But all that fun is still to come, today we're back to business, and with a mission planned for later today Rotor, Bug, Shade and myself reported for an early start to our Akrotiri briefing room. Popeye was already present and waiting for us.

Entering the briefing room we settled into our seats and once ready Popeye invited the Akrotiri OMT to deliver the met brief. The OMT informed us that we could expect a little cloud to build throughout the day with light cloud cover likely at around 6000-7000 feet. Winds are also expected to build through the day with winds of 10-15 knots likely at ground level and turbulence also predicted to be quite high.

Once the OMT had departed, Popeye turned to the ever present Major Norris to begin his intel brief. The Major told us that in Syria fierce fighting continues across all fronts, with fairly static battlelines around Palmyra, Yabrud and along the Homs road. The Russians' recently increased tempo of airstrikes is continuing, with the Russians hitting dozens of targets in SDF controlled areas over the last few days. Concerningly, and to the consternation of command, the Israeli air force have also continued to attack targets in Syria, striking SAA positions in the south of the country. There is still a lot of concern that the IAF actions could cause an escalation with Russia, Norris told us he understands that there are high level discussions between the US and Israel about the IAF standing down, we'll have to wait and see if it has any effect.

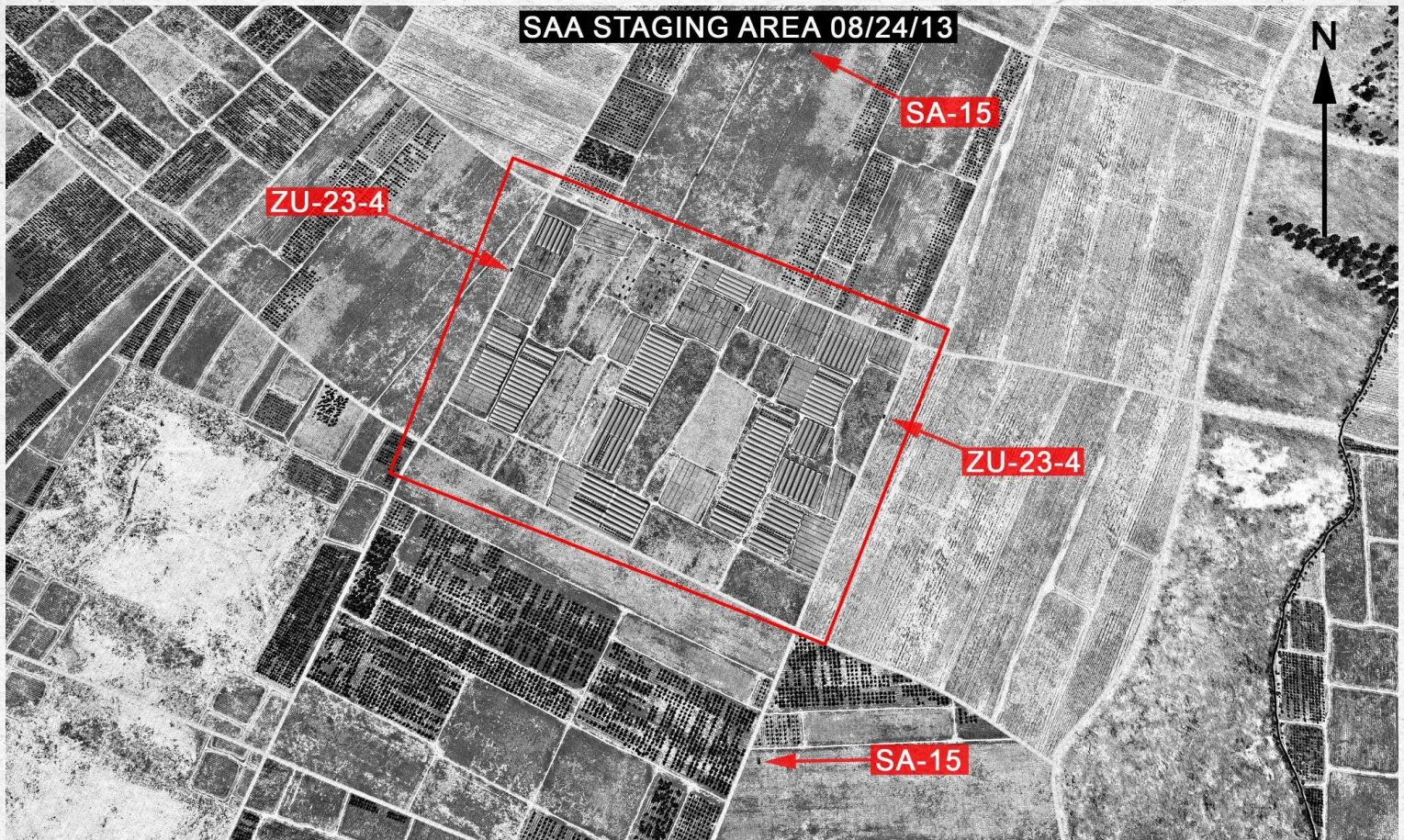
Out at sea the Chinese flotilla has passed through the eastern Mediterranean without incident and are now clear of our operating areas. The Russian's Pyotr Velikiy battlegroup remains out at sea somewhere in the southeast of the Mediterranean.

Norris departed once his briefing was complete, and it was Popeye's turn to take the podium and begin to brief today's mission.

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"Ok pilots" Popeye began, "Your mission today is to provide Weasel cover to a cell of 3 B-52s as they attack SAA targets in the southern Bekaa Valley".

Popeye clicked a slide onto the screen at the front of the room.



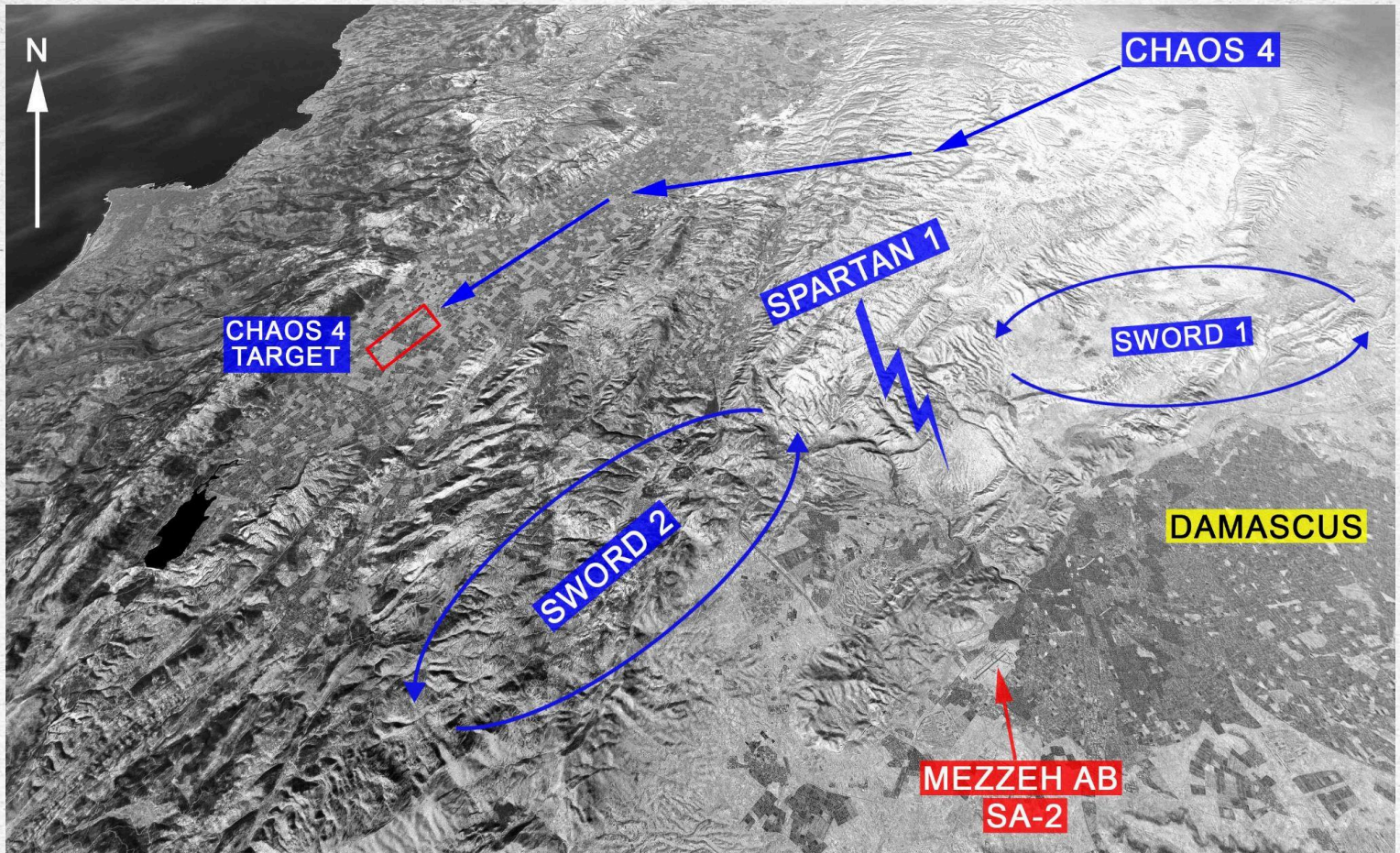
"The target is this SAA staging area, located 6 miles north of Joub Janine. This position is being used to assemble SAA armored and mechanized formations that are subsequently pushing north through the Bekaa in an attempt to link up with Hezbollah forces attacking the SDF. The BUFFs - callsign Chaos 4 - are tasked with leveling this position and denying it's use to the Syrians".

"Now as you can see the target has considerable SHORAD, including at least two SA-15s, and for this reason Chaos will be attacking from high altitude. This however will make the BUFFs an easy target for any other SAMs in the area, which of course is where we come in".

"We will be providing two pairs of Weasels to cover the strike package. Sword 1 will be Shade and Rotor, with Sword 2 consisting of Forrest and Bug. Both flights will push into the target area ahead of Chaos and set up a Weasel orbit between the expected threats and Chaos' ingress route. Sword 1 will take position northeast of Damascus in the Al Dumayr region protecting Chaos' ingress and egress route. Sword 2 will be positioned 25 miles to the west, between the target and Damascus, to protect Chaos during their strike".

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"You will also have Growler support, with Spartan 1 carrying out a standoff jam from the northwest of Damascus".



Shade interjected at this point, "Sir, what sort of threats are we looking at?" he asked.

"The only known precise threat location is an SA-2 battery located at Mezzeh airbase," Popeye replied, "This will just be within range of Chaos' target. However a number of mobile SAMs are also known to be in the area so expect SA-6 and SA-11 in both your AORs. We also know there is a new SA-10 position somewhere south of Damascus, although the Syrians appear reluctant to turn it on very often, we believe it's one of their last SA-10 batteries and it's looking like they're trying very hard to preserve it".

"Aside from the SA-15s, do we have any indications of any more SAMs in the Bekka?" I asked.

"We don't believe so" Popeye responded, "At least not within the main valley itself, reports from Vacuum put any SAMs in that area in the border region with Syria, probably protecting the routes from Damascus into the Bekaa".

"Your priority on this mission will be getting Chaos into and out of the target area successfully. This is not a SAM hunt, suppressing the threat will do just fine. Given your proximity to Damascus and the possibility of an SA-10 somewhere out there I don't want you getting bogged down trying to

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root out SAMs so hold your positions, use your HARMs wisely and come home again. We'll go back in force another day and finish the job. You guys got that?"

We all nodded in agreement.

Popeye then began to break down the mission in more detail.

We will depart Akrotiri, noting the takeoff time of 11:25 zulu. Once clear of Akrotiri airspace we will link up with Sword 1 at waypoint 4 and then proceed to the Silver Corridor and into Syria, turning south at waypoint 6 and beginning our sweep of the mission area.

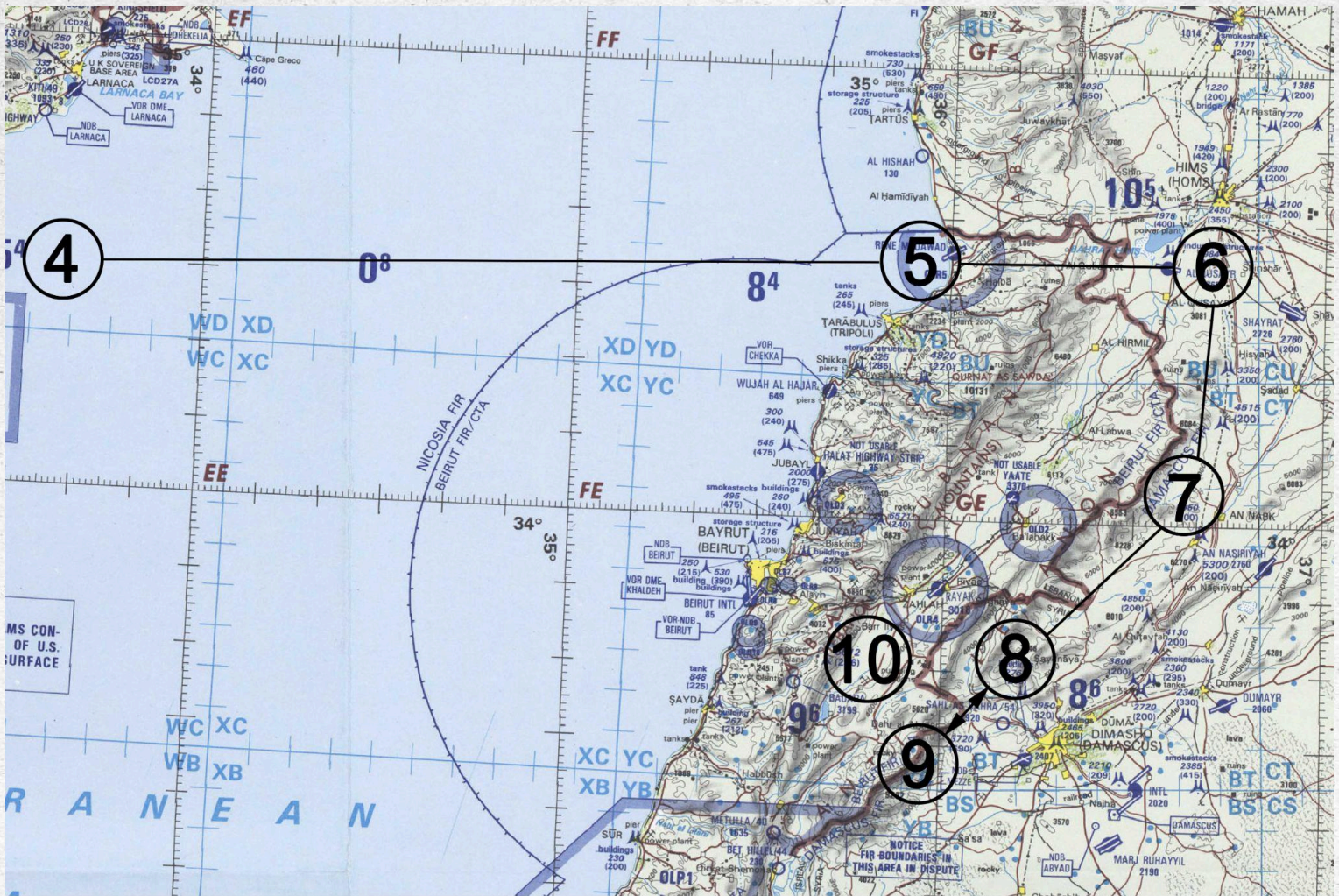
As we travel towards waypoint 7 we should ensure there are no threats along the Homs road frontline that are going to interfere with Chaos' mission, should we locate any we will quickly need to neutralize them before Chaos arrives in the area at 11:55 Zulu.

Once we arrive at waypoint 7, Sword 1 will split from us and set up their orbit northeast of Damascus. Sword 1 will be responsible for covering the ingress and egress of Chaos, with potential threats in the Al Dumayr and Al Qutayfah region. At this point I will push southwest with Bug to set up on my orbit between waypoints 8 and 9, with a vul period of 12:00Z to 12:20Z. I will hold position here ready to protect Chaos when they enter the Bekaa Valley, ensuring I am in a position to respond quickly to any threats that appear. Chaos has a TOT of 12:10Z. Once Chaos has dropped their bombs and cleared the Bekaa Valley I will push back north to waypoint 7 and flow back through my waypoints to home. Spartan 1 will be providing electronic attack and will be on station from 12:00Z.

Popeye again emphasized that today our priority is to suppress any threats to Chaos, not to kill SAMs. It will be critical we maintain our position between the expected threats and Chaos, making sure we suppress threats as required and keep any SAM radars in the area looking at us and not the vulnerable bombers. It is not advisable for us to get too close to Damascus either, where the threats become more dense.

Both Bug and I will be equipped with two HARMs each, along with the standard pods, tanks and air to air load. Bingo fuel is 3,500lb.

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We concluded by assessing the threats we may face. The staging area at waypoint 10 is protected by two SA-15s, and so is highly dangerous and should be avoided. We are most likely to encounter SA-6 and SA-11 in our operating area and these will be our priority threats to deal with. The SA-2 at Mezzeh will be at the limit of its range if attempting to engage Chaos and may be a threat we need to deal with. There is also an SA-10 battery somewhere in the vicinity of Damascus, clearly if this goes active it will be a significant threat, although the Syrians appear reluctant to expose its position at this time.

We should be careful to keep our situational awareness and ensure we don't get dragged too far out of position from our orbit. Our orbit is positioned to provide a screen for Chaos' target run, and will also ensure we keep within the protection of Spartan's jamming.

With the briefing then over, we broke away in our flights to continue preparing for the mission - given the proximity to Damascus this sortie has the potential to be another dangerous one - we will need to be fully prepared.