

FIRST IN - WEASELS OVER SYRIA

30th June, 2013.

It's been quite a start to the day!

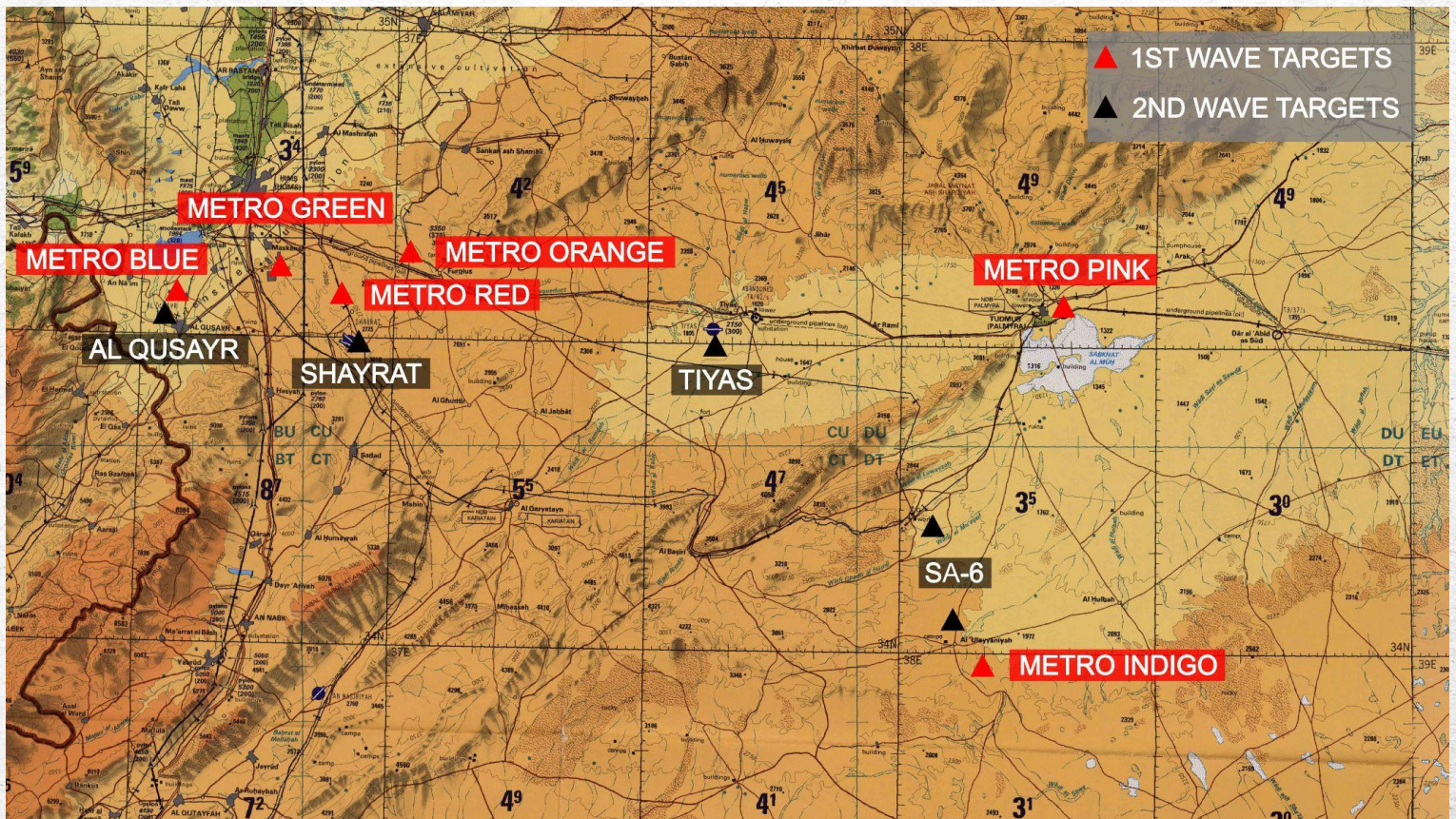
A 6 pack of Weasels striking Syrian air defense targets south of no fly Sierra. It's an impressive sight seeing the six of us working together in coordination to strike targets, and it shows that through proper planning and execution we can overcome potent threats such as the SA-15.

Our mission was part of the first wave of attacks by the JSTF against the Syrian northern IADS, we targeted an early warning radar along with communications and ELINT gathering equipment. This was designed to begin to degrade the Syrian air defense network in support of attacks on SAM sites further north.

After returning to H4 we went straight into the debrief to analyze our mission performance, Popeye warned us to expect a high tempo of operations for the next few days and so sent us to rest before reporting back to the briefing room a few hours later. Turns out we are flying again later today.

Rested up, we returned to the briefing room shortly after noon to begin briefing our second mission of the day. Having already given us a met brief today, Captain Johnson was absent, as was Major Norris who had no new intel to offer us. As we settled into our chairs Popeye began to speak.

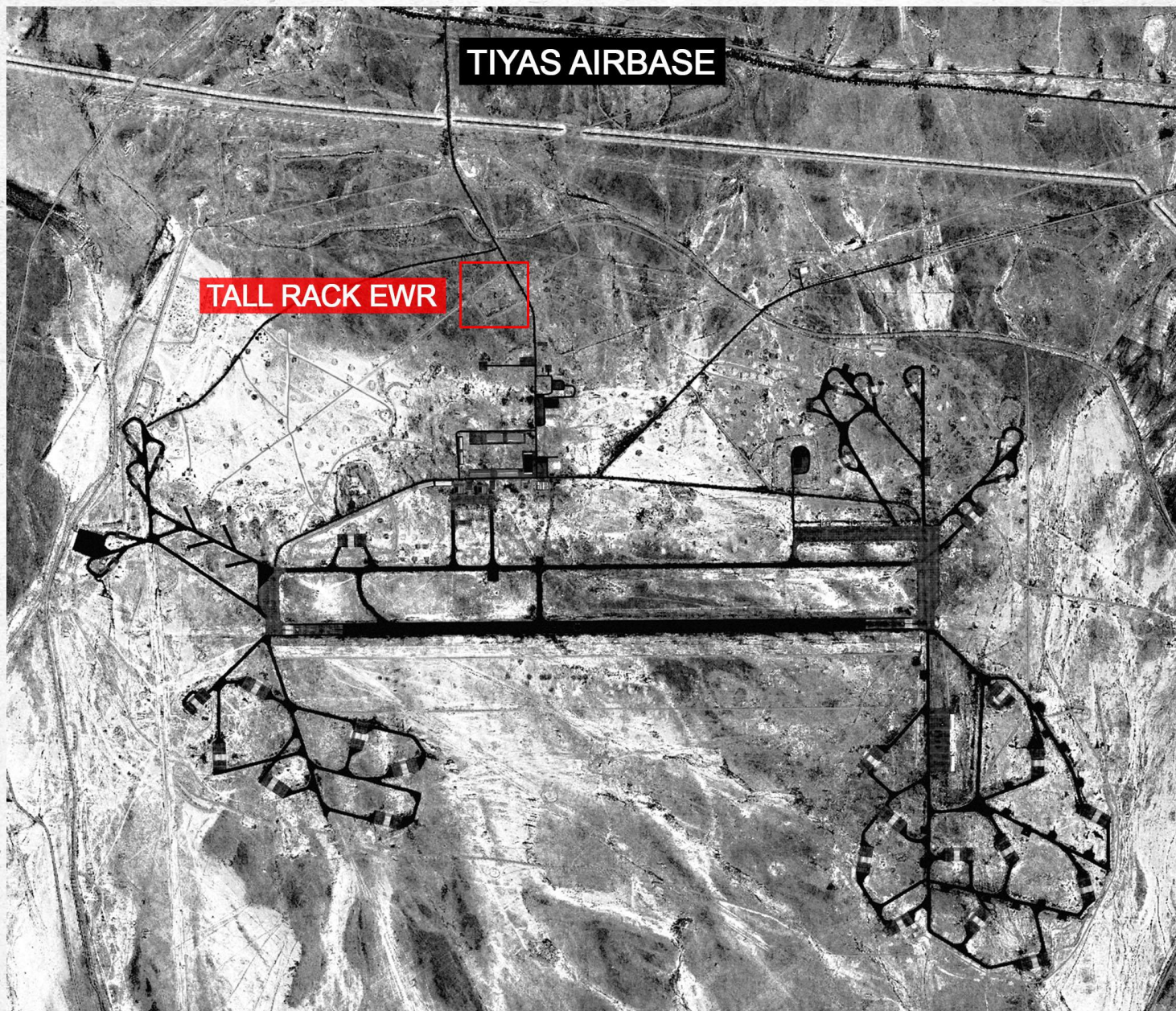
"This morning the JSTF struck a series of Syrian air defense targets around no fly zone Sierra. Along with our target Metro Indigo, we also saw a number of SA-11 and SA-6 sites eliminated around Homs, as well as the early warning radars at Al Qusayr airbase and Palmyra".



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"These attacks will continue through the rest of today and tonight, and by daybreak tomorrow it is the intention of the CAOC that the IADS in northern Syria will cease to function. To complete this task the JSTF will need to hit another multitude of targets, including command posts, communications nodes and other SAM sites. We will also be striking the Syrian airbases close to Sierra".

Popeye brought up a new picture on the screen at the front, "Our next mission then, will be to support a strike on Tiyas airbase".



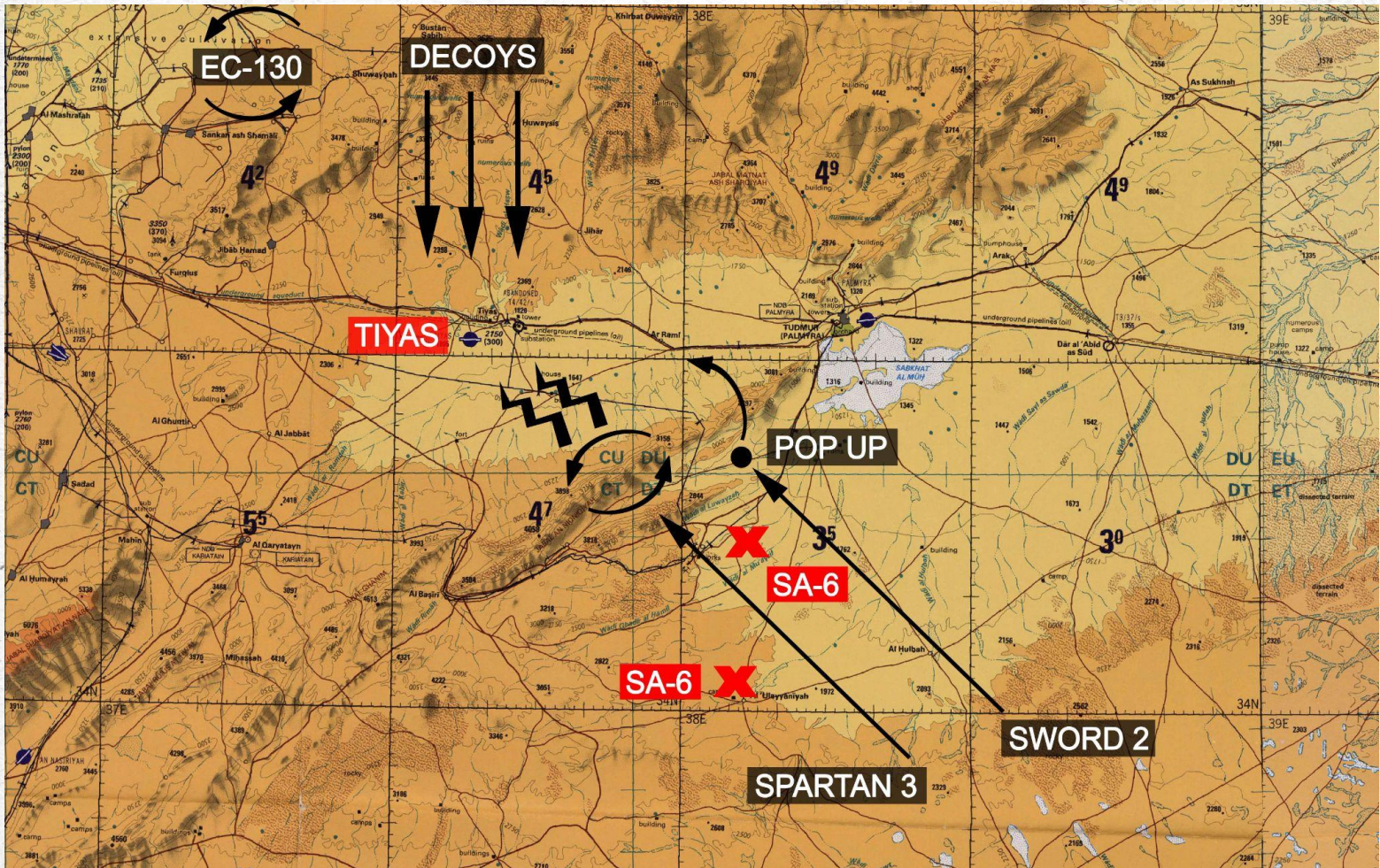
"Tiyas is home to both Mig-21s and Mig-23s, along with a Tall Rack EWR and significant stocks of surface to air missiles. These will be targeted by the strikers, a mix of Hornets and Strike Eagles. We will be operating three separate two ships in support of this strike, with 3 separate missions".

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“Sword 1 and Sword 3 will head out first and hunt down any SAMs south of Tiyas, now we know at least 2 SA-6 batteries are in the Sharqiyah mines and Metro Indigo area. These will be a potential threat to the strike package and need to be located and put out of the fight. In doing so Sword 1 and 3 will open up a corridor southeast of Tiyas, that Sword 2 will then be able to exploit to approach Tiyas, unseen, when using the ridge line south of the base to mask their approach. Tiyas also has considerable point defenses, including an SA-15, as well as an SA-6 battery, and we want these to be looking north while Forrest’s flight is approaching from the south. Therefore as Sword 2 is approaching Tiyas, a flight of Hornets will ingress from the north and will release a series of ADM-141 TALDs to attract and hold the attention of the Tiyas air defenses”.

“Once the TALDs have brought the Syrian radars online, Sword 2 will pop up from behind the ridge line and acquire and destroy the threat systems at Tiyas. Timing will be critical, you need to be in position to prosecute these targets while the decoys are in flight, and the defenses are looking north. The Gauntlet will eat your HARMs and Mavs for breakfast if you give it the chance to do so”.

“We will be supported once again by Growlers. Spartan 3 will rendezvous with Swords 1 and 3 for their push and will remain on station for the duration of this mission, before topping off at Shell and then rendezvousing again with Sword 2 as they approach the threat area. Spartan will escort Sword 2 towards Tiyas, and will commence a standoff jam as Sword 2 unmask from the ridge line and begins their attack. During this entire operation an EC-130 Compass Call will also be on station jamming Syrian comms”.



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"Tiyas is known to be defended by at least 1 SA-6 battery, the exact location of the battery is changing regularly and is therefore not precisely known at this time, you will of course have your HTS pod to support you in nailing down it's location. In addition to the SA-6, Vacuum has also detected SA-15 emissions from this location in the last 24 hours, we believe this may have been relocated from the Sharqiyah mines. In addition to these SAM systems, Tiyas also contains radar guided AAA along with S-60s".

Popeye paused to allow us to absorb that information, it was a lot to take in.

As the briefing continued we started to dig into more detail for each phase of the mission. Our flight today will be carrying another mixed load, with Bug carrying two HARMs for SAM suppression and myself carrying a combination of Mavericks and CBU-105 WCMDs for follow up destruction of the sites.

Once airborne and clear of H4 airspace we will push onto our flight plan, rendezvousing with Spartan 3 at waypoint 2 at 12:20 zulu as they return from the tanker. As we head into Syria, Vacuum will be available to give us a lowdown on the target area. Once at waypoint 2 we will switch to our strike frequency - Red 1 - and descend to below 2,500 feet MSL and ingress towards waypoint 3 at low level. We must ensure we maintain an altitude below 2,500 feet to avoid unmasking ourselves to the radars at Tiyas, if we are spotted on our ingress it is unlikely the decoy ruse will be effective. Waypoint 4 is our pop up point, 26 miles southeast of Tiyas, and here Spartan will commence their electronic attack.

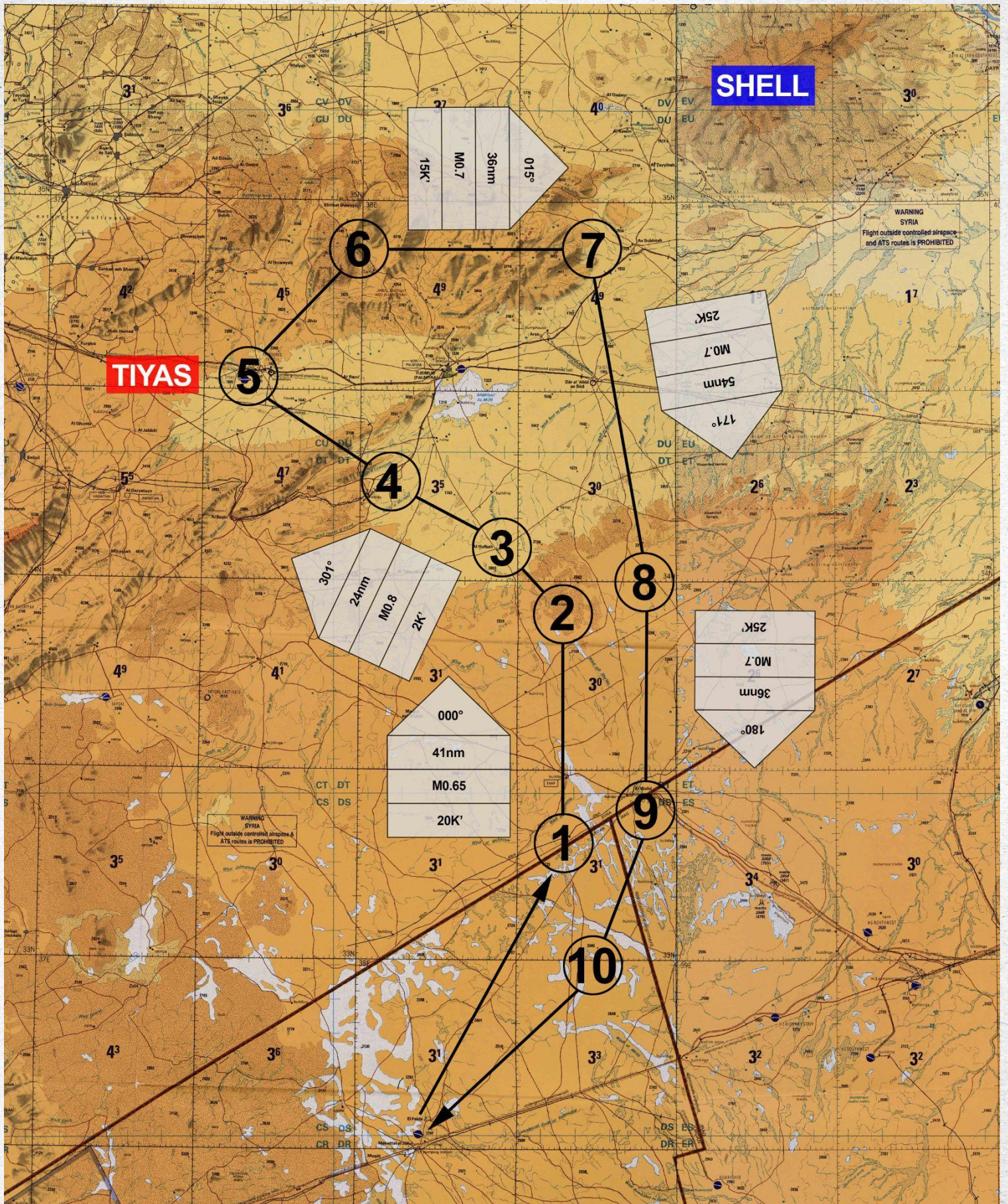
As we are ingressing, the Hornets (callsign Devil 5) will release their TALDs north of Tiyas. This will occur at 12:24Z. We must reach our popup point between 12:24Z and 12:25Z to ensure we are in position to detect, mark and engage Syrian radars as they come online and are focused north, away from us. If we arrive early or late and the SA-15 is not sufficiently distracted when we release our weapons then they are far more likely to be intercepted.

From the planned release point the TALDs will have a flight time of approximately 3 minutes until they are likely within visual range of Tiyas, at this point assume the base's air defenses will have discovered our deception and will be monitoring all directions once again.

After we unmask from the ridge line we should use our available sensors to ID, locate and engage targets as quickly as possible, our primary targets are the SA-15 and the SA-6 battery. Destruction of the entire SA-6 battery is the desired outcome, however just knocking out the radar will suffice for the purposes of getting the strikers through the target safely. Bug will wait for my instructions on target engagement, should he run out of HARMs I will have options available to me on how Bug can support by distracting or baiting the SAMs. We should ensure the SA-6 and SA-15 targets are eliminated before the strikers (Devil 4 and Hammer 3) TOT of 12:35Z.

We will then remain over the target to provide cover as the strikers carry out their attacks before covering their egress to the north. We will then follow the strikers north out of the target area before flowing back east on our flight plan for our RTB. Shell will be available northeast of waypoint 7 for AAR. Bingo fuel from Tiyas is 4,000lb.

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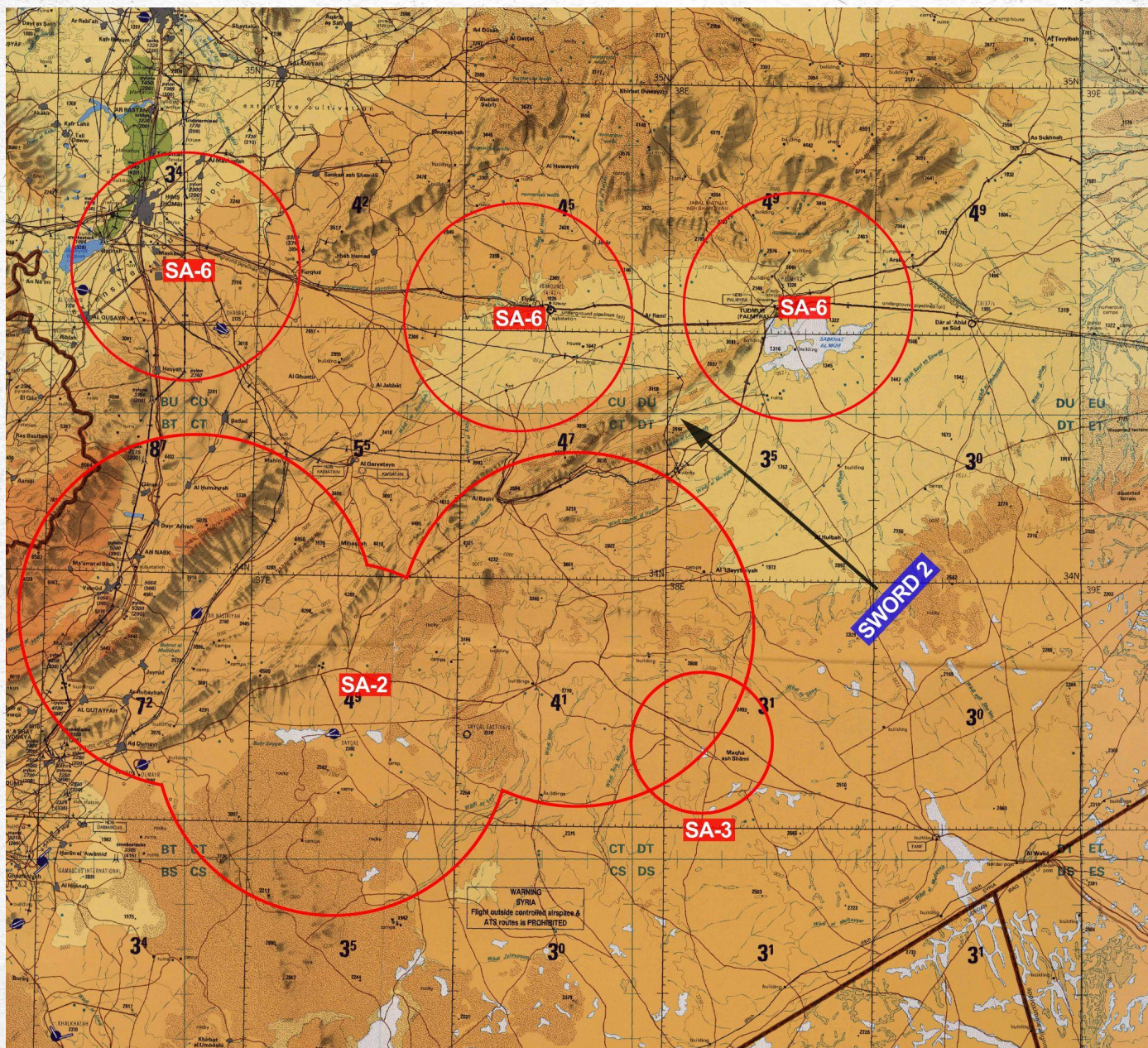


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Discussing the threats at Tiyas, Popeye clarified exactly the threat environment we will face. The SA-6 and SA-15 make a potent pairing. The SA-6 compensating for the SA-15's limited range and ceiling, and the SA-15 protecting the SA-6 from incoming missiles. This is why fully utilizing the decoys will be key to our success. Our jamming will also keep the SA-6 at arm's length (providing we keep our distance to avoid burnthrough), but it is vital we quickly eliminate the SA-15 before it gives us it's full attention. Spartan will be anchored at the ridgeline southeast of Tiyas, this will be a useful visual reference if we need to re-orient ourselves to the jamming screen.

Tiyas also contains ZU-23, S-60 and KS-19 radar guided AAA. These provide low, medium and high altitude cover over the base and surrounding area, so we should avoid loitering on predictable flight paths and keep our energy up. There will no doubt also be MANPADs present on the base so low overflights of the target should be avoided.

Swords 1 and 3 will have cleared our ingress route of SAMs ahead of our arrival. However there will still be other SAM threats present so we should ensure we stick to our briefed flight plan. These threats are an SA-6 at Palmyra, along with SA-2s and an SA-3 west of our ingress.



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Our approach will also take us within 5 miles of the Sharqiyah Mines (southwest of WP4). Although any SAM threats here will have been eliminated ahead of us, it is likely this site will still contain active AAA.

So this will be a complex threat environment - one where precision is key. We need to hit our TOT, we need to eliminate targets efficiently and we need to maintain a careful watch on our position to ensure we keep clear of the multitude of threats in the area.

With these words still ringing in our ears, the briefing ended and we split into our individual flights to continue studying the mission ahead.

Takeoff time is 12:05 Zulu.