

# LAST OUT - WEASELS OVER SYRIA II

August 26th, 2013

It was a big day today. I led a large strike package through Israel and into Syria to attack an SA-10 site south of Damascus. The attack was a low level pop up attack right into the heart of a dense area of SAMs, not the most straightforward thing I've ever had to do and we had to fight our way out of the target...but we survived. Coming in through Israel was an interesting experience, we had to be careful not to enter the Golan Heights where tensions are extremely high and the Israeli air defenses are on high alert. Even re-entering Israeli airspace involved following agreed altitudes to ensure the Israelis didn't shoot us down as we did so. So with that mission complete I was looking forward to a quiet evening back on base. No such luck and after landing and the debrief we were pretty much dragged straight back into another briefing. Things are pretty fast paced right now.

And so we found ourselves in a late evening briefing, the full detachment was already assembled, all of us having had a quick turnaround from our previous missions. Once we were all seated Popeye had our OMT begin the met brief for tomorrow.

Tomorrow's weather will see a slight deterioration from the conditions today, with the clouds and wind building throughout the night. We can expect scattered to broken clouds at around 9-10 thousand feet with winds increasing to around 10-15 knots at ground level.

Once the OMT had delivered their brief and departed, it was time for Major Norris to brief us with an intel update. The major began by filling us in on an operation that we partially witnessed as we came into land, the chasing off of what was believed to be a Russian intelligence gathering ship parked off the coast near nav point Irefa. Norris told us that suspicions had grown at how long that ship had remained in the area and eventually someone worked out that it was providing intelligence on our movements in and out of Akrotiri and no doubt passing information on to the Syrians. The Royal Navy and Marines went out to move them on, and after a tense standoff the ship withdrew peacefully. A good conclusion but it hasn't helped our already strained Russian relations.

Continuing to discuss the situation in Syria, Norris told us the Russian support for Syria remains unabated, with a fresh round of airstrikes on SDF targets carried out today. He also revealed another Russian resupply effort appears to be taking place, with flights arriving into several Syrian airbases this afternoon, "More on that later", Popeye declared ominously.

Shade asked Norris about how the Russians were behaving after yesterday's incident, Major Norris responded by telling us that we'd seen a big drop off in Russian intercepts of our aircraft and less harassment overall. Let's hope it continues.

Turning to the SDF and SAA frontline, Norris told us that the recent pressure on the Syrians and Hezbollah from JSTF strikes had taken its toll and the SDF has made a small breakthrough in the Syrian lines. The frontline now sits just 20 miles north of Damascus. This got me thinking "maybe this thing will soon be over", but Norris' next piece of information, that large amounts of Hezbollah fighters are believed to be massing south of Damascus gave me additional pause for thought.

Norris wrapped up his intel brief with new information on SIA activity, telling us that there were reports of SIA forces popping up in a town in southern Syria. It is also believed they have made a rocket attack against Israeli forces in the Golan Heights, but this is breaking news and

# LAST OUT - WEASELS OVER SYRIA II

the details are still being verified. If true however, it's not a good sign as southern Syria is already heating up a lot.

Norris then left the briefing room and Popeye began to brief our mission.

"Ok pilots let's get down to business." Popeye said as he clicked a slide onto the briefing screen.



"Now as Major Norris already told us, the Russians are in the process of another round of resupply efforts. Multiple flights of Russian heavy lift aircraft have been observed flying into a number of Syrian bases, including here at Mezzeh where we've identified both armor and large amounts of ammunition and weapons being delivered. No doubt this equipment is destined for the Syrian frontline, and given the small breakthrough the SDF have just made the CAOC wishes for this to be prevented".

"Therefore a number of strikes will be carried out early tomorrow morning, targeting Mezzeh and Marj Ruhayyil airbases and Damascus IAP, the objective of which will be the destruction of these new stockpiles".

"Bold move" remarked Tank, "Is there not concern that we're going to catch Russians in these attacks?"

# LAST OUT - WEASELS OVER SYRIA II

"Absolutely, it's a good question." Popeye replied, "First the attacks will be on Syrian storage areas, not Russian transports. Secondly, command is giving the Russians a short amount of notice of the attacks to ensure they have time to get their personnel clear if they are still present".

"Great!" replied Rotor, "I'm *sure* they won't tell the Syrians that we're coming".

"But preferable to bombing the Russians" I added, "Especially in light of recent events".

"Exactly" responded Popeye. "It's a complication for sure, but we're used to complications by now so I know you'll handle it. We will be providing a Weasel two-ship as part of the force protection for each of these strikes, accompanied by EW flights of Growlers and Eagles on CAP".

"The threat picture looks complex. Following the recent Israeli actions in southern Syria and Lebanon, the Syrian air defenses in the area are likely to be primed and ready for anything".

Popeye continued the briefing, outlining the strike each Weasel flight would be covering, eventually turning to my flight.

"Forrest, you will be paired with Rotor as Sword 2, you will be covering a strike on Mezzeh airbase, the package has a TOT of 03:55 zulu".

"Don't get me killed Forrest," Rotor said half joking, but as we expect this to be his last flight before leaving for his new assignment I think he makes a good point.

Once Popeye had finished briefing the overview of our missions we broke away to begin detailed mission planning.

Our mission will be to provide a lane SEAD operation, covering a strike on Mezzeh airbase by a flight of Strike Eagles (Hammer 2) and two flights of Hornets (Knight 1 and Knight 2).

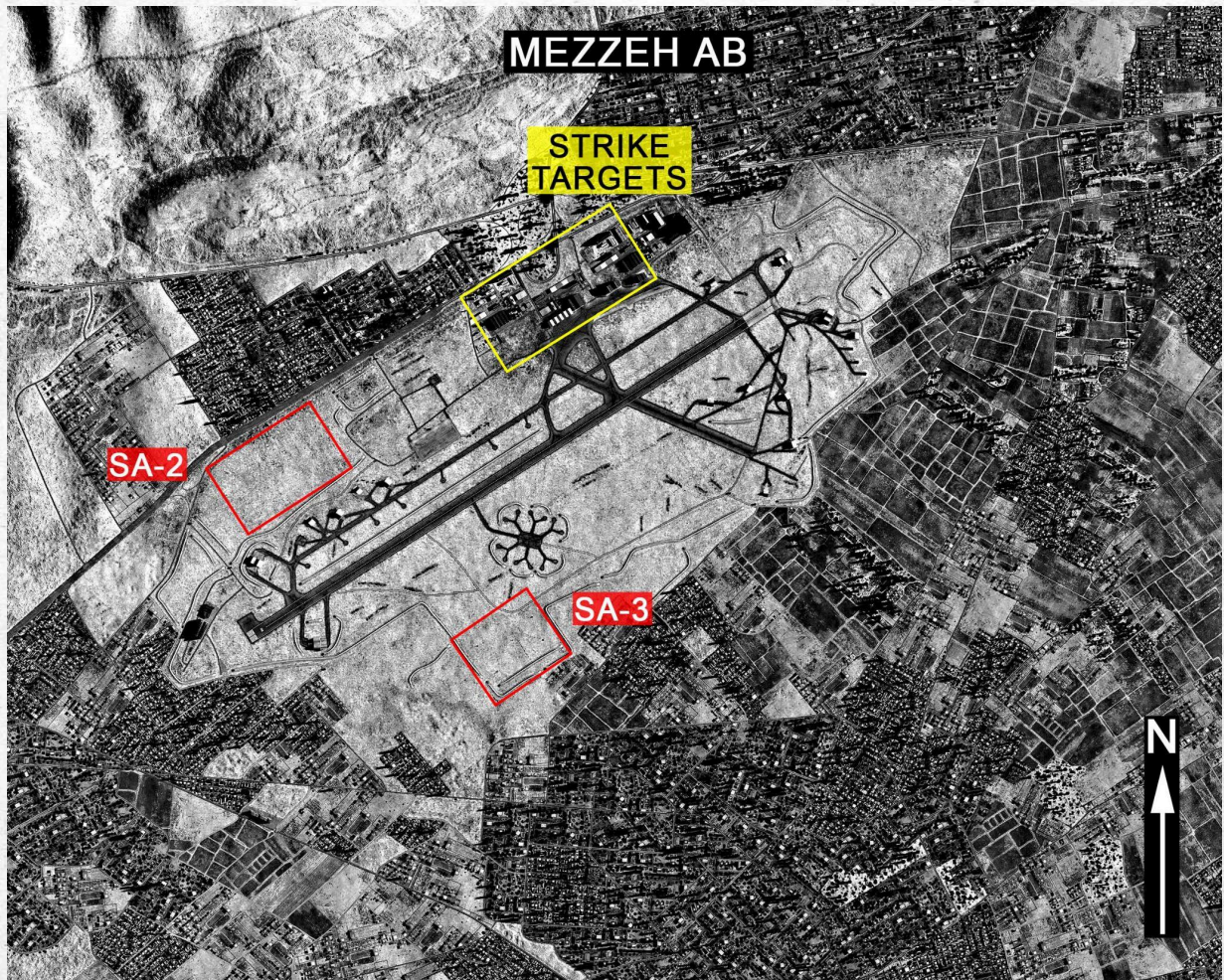
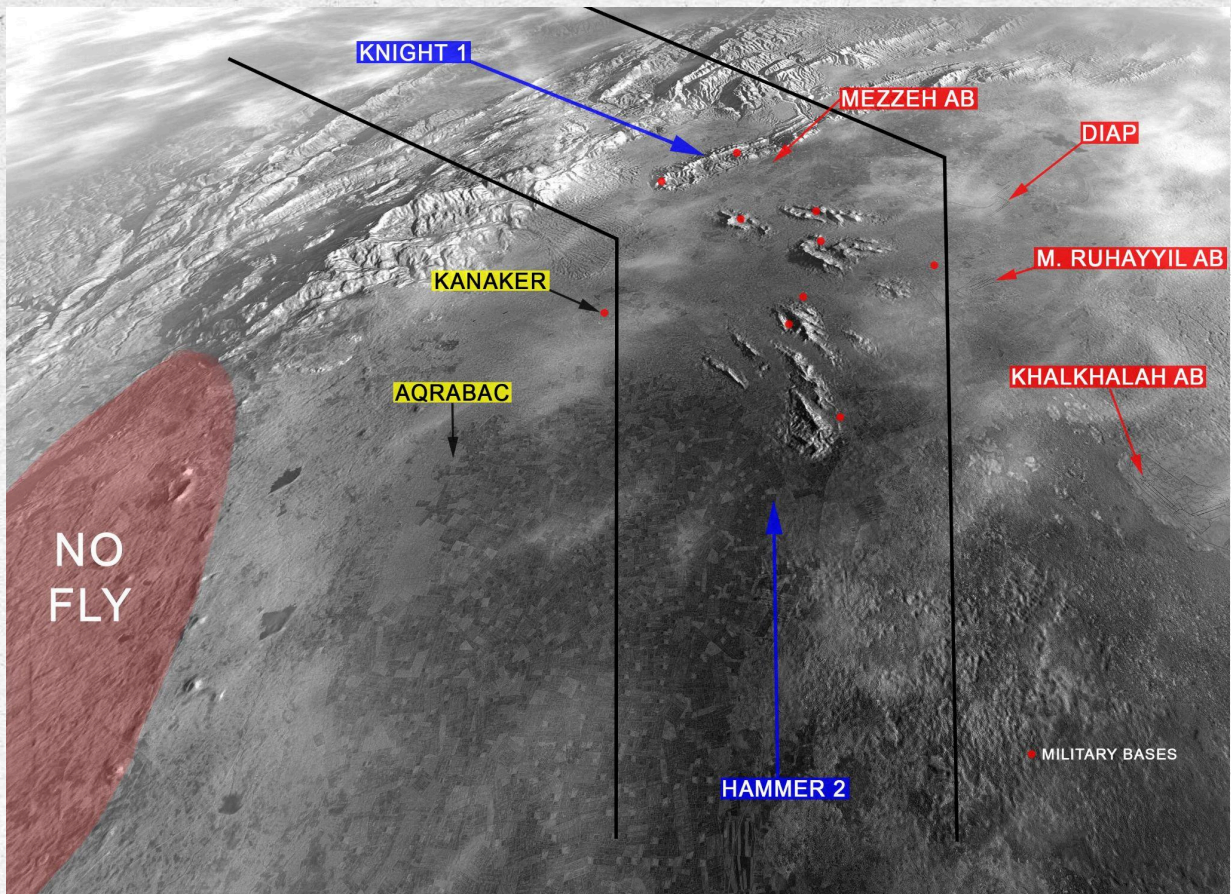
Departing Akrotiri, Rotor and I will proceed on flight plan through the Silver Corridor before turning south into the Bekaa Valley at waypoint 6. We will continue through the valley to waypoint 8, which marks the beginning of our AOR. Our TOT for waypoint 8 is 03:40 zulu.

The lane we've been assigned runs from waypoint 8 to waypoint 10, with waypoint 9 located on Mezzeh itself. We should patrol this lane during our vul time of 03:40Z to 04:00Z, ensuring the suppression or destruction of all threats during this window, as ever the destruction of a threat is preferable to suppression to prevent it attempting to re-engage us at a later time. The strikers have a TOT of 03:55Z.

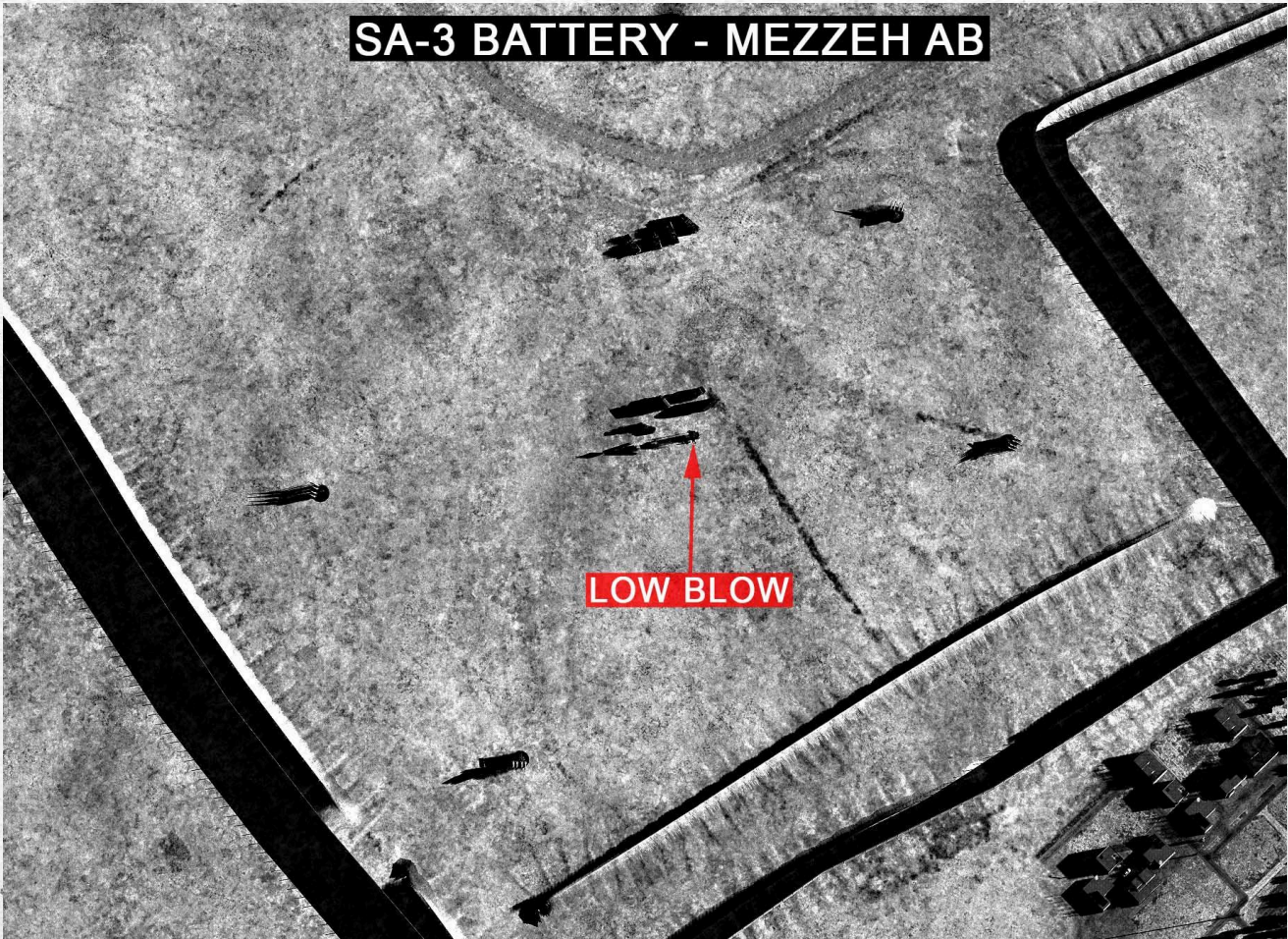
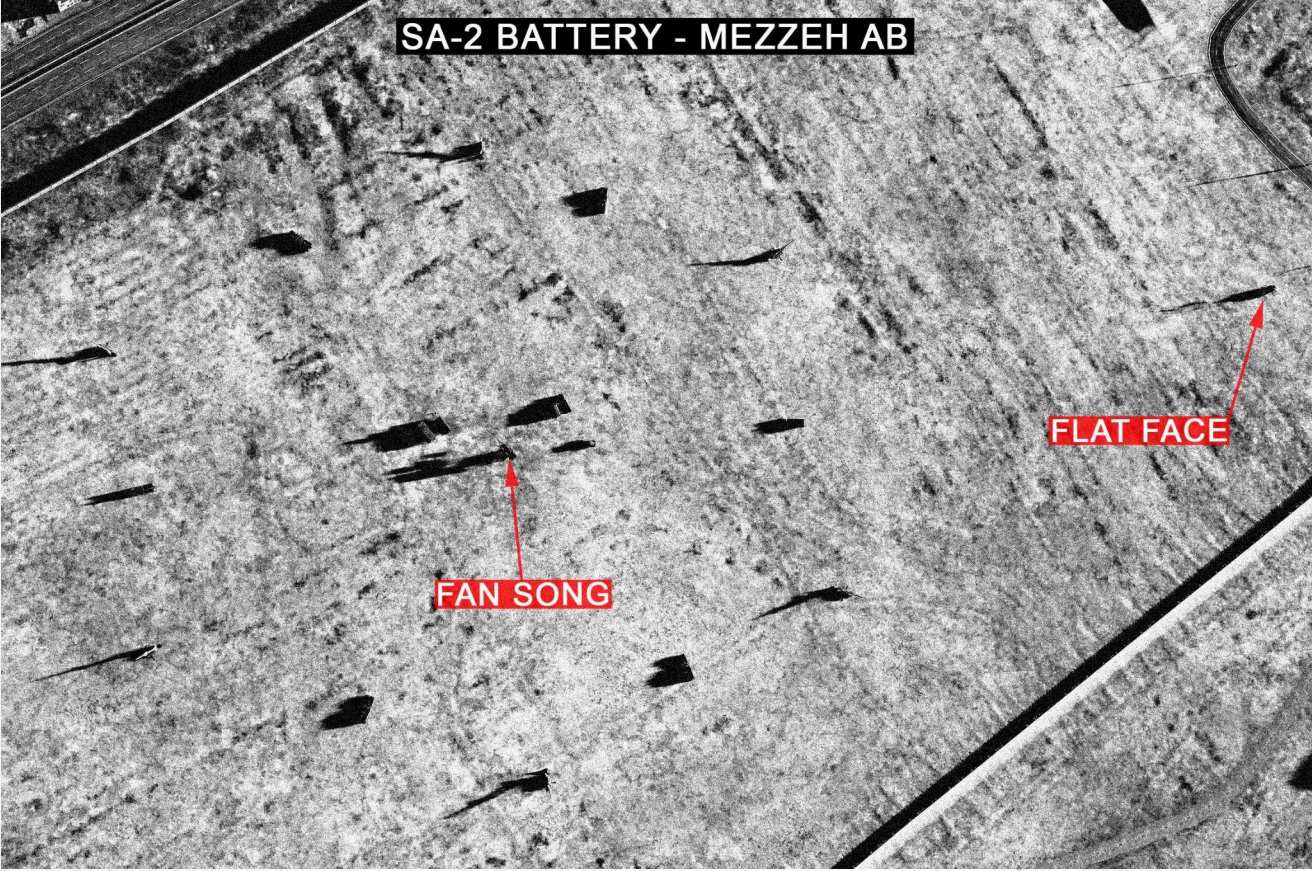
This area of Syria will be heavily defended. Mezzeh itself has an SA-2 and SA-3 combination protecting it, these are the only known static SAM positions in the area. We can however guarantee a variety of mobile threats in our assigned lane due to both the threat to Syria of Israel from the south and the presence of a large number of SAA bases in our lane. EW support will be provided by Spartan 3, who will set up a jamming orbit north of Damascus.

As in our previous mission we must make sure we keep well clear of the Golan Heights area.

# LAST OUT - WEASELS OVER SYRIA II



# LAST OUT - WEASELS OVER SYRIA II



# LAST OUT - WEASELS OVER SYRIA II

Once the strikers have egressed our AOR we will proceed back to our rally point at waypoint 11 before pushing back through the Bekaa valley towards home. Although recent missions have reduced the threat in the Bekaa we should be mindful that this is still Syrian controlled territory.

Stocks of Mavericks are running low so I will be loaded out with 4 GBU-38s on this mission, alongside all the usual kit. Rotor will be carrying 4 HARMs, an indication of just how busy we expect to be. Bingo fuel is 3,600 lb.



Expected threat systems are the full range of AAA calibers and a wide variety of SAMs; SA-2, SA-3, SA-6, SA-8, SA-9, SA-11 and SA-13 being the most likely. We should be careful about maintaining position in our assigned lane, to the west we have the Golan Heights and to the east is Damascus, along with a number of airbases and significant SHORAD. Attempts by the Syrian air force to disrupt our attacks remain rare, but should the SyAAF wish to get involved, we will have an F-15C two ship, callsign Renegade 2 on CAP near Damascus.

With the details hammered out exhaustively, the briefing was then concluded and Rotor and myself retired to get a few hours sleep. We need it after today and we step early tomorrow, this will be a down takeoff.