

LAST OUT - WEASELS OVER SYRIA II

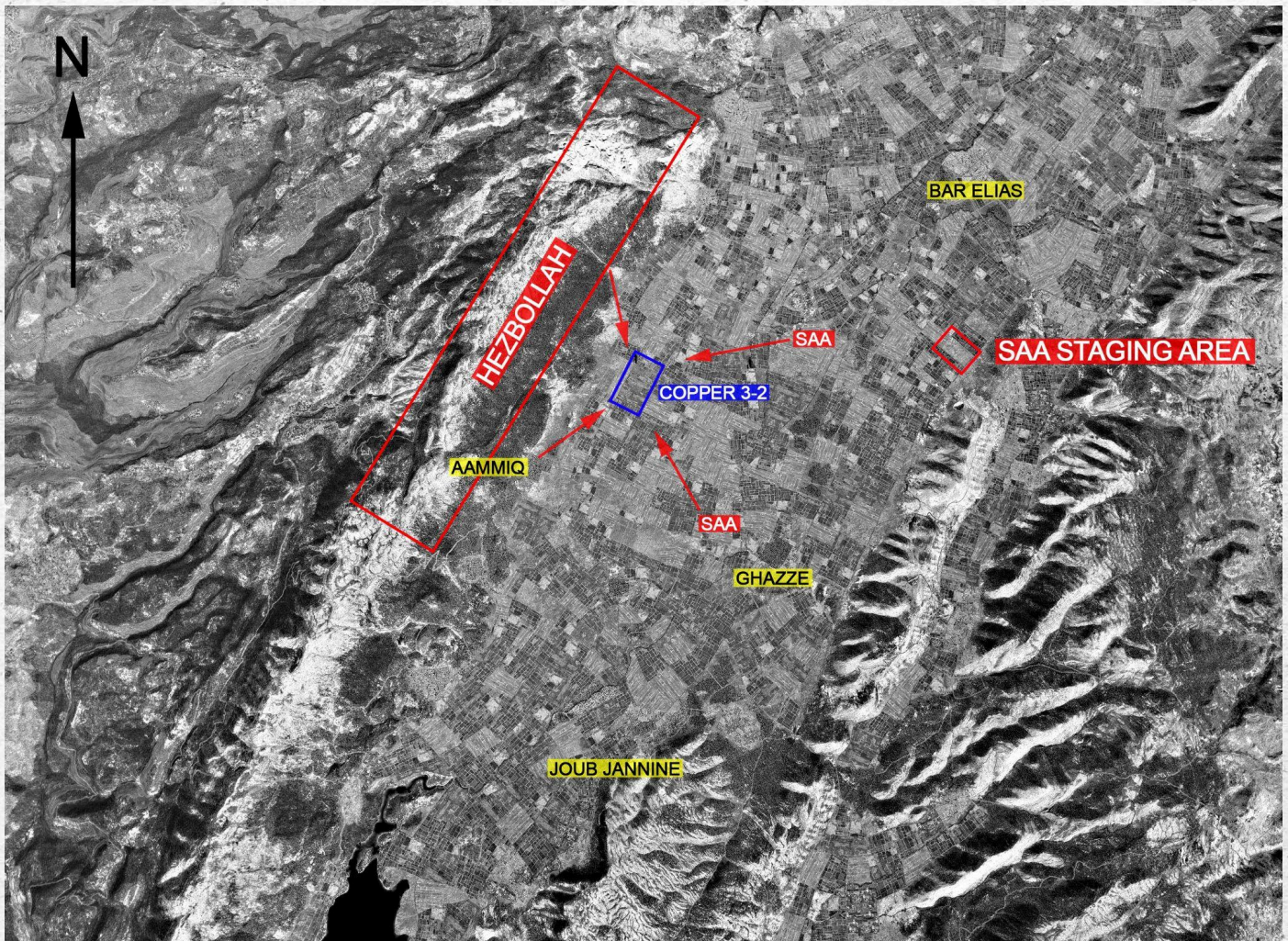
August 28th, 2013.

Well here we are back at Muwaffaq Salti. I expected to be back at Akrotiri by now after our mission working with Rock 3 around Qatana, but fate had other ideas.

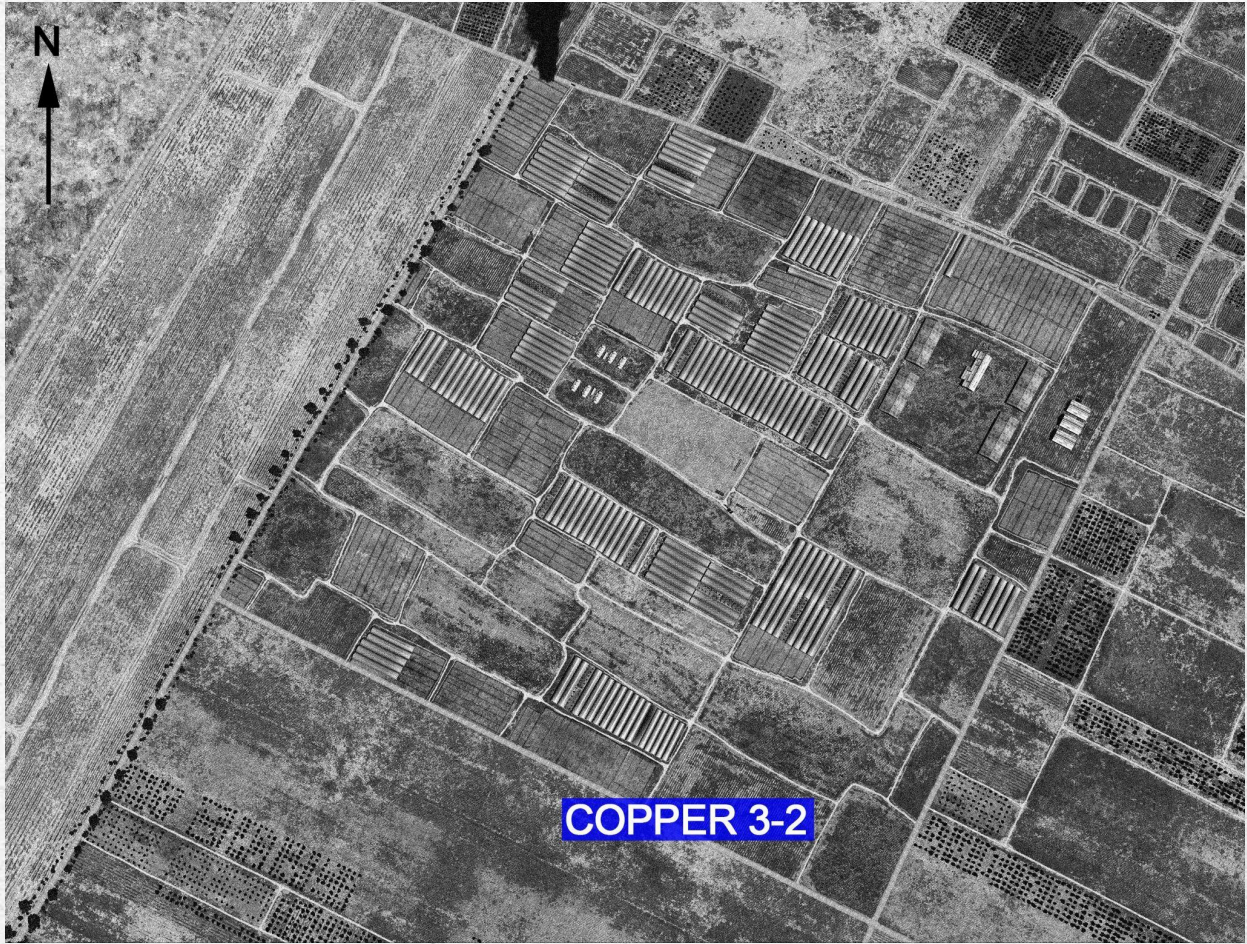
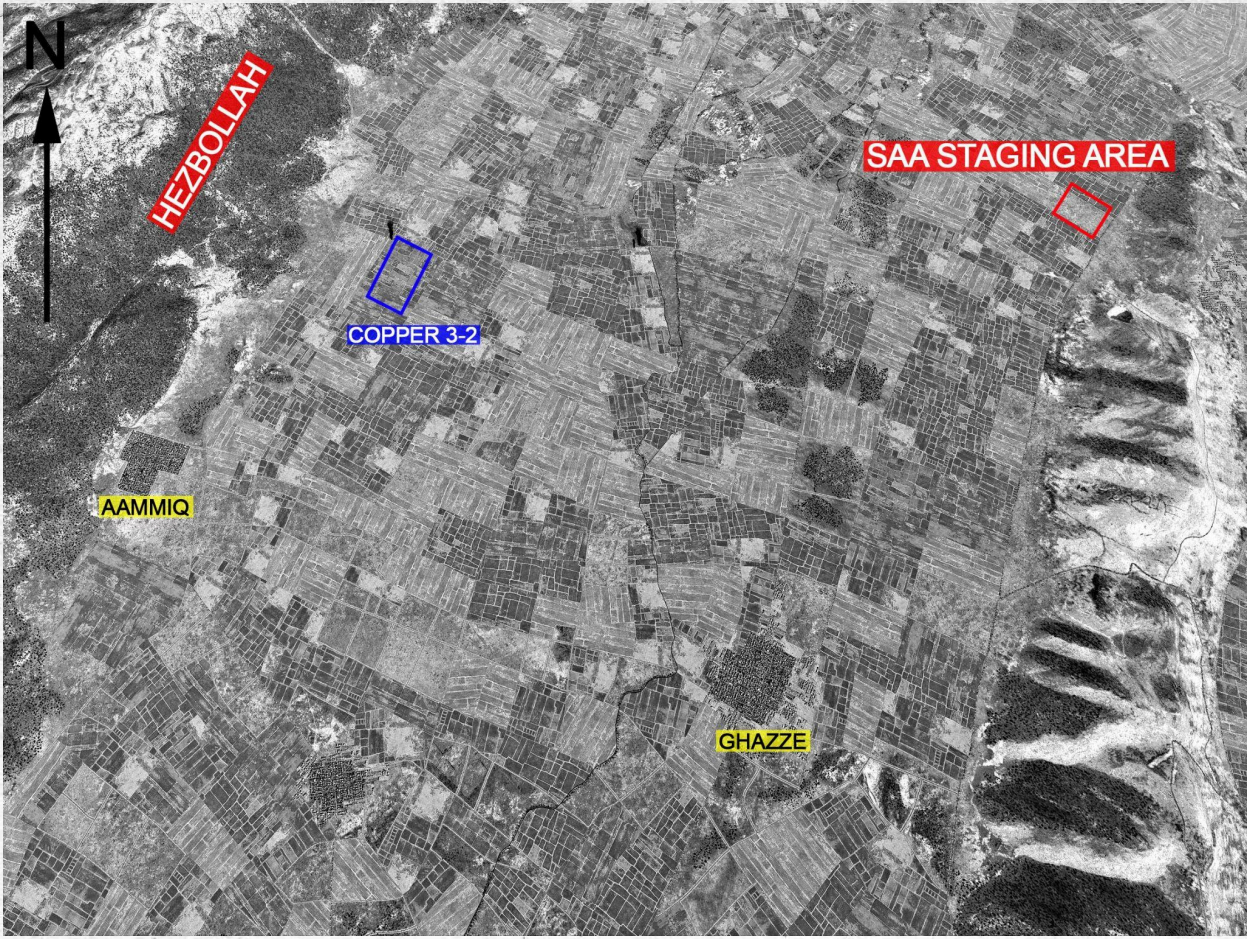
We were ordered to return here to get refueled, re-armed and ready for new urgent tasking although we weren't aware of why when we touched back down in Jordan. After parking the jets and leaving them to the ground crews, Boomer and I were met on the ramp by Shade and Bug. Crowding around a desk in one of the shelters, Shade laid out a series of maps and satellite imagery and began to fill us in on what had happened.

"Ok guys, there's a situation developing in the Bekaa valley, let me bring you up to speed. As you know the Syrians have been in the process of moving a large mechanized force south from the Bekaa to Qatana, in preparation to have it enter the fight around the Golan. What you might not know is that we had several teams of special operations forces in the valley as well, providing surveillance on Syrian and Hezbollah troop movements. One of these teams has been compromised and are cut off in the south Bekaa".

"This team is in a particularly perilous position, trapped between Hezbollah forces occupying the Lebanon mountains to the west, and Syrian armored forces to the east and southeast. They have gone defensive in this location, a farm complex northeast of the village of Aammiq, however both Syria and Hezbollah know where they are".



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"The SOF team's callsign is Copper 3-2. They have already beaten back several light probing attacks made against them so far, and have reported knocking out two T-72s in the process with AT weapons. This has given the Syrians pause for thought and bought a little time, but once the Syrians and Hezbollah figure out a large sustained attack will succeed then they have little chance of holding out. The army has Blackhawks inbound to extract the team and we have A-10s ready to provide CAS, but..."

"Let me guess..." I interrupted, "...too hot for them to get in at the moment?"

"How'd you guess", Shade replied sarcastically. "The Syrian mechanized formation comes equipped with a variety of SHORAD, this needs to be gone before the helos and A-10s can get in. The four of us will be providing force protection to the operation, relieving Sword 1 who are covering the first vul as we speak".

"What sort of SHORAD are we looking at?" I asked.

"Reports so far are of SA-9s and ZSU-23-4s as well. No reports yet of any SA-6s or SA-11s in the area but we should still be prepared for them just in case".

Shade continued, breaking down the mission.

Our takeoff time is 11:30Z. Once airborne we will rendezvous with Sword 3 at waypoint 1 before pushing back north into Syria via waypoint 2.

We will proceed north through Syria up to waypoint 4, again keeping clear of the Golan as we do so. At waypoint 3 we will turn northwest for waypoint 4, which marks our IP and the southern edge of our AOR. We should not fly south of waypoint 4 as this risks us encroaching upon the Golan.

Once on station at the target area, we should check in with Copper 3-2 before searching for and destroying any air defense units in the vicinity of the farm. Waypoint 5 is set on Copper 3-2's position, and waypoint 6 marks the SAA staging area.

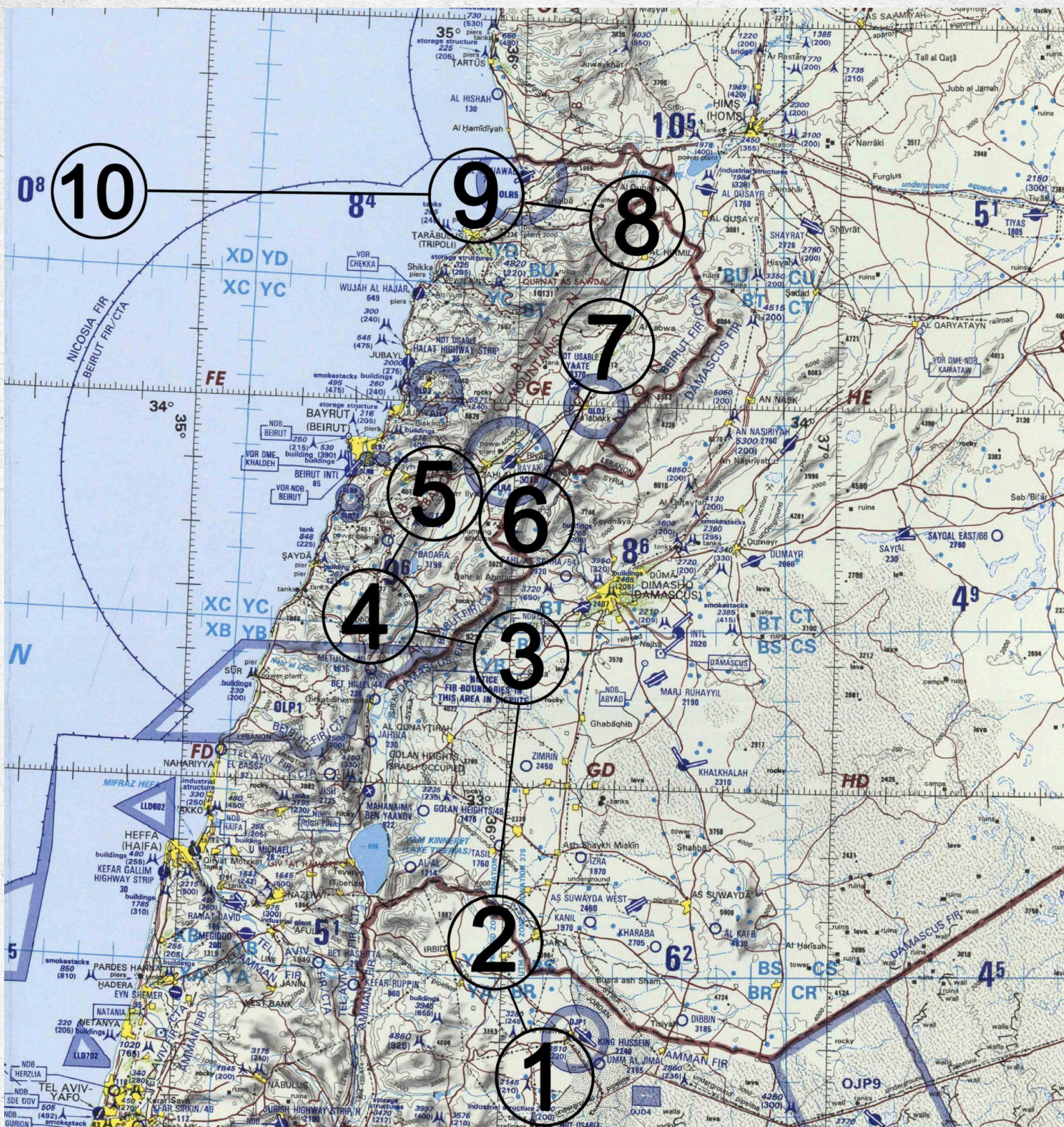
Once the area is clear of air defenses we will remain on station to cover the arrival of the A-10 flight (Gunman) and the Blackhawks (Archangel) as they begin the extraction of Copper 3-2. Once they are safely away we will rendezvous at the rally point at waypoint 7, before flowing back home to Akrotiri.

Stores of weapons at Muwaffaq Salti are beginning to run low and HARMS and Mavs are currently depleted so my loadout for this mission is 2 GBU-12s and 2 GBU-38s. Boomer will be carrying the same, with Shade and Bug carrying 2 GBU-31s each.

Bingo fuel for a return to Akrotiri is 3,100 lb.

As ever with operations in the Bekaa Valley, we are not authorized to cross the Lebanon mountains and enter the western, coastal region of Lebanon. Shade was really keen to emphasize this, there's a lot at stake in this operation and a lot of eyes watching it...and us.

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We finished up by discussing threats. After a hard day's work from our Weasel detachment we've already put a serious dent in the Syrian SAM umbrella in the south Damascus region, there are no indications currently of any remaining SA-6s or SA-11s in this area or in the Bekaa, but of course we should expect the unexpected. There will however be SHORAD units present in the Bekaa Valley and the Syria/Lebanon border region that are moving with the SAA units in this area. SHORAD we would typically expect to see with these sorts of formations would be ZSU-23-4, SA-8, SA-9, SA-13 and possibly SA-15. Hezbollah forces will likely have MANPAD systems as well so we should ensure we maintain a safe altitude whenever possible.

With the briefing finished we all set to work preparing for our individual flights, checking in with the crews working our jets and filling out new kneeboards. It's been a hell of a day so far, this is our third sortie since leaving Akrotiri and we're all tired and are being pushed to the edge. I could already tell during the briefing that fatigue was starting to creep in, but we've got guys on the ground in harm's way and I could see the determination in the others to get the job done.

Failure is not an option.