

November 29th, 2011.

Six days have passed since 1st Marine Division entered Kerman City. And what a welcome they received, hailed as liberators the Iranian civilians left in the city threw confetti from the rooftops and cheered the advancing Marine columns as heroes....no...wait that didn't happen at all.

It wasn't confetti...it was bullets, grenades and shells that were instead hurled at the Marines. And far from a welcoming crowd, it was hundreds of militia fighters that were waiting to meet the US soldiers. It would be fair to say that things aren't going the way the brass originally wanted.

But, we are Marines, we adapt, improvise and overcome. And if it's to be a fight, then it's a fight we will win.

The six days since the initial breaching of the city have settled into a pattern. One where militia fighters ambush our forces as they work to clear the city, extract maximum casualties then melt away as we bring our overwhelming firepower to bear. Progress has been slow, but steady and we've been chipping away at militia strong points and safehouses all week. More importantly it's been costly, 200 casualties on our side already down on the streets, heavens knows the cost to the enemy or civilians.

Our detachment has been pushed to the limit these last days, flying 2 or 3 sorties a day each as we maintain a constant presence over Kerman, we are all absolutely exhausted but we must continue, our troops on the ground need us now more than ever. The wider Marine air wing has been supporting us with Hornets and other platforms from the USAF have pitched in as well, but the vast bulk of the workload has been sitting with Det B this last week. But relief is in sight, Det B is to be relieved in two days time, with Det A coming out to Juliet to take our place. For now though, our work continues, we must struggle on through the fatigue, after all I am going out again this afternoon.

Having returned from a quiet XCAS mission this morning I debriefed, re-fuelled my body then went with Ein-Stein straight back into another briefing ahead of my second flight of the day. Mother and Noble were also present, but Baz and Chief were currently out on their own mission. Lowering myself wearily into a chair in our briefing room Mother immediately set about starting the briefing.

Captain Parkin was invited to begin. She briefed an update on weather for the rest of the day, thankfully the recent fine weather continues, with just scattered clouds and light winds to worry about across Kerman.

Once Parkin had departed Major Daniels began his latest intel update. He had little new information to update us on today, although the events of the last week have already revealed some important new intelligence information. The onslaught we faced as we entered the city was fierce, far fiercer than even our worst expectations. Ongoing operations have since revealed indications that we are facing more than just Basij in the city. The militia appears to be reinforced with IRGC special operations forces, specifically elements of the Saber Brigade - the IRGC's most elite troops. If these troops are indeed embedded with the militias then it can go a long way to explaining the effectiveness of their tactics.

The Basij/IRGC force doesn't have the manpower to hold ground across the entire city, instead they are concentrating their forces into certain areas of the city. These areas are riddled with safehouses, weapons caches and fortified 'strongpoint' buildings. When our ground forces move into one of these areas they are finding underground tunnels linking basements and holes knocked into adjoining walls of buildings. This is allowing the defending force to rapidly move between buildings, away from the constant surveillance we have overhead from our UAVs. It's an effective hit and run strategy, greatly complicating our mission in this dense urban environment.

The last new piece of intel we've been dealing with is the presence of Iranian aircraft over Kerman Province, we have seen three separate incursions by the IRIAF in the last 6 days, with Mig-21s, F-14s and F-5s all making a 'brief' appearance. Brief (and brave) because they were very quickly dealt with by our CAP, but perhaps a sign that the Iranian armed forces aren't going to roll over any time soon and are trying anything to attrit our forces, bloody our noses and make us lose the will to fight.

Once Daniels had concluded his intel brief he deperated, allowing Major Shaw to begin briefing us on today's operations in Kerman.

The Major began, "We continue to make steady progress across the city, the areas marked in blue on this map have been swept and secured by our Marines. Today's operations are focusing on the two districts in red. On the east of the city teams from RCT 1 are working to clear the University District, and in the northwest teams from RCT 5 are clearing a dense urban area that they've taken to calling 'The Maze'.

"Now these two areas offer distinctly different environments. The Maze is a very tightly packed urban area, this will be CQB of the highest order. The University District on the other hand is a more open area, with longer sightlines and a lot more space to work in".

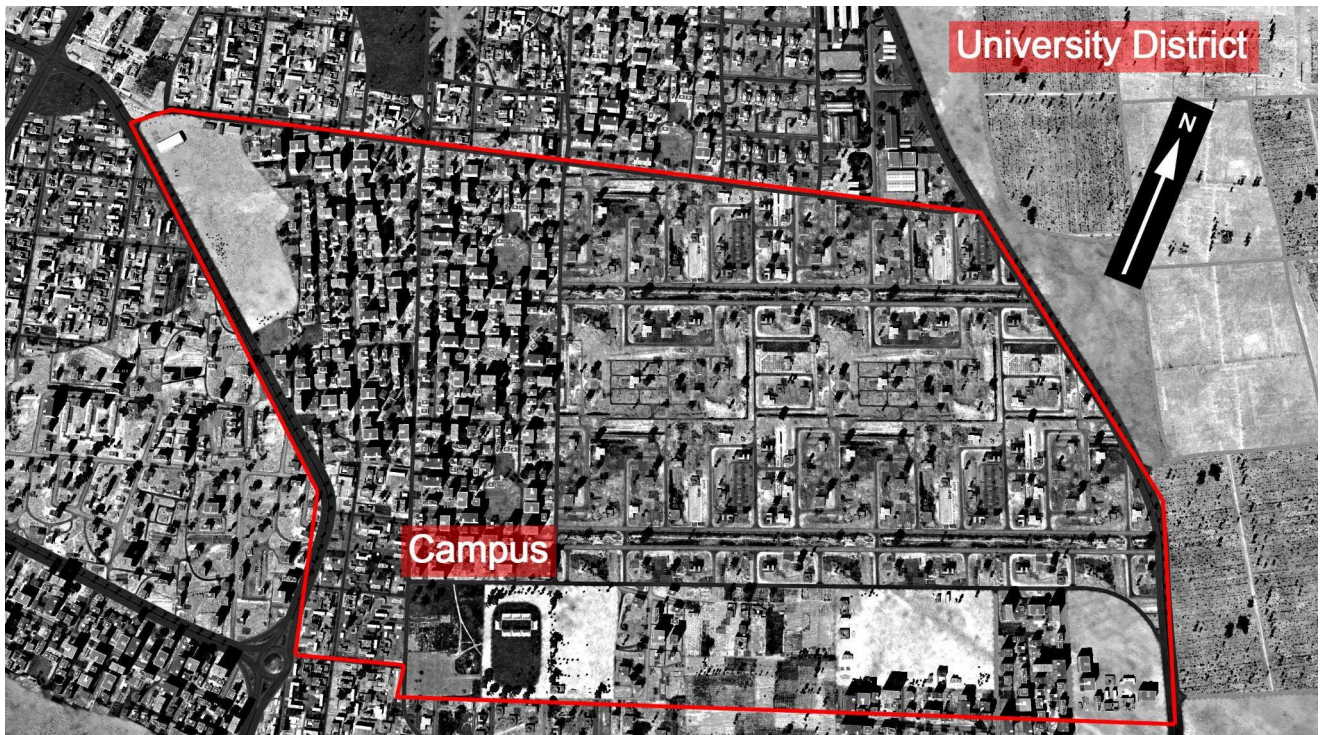
"We will be adopting the same strategy that we have with all the areas we've cleared so far. Our M1s and AAVs will secure the perimeter of each area, and then our troops and Humvees will move through each area systematically, clearing it compound by compound and building by building. We will be providing ISR to each area via two UAVs - Cyclops 1 and Cyclops 2".

"There will be several Sandman teams embedded with each ground force and they will of course be your primary contact if an ASR is made to Chieftain. Once again all attacks will be under FAC control - we're going to have a lot of friendlies in tight spaces down there, especially in The Maze."











"How hot do you expect these areas to be?" asked Mother.

"We think they're pretty hot," responded Major Shaw. "Intel believes the University District houses some significant weapons caches and safehouses so we expect to at least encounter resistance around these if we locate them. The Maze is almost guaranteed to be a brutal fight, it's tight alleyways and close buildings make it the perfect place for the Basij to hole up and draw us in...especially knowing how careful we are in trying to avoid collateral damage when employing air power. We expect to find a significant militia force there".

"How are we handling target identification?" I asked, "The Maze especially looks like it will make a talk on very difficult".

"You're right," replied Shaw. "Plan on the FACs giving out grids in UTM format, we will set precise target points for you, combined with some final checks from the FAC to make sure you're looking at the right target. The FACs have ROVER feed from Cyclops so they will be able to see a similar picture to you".

After nailing down all the details, Shaw departed and Mother was left to review the details of our planned flights.

Mother began, "As Major Shaw outlined, we will be providing on call CAS to the Marine units operating in The Maze and the University District. Contact with the enemy in these areas is pretty much guaranteed so consider it highly likely that you will be called in for air support".

"The ingress to Kerman will be the standard approach. Flights will form at waypoint 1 and then push through the flight plan to waypoint 3, which will again be the location of the CAS stack for Kerman. Waypoint 4 is designated on the University District and waypoint 5 on The Maze. As ever Chieftain will be connecting you to the ASRs being made on the ground".

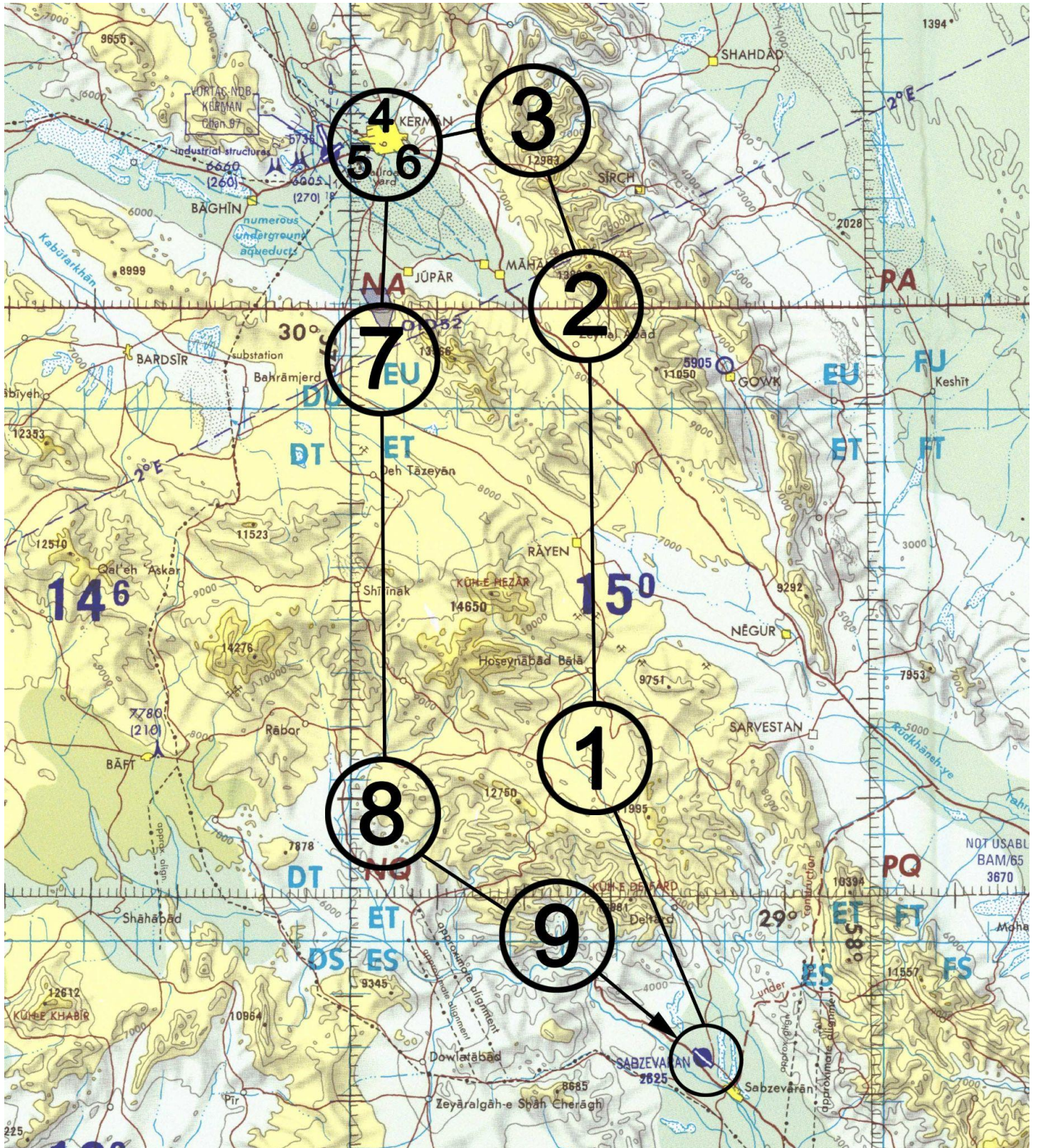
"What will be different however is that as of this morning KIAP is now up and running as a fully fledged FARP. It is now designated as FARP Kilo. To help increase our time over the target area we will be making immediate use of Kilo. However, pay close attention to the details in your briefing pack. We will not be using the main runway, the Iranians covered it in mines before we chased them off, and the clearance operation is not yet complete. Instead we will be utilising a 4000 foot taxiway as a landing strip, this should make for a much easier takeoff roll than at Romeo, but bear in mind the field elevation is still high at nearly 6,000 feet MSL".

"Kilo will be in your flight plans as waypoint 6, we've set this on the landing strip itself so it should be simple for you to locate it. Once your first overwatch is complete, land at Kilo, rearm and refuel and then get back overhead in the stack for your second vul period. After your second vul is over, RTB back here to Juliet. Bingo from Kerman to Juliet is 2,500 lb".

I asked another question, "What is the best approach for Kilo? I'm guessing coming in low over the city should be avoided".

Mother nodded, "I would avoid it unless absolutely unavoidable, a low approach over the city is just going to invite a MANPAD on to you. Far better to come in from the southwest and use the strip on heading 053".









FARP Kilo  
Strip Length 3900'  
Field Elev 5746'  
Heading 053 / 233

Operational Ramp

“What about loadouts?” I asked, “Assume we’re still keeping the heaters on?”. I was referring to the fact we had started carrying sidewinders again, in light of the resurgent air to air threats we could face.

“Correct” replied Mother, “This is one of the reasons for getting Kilo up and running, now we can ditch the fuel tanks again, freeing up space for more varied loadouts. For this mission your loadout will be 2 GBU 16’s, for any buildings you may need to drop, accompanied by two pods of APKWS and the gun - both of which are in acknowledgement of the tight urban areas you may well be employing in”.

“I also want you to pack NVGs, you’re going out later in the afternoon so there’s every chance the mission takes you beyond sunset”.

The briefing finished up by highlighting the threats we will see over Kerman. As ever the primary threat to us will be MANPADs, however the outside chance of Iranian air turning up is now present as well. To defeat the MANPAD threat we should look to maintain our altitude above 20,000 feet.

Once the briefing was complete, Ein-Stein and myself left the briefing room to finish preparing to depart Juliet once again. There’s no other way to put it...we’re absolutely exhausted, the pace has been relentless, just like the Iranian threat in Kerman. But the end is now in sight, two more days and we will be heading away from Juliet and some much needed rest. All we need to do is get through a couple more flights without screwing up.

Takeoff time is 15:00.