

July 15th, 2014. 03:00 Local.

It's been a long day and night at Ramat David. We landed here yesterday morning following our strikes on the Velikiy and Moskva, and once on the ground we turned our jets over to the maintainers and ordnance personnel who had arrived ahead of us. As our aircraft were being worked on Soprano and I watched a constant stream of US aircraft arrive at the base. We looked out for the rest of our squadron arriving, and upon spotting Flair, Boomer and Monk coming in to land made sure we were waiting for them as they disembarked their aircraft. We wanted news on Nomad, but one look at Monk's face told us everything we needed to know, Nomad hadn't made it. We shared a brief moment of grief, but we all knew there was work to do and quickly shut down our emotions - there'll be plenty of time for that later.

We set about making sure we were fed and ready to go out again as soon as we received orders, with Flair keeping a watchful eye over the progress of the ground crews. As this was going on we watched a number of USAF F-16, F-15Cs and Strike Eagles arrive, which were soon swarmed over by the ground crews. Eventually these aircraft departed again as phase two of Cerberus East began.

Two hours later these same aircraft returned, stripped of ordnance. We anticipated the commencement of our involvement in the operation, and were prepared to receive target instructions and begin planning our strikes. However instructions were not forthcoming and instead we watched the Vipers and Eagles re-arm, refuel and head out again.

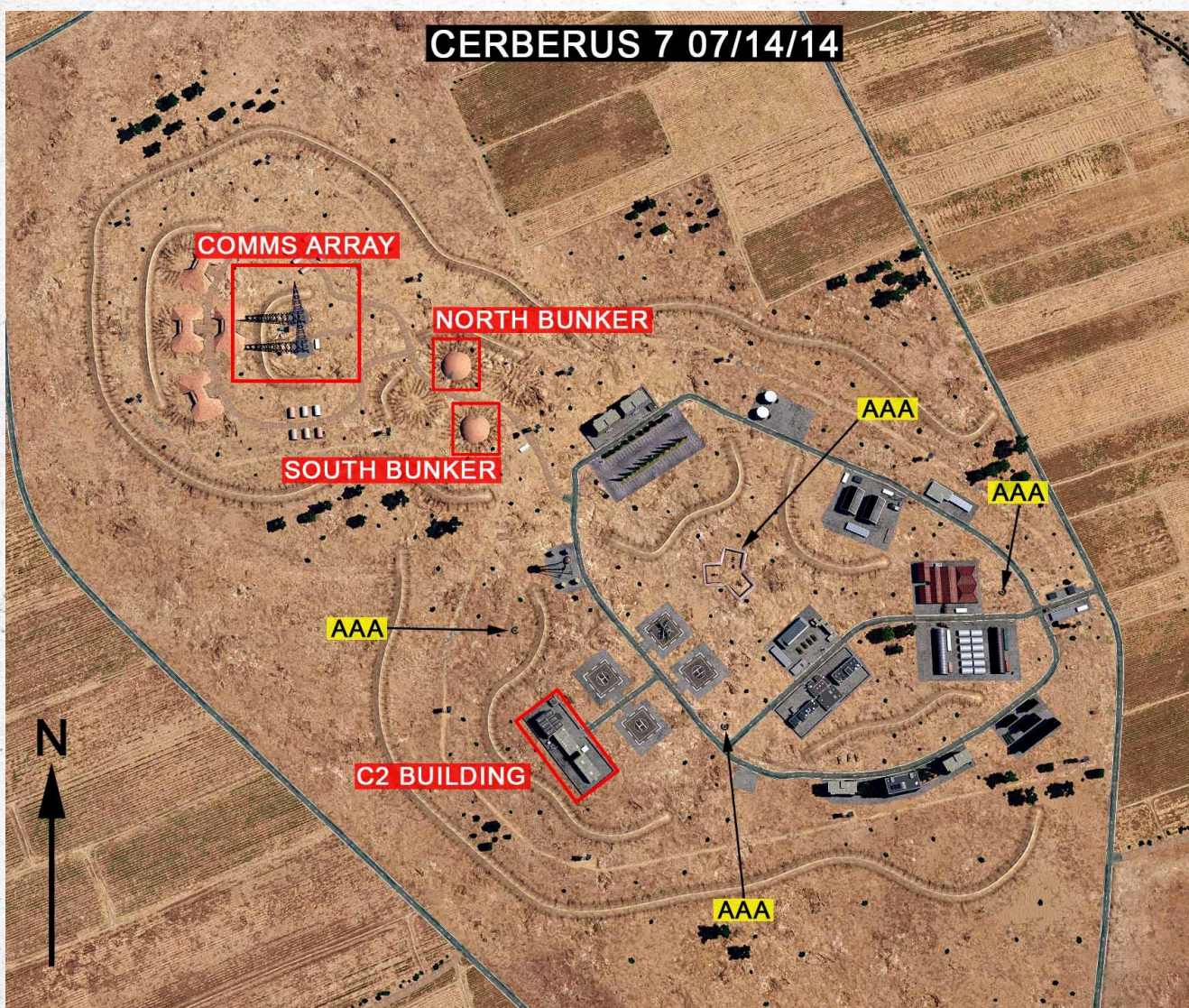
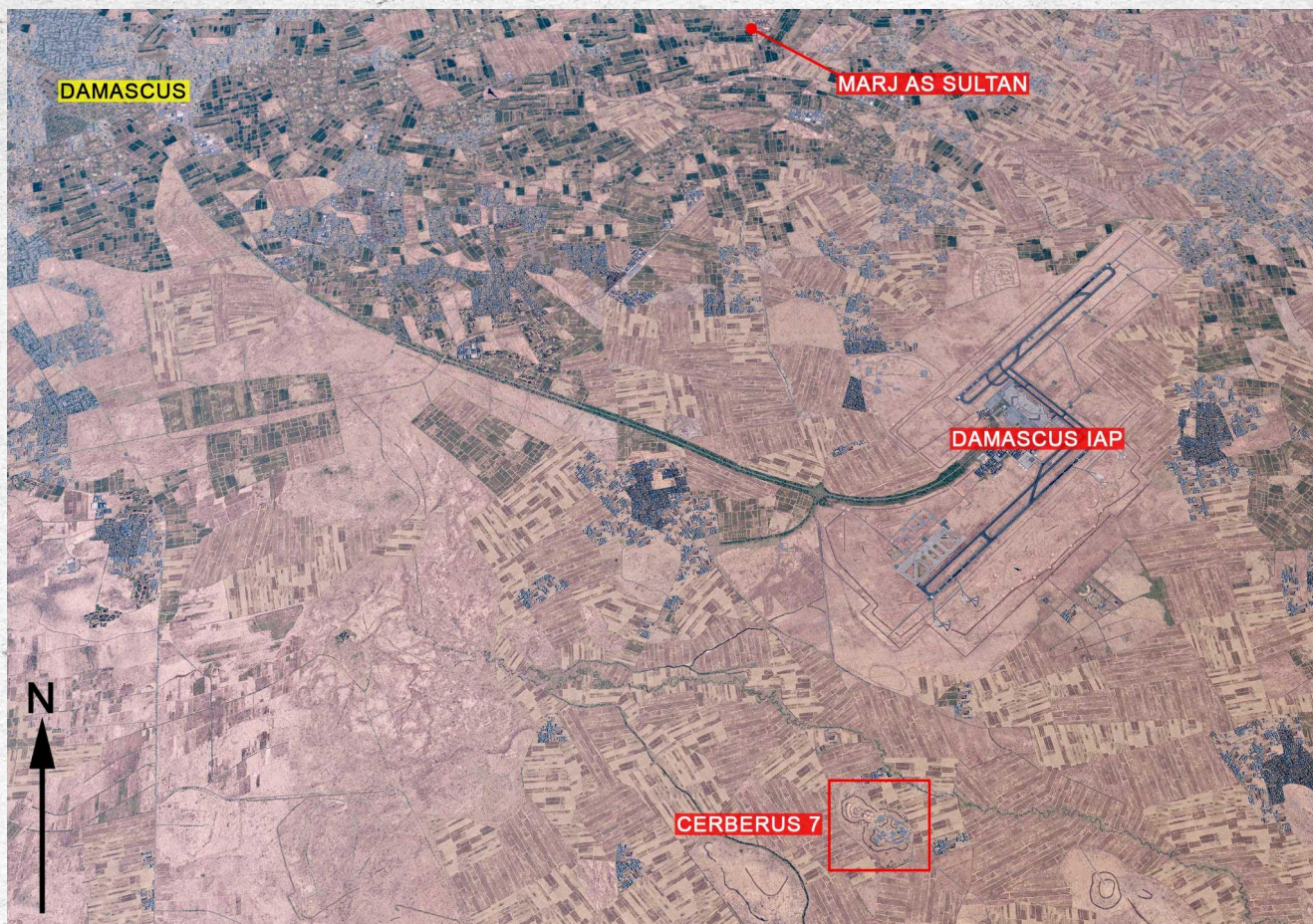
And so we waited, and watched, frustrated, with the process repeating itself several times. As we waited we received word on the status of the Russian ships we attacked, with the Moskva being reported sunk and the Pyotr Velikiy heavily damaged and under tow back to port. As darkness fell we found ourselves falling asleep in chairs as we waited, this went on through most of the night, with the sound of aircraft arriving and departing constantly awakening us. Eventually at around 2am we finally received word on our target packages and could begin preparing our strikes.

The objective of phase two of Cerberus East is to cause overwhelming damage to the Russian and Syrian military and force Russia to back down. The all too common phrase shock and awe has been bandied about here on the ground, I don't think we're bringing quite that much firepower to bear but you get the idea.

Soprano and myself have been assigned the target 'Cerberus 7'. This is a Kazan Group HQ facility in southern Syria, close to Damascus International Airport. Our two assigned primary targets at Cerberus 7 are a Kazan C2 building in the southwest corner of the base, and a communications array to the northwest of the facility. Both targets are to be totally destroyed. Two secondary targets have also been assigned at Cerberus 7, these are two munitions bunkers in the center of the facility.

Cerberus 7 is located 2 miles from Damascus IAP. Around eight miles to the north is the Syrian 'Marj as Sultan' facility and Damascus itself is 12 miles to the northwest. The Strikes returning through the night have reported at least one SA-3 and two SA-6s in this area, along with considerable amounts of SHORAD, the Weasels have reported possible kills on these SAMs but with nothing confirmed we will need to be alert to these potential threats. Cerberus 7 also contains a number of AAA positions, with both S-60 and ZU-23 present at the site.

Once all targets at Cerberus 7 have been destroyed, we will check back in with Sentinel to receive further targeting information.



To execute the mission we will depart Ramat David then head northeast to waypoint one - over the Sea of Galilee. From here we will head east, skirting the southern end of the Golan Heights.

From waypoint two we will turn northeast for our IP at waypoint three, fifteen miles west from Cerberus 7.

We will attack directly from the IP, Soprano will target the communications array and I will target the C2 building. There remains significant cloud cover over Syria, and with the uncertain SAM threat we should be prepared to adapt our attack plan to avoid both the weather and any threats. Once our primary targets are destroyed and if the situation allows it we will attack our secondary targets - Soprano will take the north target and I will target the southern bunker.

During our attacks we should take care to ensure we keep clear of Damascus IAP and it's significant concentration of SHORAD.

Once the targets at Cerberus 7 have been eliminated we will check back in with Sentinel to receive new targeting information and join the efforts to hunt down Russian, Kazan and Syrian forces.

Once we have expended all our weapons we will head west through southern Lebanon, going feet wet at waypoint five and recovering aboard the Truman. We anticipate case 1 operations and enhanced Red Crown procedures remain in effect.

The supply of JDAMs at Ramat David is almost exhausted so our loadout is light on these, with only two GBU-38s available for each of us. We will also each be carrying a high drag MK-83 and two GBU-12s. We agreed to not specify our weapons selection for our primary and secondary targets ahead of time, this will depend on the threat situation and cloud cover over the target and will be at our own discretion.

Jordan has denied the use of their airspace for offensive operations against Russia so we should ensure we keep clear of Jordanian airspace.

Bingo fuel is 4,600 lb, with our divert being Akrotiri.

Reports of comms jamming continues and we've been assigned a new set of 'Chattermark' frequencies - listed as 'Charlie' in our kneeboards.



The threat picture remains unclear as the Weasels have been targeting SAMs, but with confirmation of kills still pending. Boomer chatted with a Weasel pilot he knew from his time on exchange and brought back the most up to date intel he could and we marked the threats on our kneeboards. Mobile SHORAD systems remain a concern and we anticipate SA-8, SA-15 and SA-19 to be highly active in theater, along with significant amounts of AAA. All this means we should be careful as we chase new targets around Syria and Lebanon. Although the two main Russian naval threats have been taken off the board, a number of smaller Russian ships, equipped with variants of both SA-8 and SA-15 remain off the coast of the Russian quarter and we should take care to avoid this area and only transit across the sea from waypoint 5. EW support has been requested and denied, with EW assets being tied up supporting high value assets on their strikes. We are however expecting a flight of Wild Weasels to be assigned to support us, Sentinel will pass details when in the air. OCA flights have been targeting Syrian and Russian aircraft so a limited air to air threat is expected.

Finally, with the mission briefed and prepared, Soprano and I stepped to our aircraft. As we did so I thought back on the events that have led us up to this point, there's been an inevitable feeling that this is where we would end up, dragged back into a conflict that some say we have no business being involved in. Maybe they're right, then again maybe if we have the power to intervene then it's the responsible thing to do. Ultimately though that's not our decision, my immediate concern is to get the job done, not screw up and to make sure both me and Soprano come home safely. As my thoughts wandered, my mind drifted back to a year ago and the missions we flew around Damascus and southern Syria, these were tough, dangerous missions, and I feared we might be about to experience something similar. But I can't allow thoughts like these to distract me from the mission ahead, this operation is designed to end this conflict quickly and decisively. There's a lot riding on it - not least the survival of Soprano and myself - so I pushed all erroneous thoughts from my mind, steadied my nerves and let my mind focus on the job ahead.

Let's get it done.