



**42<sup>nd</sup> Anniversary**  
**Iran Hostage Crisis and**  
**Operation EAGLE CLAW**

**DICE REGION VIII**  
**VETERANS' DAY 2022**

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

And so, my fellow Americans:  
ask not what your country  
can do for you... ask what  
you can do for your country.

John F. Kennedy

# Birth of SOF

- ▶ Outcome of Iranian failure and poor performance in Grenada
- ▶ President Carter is not re-elected brings in Reagan Era
- ▶ 1983 - Grenada and Beirut
  - ▶ FBI forms the Hostage Rescue Team (trained by Delta)
- ▶ Presidential Directive on Terrorism
- ▶ Congress demands more action by DoD
  - ▶ October 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act & SOCOM
  - ▶ Warfighting authority moves from Service Chiefs to GCCs

# November 4, 1979

- ▶ Student militants incite thousands of Iranians to seize the US Embassy – 66 Americans are taken hostage (3 in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), 6 others avoid capture and are hidden by the Canadian Embassy



# US Embassy - Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs



# Joint Task Force 1-79

## ▶ Task Force Headquarters

- ▶ Created within a week of November 4, 1979
- ▶ Less than 75 personnel
- ▶ Key personnel from JCS J3 Special Operations Division (today's DDSO)
- ▶ MG James Vaught, MG Phillip Gast, COL Jerry King, Lt Col Rod Lenahan

## ▶ Operational Units

- ▶ 1st SFOD-D; Detachment A (Berlin); C Company 1<sup>st</sup> Ranger Bn
- ▶ 1<sup>st</sup> Special Operations Wing; Military Airlift Command C-141s and Tankers
- ▶ Ad hoc helicopter squadron

## ▶ Operational Concepts Considered and Discarded

- ▶ Airborne infiltration
- ▶ Airlanding in Tehran or outlying airfield seizure
- ▶ Clandestine land infiltration

# Out of Range for One Night Mission



# Friendly Situation on November 4

- ▶ No advance indicators and warning of the event
- ▶ Middle East in turmoil with no close-in launch bases for US
- ▶ No stay-behind intelligence agents in Iran
- ▶ US Special Operations at a low ebb
  - ▶ <4,000 Special Forces and 3 Ranger Battalions
  - ▶ 1<sup>st</sup> SFOD-D completed international validation on November 4
  - ▶ Only one Air Force Special Ops Wing with only 20 aircraft
  - ▶ <1,000 SEALs, no Marine Special Operations
  - ▶ Few air-refuelable helicopters
- ▶ No Standing Counterterrorism Headquarters



# Enemy Situation on 4 November 1979

- ▶ **Unknown number of hostage-takers**
- ▶ **Modernized Iranian military**
  - ▶ M60 tanks; F-14, F-4 and F-5 aircraft
  - ▶ Improved HAWK air defense missile systems
  - ▶ 415,000 in uniform
  - ▶ Paramilitary police units
  - ▶ Pasdaran (today's Revolutionary Guards)
- ▶ **Tehran population of 5 million with anti-American sentiments**

# Enemy on 24 April 1980

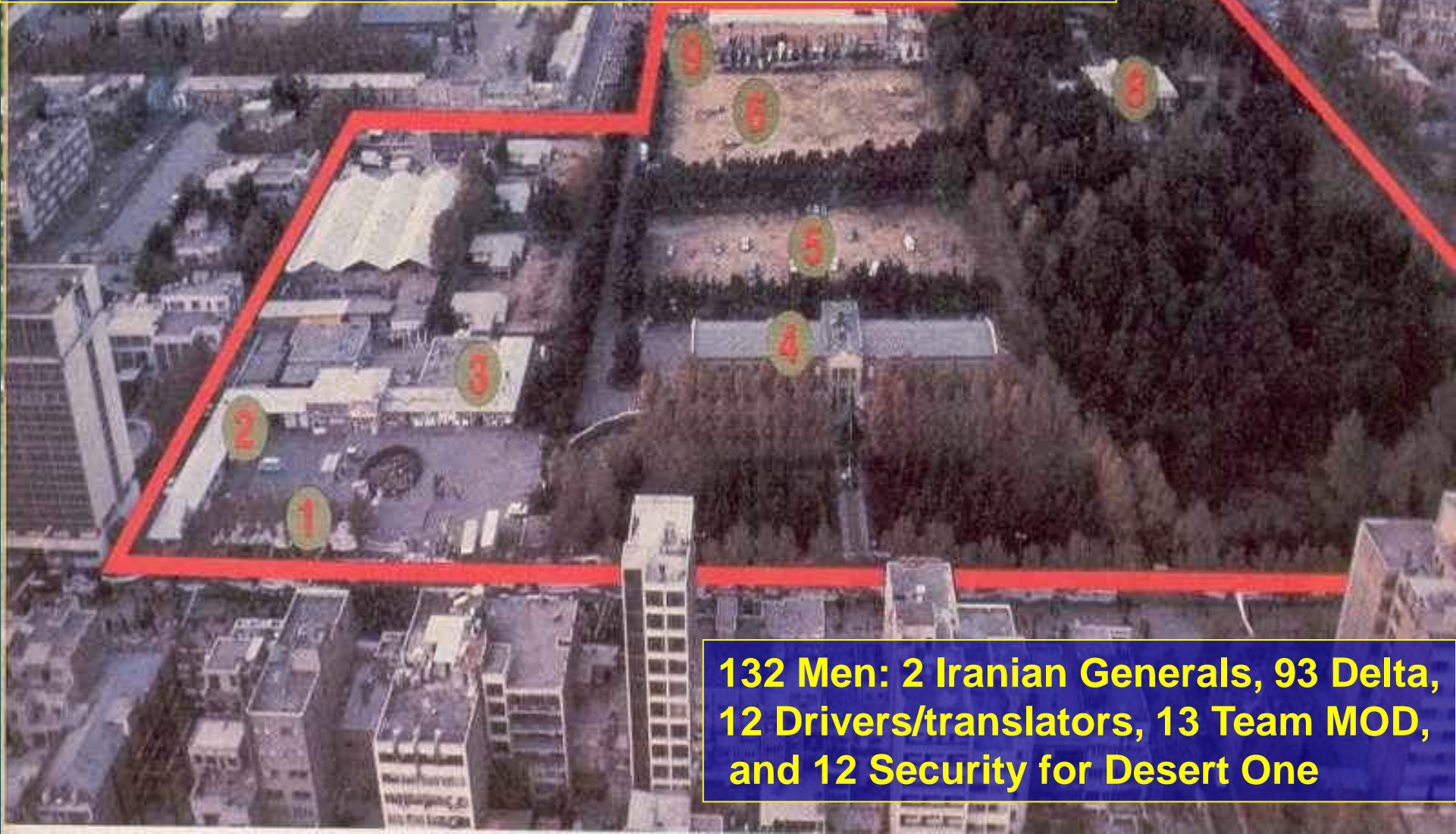
## ▶ Guard Force

- ▶ Day 60, night 40 armed with G-3 rifles and pistols
  - ▶ Mostly students, Pasdaran militia, Fatah trained militants, Student/Religious leaders, PLO Advisors

## ▶ Reaction Force

- ▶ 0-5 minutes: local guards, surrounding buildings
- ▶ 10-15 minutes: Student HQ, Pasdaran militia 75-100
- ▶ 15-30 minutes: Pasdaran reinforcements 200+
- ▶ 45-60 minutes: **IRG and 2,000-3,000 local mob**
- ▶ 60 minutes: **time for Iranian to launch Army Helos and Air Force F-4s, F-14As**

- Situation: Recover US Hostages: 66 = 13 + 3 + 50 (+6)
- Spread out over 26 acres at the Embassy and the MOD
- Half the world away
- With minimal collateral damage in one night
- No reserve or QRF



132 Men: 2 Iranian Generals, 93 Delta, 12 Drivers/translators, 13 Team MOD, and 12 Security for Desert One

# Final Operational Concept: 3 Phases and 2 Nights

## Phase 1

- ▶ Desert 1 refuel site recon and landing lights emplacement (March)
- ▶ CIA puts Bob Plan into Tehran
  - ▶ Procurement of trucks and warehouse
- ▶ Covert infiltration of 4-person advance team
- ▶ Recon of Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- ▶ Move to Intermediate & Forward Staging bases
  - ▶ Wadi Qena in Egypt
  - ▶ Masirah Island, Oman; and USS Nimitz



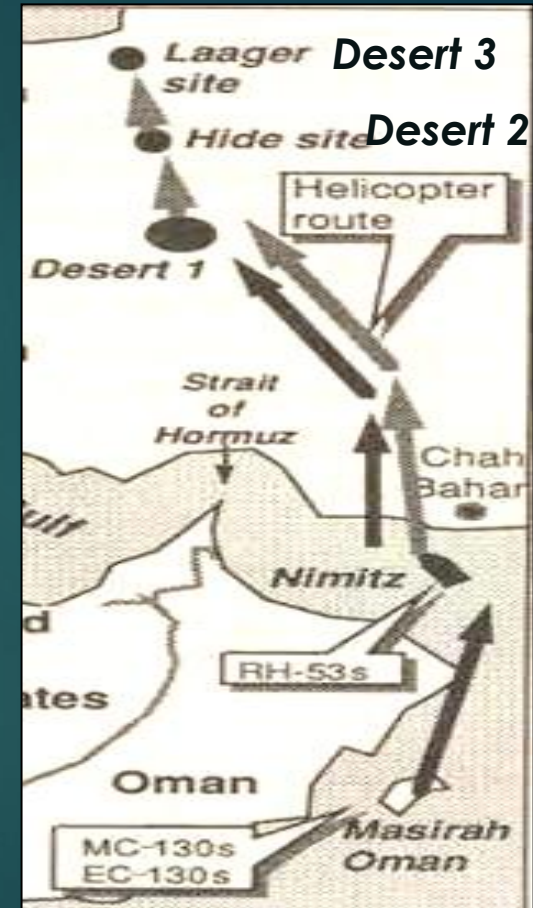
## Phase 1 Actions Determined the Night One Plan



# Final Operational Concept

## Phase 2 (Night 1)

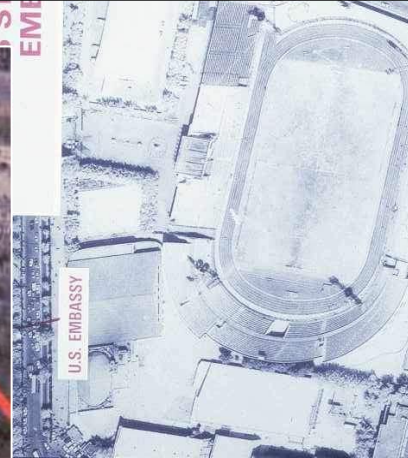
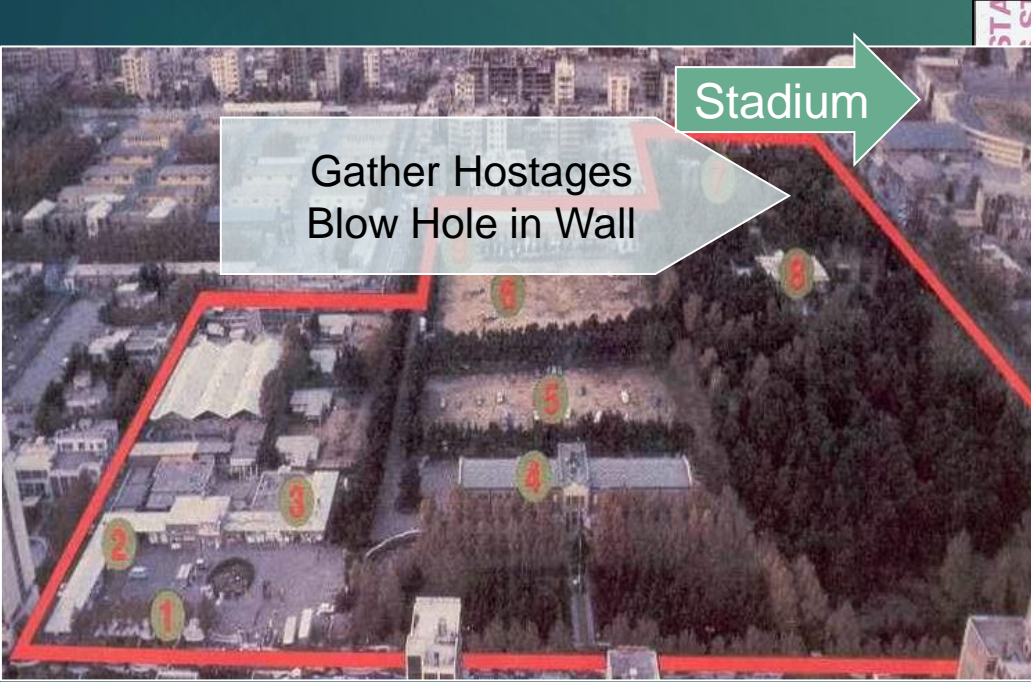
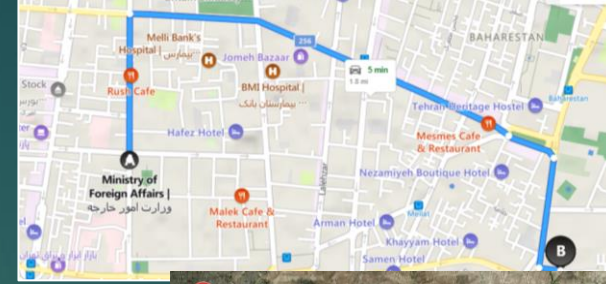
- ▶ 1 MC-130 to launch from Masirah at same time 8 helos launch from USS Nimitz - check LZ and establish security
- ▶ 2 MC-130s & 3 EC-130s w/fuel depart Masirah an hour later
- ▶ About 1 hour after first MC-130 lands, other five MC/EC-130s arrive followed by helos
- ▶ Refuel helos and deliver Assault Force to Desert 2 Garmsar area
- ▶ Helos fly to Desert 3, mountainous area and locate suitable landing zone
- ▶ Hide out for the day



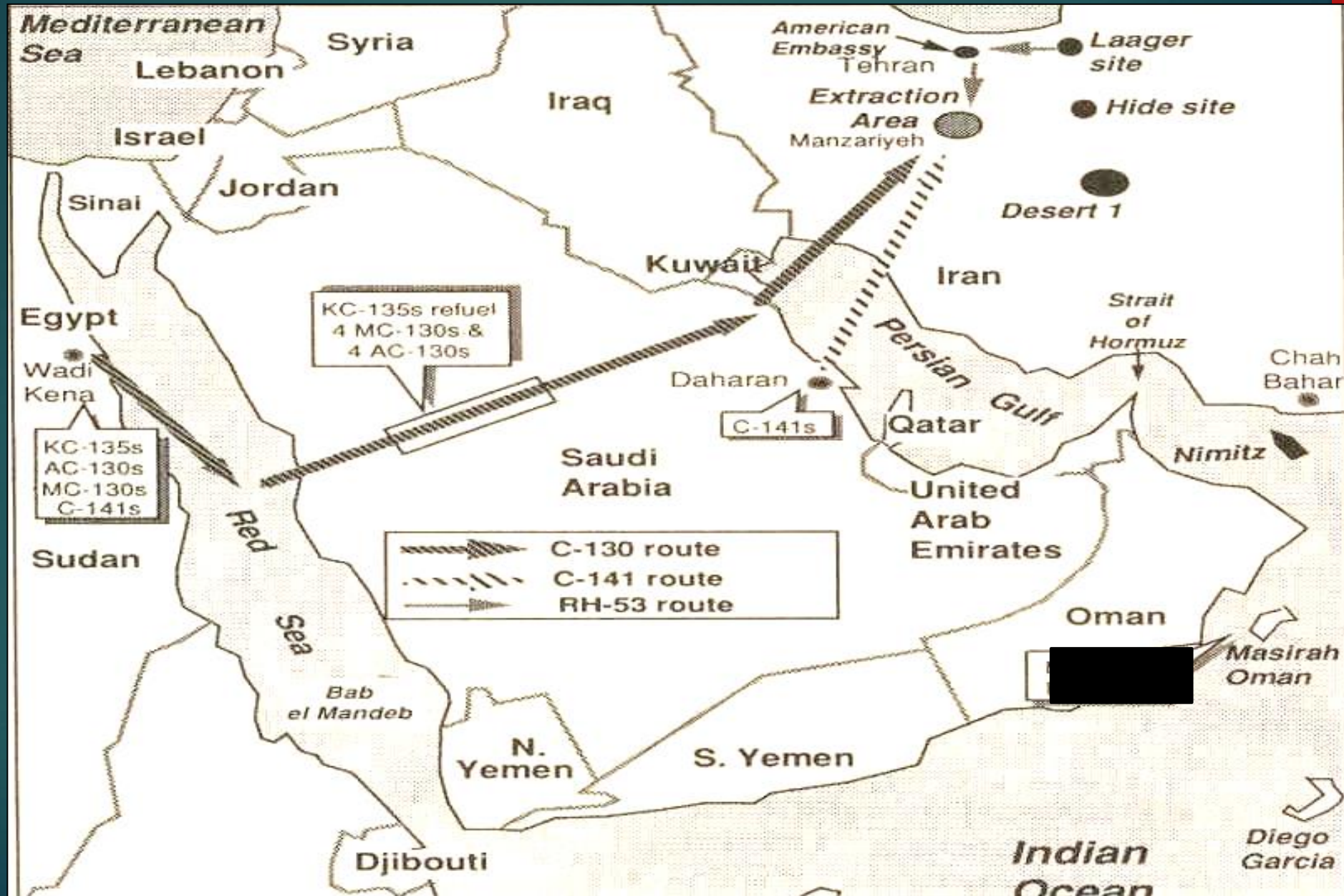
# Final Operational Concept

## Phase 3 (Night 2)

- ▶ Vehicle movement to Embassy & MFA; Recover hostages
- ▶ 4 AC-130s provide support in Tehran; (E&E)
- ▶ Assault Force move hostages to Soccer stadium
- ▶ 1 Helo extracts Det A and 3 hostages from MFA
- ▶ Rangers seize Manzariyeh airstrip for Helos, 3 MC-130s & 2 C-141s (one hospital configuration)
- ▶ Move to Manzariyeh on helicopters, destroy helicopters, C-141 exfil



# Air flow - Night Two Plan



# Rangers – Security Force





# 3 MC-130 and 3 EC-130s



## NVG & Cockpit Limitations

EC-130 (refuel) in Accident

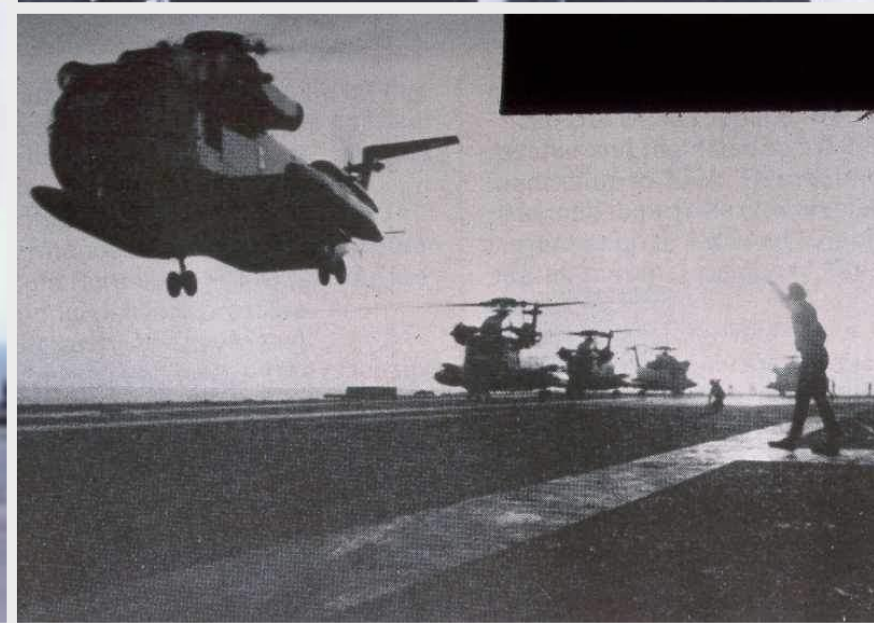


# Navy RH-53 Sea Stallion Mine Sweeper, Marine Role

Departing the US



Deployed in Persian Gulf



# So, What Happened?

- ▶ MC & EC130s arrive on schedule
- ▶ Helicopters begin to arrive an hour later
  - ▶ Jim Schaefer is the first one in
  - ▶ **6 of 8 arrive, 6 are required**
- ▶ Only 5 flyable helos... **Abort**
- ▶ Plan is to fly helos back to the Nimitz
- ▶ Helicopter banks into EC-130 with B Squadron on board
- ▶ Disaster





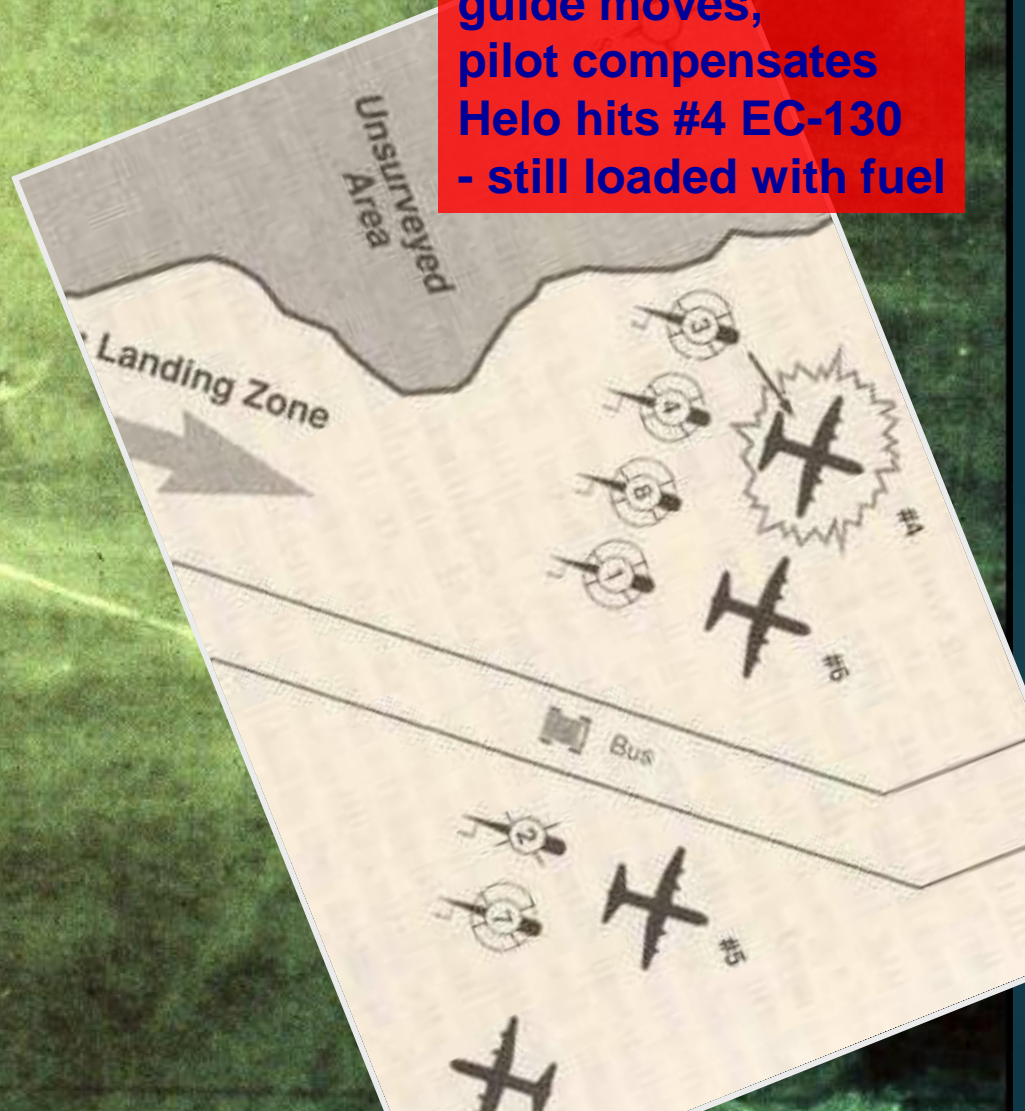
3. #4 RH-53 hydraulics fail,  
CDR & President determine  
extract, go again tomorrow

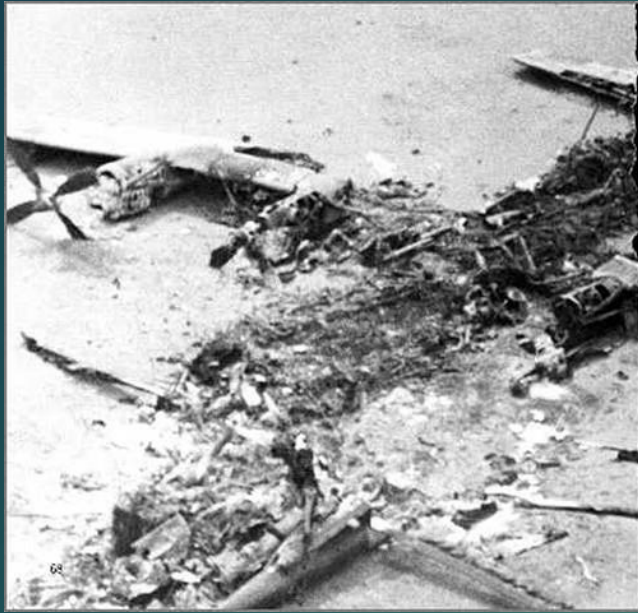
2. Smugglers Gas  
Truck Hit – huge fire

1. Bus seized,  
43 people, put on  
#1 MC-130



4. #3 RH-53 lifts off,  
guide moves,  
pilot compensates  
Helo hits #4 EC-130  
- still loaded with fuel





# 20 January 1981

- ▶ 444 days after the seizure, 52 Hostages are released!



# Initial Capabilities that Evolved



*No Greater Love has a man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.* John 15:13



TSG Joel C. Mayo, USAF age 34



MAJ Harold L. Lewis, Jr., USAF age 35



CAPT Lyn D. McIntosh, USAF age 33



CAPT Charles T. McMillan II, USAF age 28



SGT John D. Harvey, USMC, age 21



MAJ Richard L. Bakke, USAF age 33



CPL George N. Holmes, Jr., USMC, age 22



SSGT Dewey L. Johnson, USMC, age 31