RWI-BRIEF-004 — The C-146A at Al-Watiya, 14 December 2015: movements and other air traffic

Companion to RWI-HC-003-P2 (Al-Watiya, the whole of December 2015). Window 7–21 December 2015. Sources: the Libyan Air Force post and photos of 16 Dec 2015; Flightradar24 as reported by Civ & Mil Air and The Aviationist; press and official statements; Sentinel-2 imagery of the base. RWI's own ADS-B archive does not reach 2015, so no track here is RWI's own. Times: Libya = UTC+2. Issued 28 Oct 2026. LLM-assisted analysis; check quotes against the originals before publishing.

REPORTER LEADS — things in our data that no public reporting explains yet. Leads, not findings: each needs a reporter to confirm or kill it.

L1. Where did the C-146A go when it flew back toward Libya from Pantelleria later on 14 Dec 2015?
Pantelleria (LICG) → Libya, afternoon/evening 14 Dec 2015
Why it is a lead: The Aviationist reported the aircraft flew 'again towards Libya later on the same day from Pantelleria'. No destination has been reported. The Pentagon said personnel 'traveled to Libya' with Libyan concurrence — the second trip may be the one that was planned.
What would settle it: AFRICOM/SOCAFRICA: second destination; Flightradar24: historical playback of 13097 / MAGMA30 for 14 Dec 2015. (Plate R1)

L2. Did the team arrive 'with their vehicles' — and on what?
Al-Watiya, 14 Dec 2015
Why it is a lead: HoR member Ali Tekbali tweeted that 20 US soldiers were 'dropped with their vehicles'. Only one aircraft is on the record, a 21 m Dornier 328; Photo 3 shows gear loaded onto a light vehicle of unknown ownership.
What would settle it: Libyan Air Force / Abu Bakr al-Siddiq Battalion: whose vehicle is in Photo 3; any second aircraft. (Plate G2)

1. Bottom line

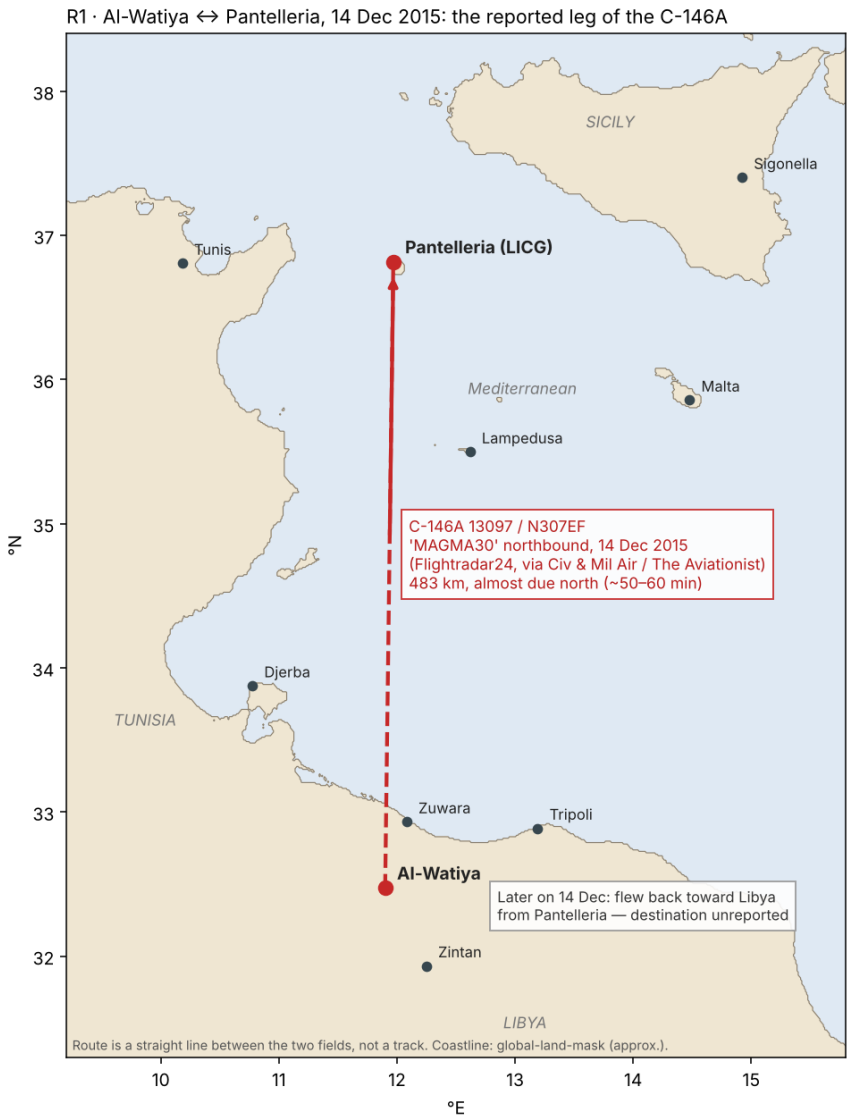
1.1 **One aircraft is on the record:** USAF **C-146A Wolfhound 11-3097** (tail 13097; Dornier 328-110 MSN 3097; formerly N307EF and D-CPRW), 524th Special Operations Squadron, 27th Special Operations Wing. It landed at Al-Watiya in the dark early on 14 Dec, stayed for at least two and a half hours, and was tracked flying **north** afterwards as **MAGMA30**. Africa Express reported it landed at **Pantelleria** the same day — 483 km almost due north, about an hour's flight. Later that day it **flew back toward Libya** from Pantelleria; where it went has never been reported.

1.2 **No public track exists for the inbound flight.** Its origin was never stated. Pantelleria is the likeliest staging point: the same aircraft routinely flew between Stuttgart and southern Italy, "especially Pantelleria" (The Aviationist), and Italian reporting describes Pantelleria as the technical-stop base for US special-forces flights into Libya.

1.3 **No other aircraft is reported coming into Al-Watiya in the window.** Sentinel-2 on 25 November and 25 December shows no large aircraft on the runway, taxiways or aprons, and no change to them (R2). A transport would be visible at 10 m; a small aircraft or a fighter might not. The New America airstrike database lists no LNA, GNC or foreign airstrike anywhere in western Libya between 18 October 2015 and 31 January 2016 (all strikes in the week before the landing were in Benghazi and Ajdabiya), and no aircraft loss in the west from August to December; no report puts any sortie from Al-Watiya in December. Il Post and Breitbart describe the base as an LNA strike base in general terms only. SOFREP (January 2016) adds that men from a second militia at the base threatened to detain the team.

2. Timeline

When (local, UTC+2)	UTC	What	Source
14 Dec 06:00	04:00	US military aircraft lands at Al-Watiya with 20 soldiers, "without prior coordination" with the base protection force; troops in combat posture, night-vision devices. Sun 26° below the horizon.	Libyan Air Force post, 16 Dec
14 Dec 07:30	05:30	Aircraft arrives (alternative time). Still before sunrise.	Zintan Thunderbolt Brigade statement, 18 Dec
14 Dec 08:05	06:05	Sunrise at the base.	ERA5 / Open-Meteo; RWI calculation
14 Dec ~09:30	~07:30	About two hours after arrival, an Abu Bakr al-Siddiq Brigade group led by al-Ajami al-Atiri cordons the area and tries to take the team to Zintan.	Zintan Thunderbolt Brigade (Libya Observer, Libyan Express)
14 Dec, after ~08:30	after ~06:30	Three photos taken in full sunlight: team beside the C-146A, a team member with a suppressed carbine, gear loaded onto a light vehicle (G2).	Libyan Air Force post; RWI sun analysis
14 Dec, "hours after"	—	Team leaves; per the Libyan Air Force after all equipment was seized, saying they were headed to Italy.	Libyan Air Force; Libyan Express
14 Dec	—	C-146A tracked northbound as MAGMA30 on Flightradar24; lands at Pantelleria "coming from al-Watiyah".	Civ & Mil Air (X), The Aviationist; Africa Express
14 Dec, later	—	C-146A flies toward Libya again from Pantelleria. Destination unreported.	The Aviationist
16 Dec	—	Libyan Air Force posts the photos and statement on Facebook.	Libyan Air Force
17 Dec	—	AFRICOM/Pentagon: personnel "traveled to Libya on 14 December" with the concurrence of Libyan officials; left "without incident" when militia demanded it. Libyan Political Agreement signed at Skhirat the same day.	Pentagon to The Guardian; AFRICOM via Guns.com



R1 · The reported leg: Al-Watiya to Pantelleria, 483 km almost due north. A straight line between the two fields, not a track.

Libyan Air Force Facebook post, 16 Dec 2015 — the three photos of the 14 Dec landing at Al-Watiya

Photo 1 · suppressed carbine; concrete hardstand



Photo 2 · C-146A '13097' (N307EF), left side, nose to the left, sunlit; base pickup



Photo 3 · gear loaded onto a light vehicle; single-storey building, water tank, eucalyptus; power line on horizon



Source: Libyan Air Forces Chief of Staff page (Facebook), facebook.com/libyan.air.forces/posts/1071558019541128 (archived 5 Jan 2026). Reproduced for analysis.

G2 · The Libyan Air Force photos, 16 Dec 2015. Photo 2 shows the tail number 13097.

G1 · Al-Watiya airfield, Sentinel-2 25 Dec 2015 (10 m) — the photos against our imagery



North up. Photo 2 fits the runway/west taxiways (aircraft facing W–SW); Photos 1 and 3 cannot be placed on individual buildings at 10 m. Contains modified Copernicus Sentinel data 2015.

G1 · The C-146A in Photo 2 was facing west to south-west, consistent with the runway and the western taxiways (from HC-003-P2).

R2 · Al-Watiya runway, taxiways and aprons either side of the landing: no large aircraft parked on either date

Sentinel-2, 25 Nov 2015 (19 days before)



Sentinel-2, 25 Dec 2015 (11 days after)



10 m pixels: a transport (Il-76, C-130, ~30–47 m) would show as a dark or bright cross of 3–5 pixels; a Do-328 (21 m) or a fighter may not. Contains modified Copernicus Sentinel data 2015.

R2 · The movement area 19 days before and 11 days after: unchanged, and no large aircraft.

3. What doesn't add up

1. **Coordination.** The Pentagon says the trip had "the concurrence of Libyan officials"; the Libyan Air Force says the aircraft landed "without prior coordination" with the base protection force, and the team itself said it had coordinated with "some parties in the Libyan army". Which officials agreed has never been said. Who told them to leave also varies: a base commander (Libyan Air Force), "a local militia" (Pentagon), "national army troops" (The New Arab), a second militia at the base (SOFREP), or the Abu Bakr al-Siddiq Brigade (Zintan statement).

2. **Two arrival times, both in the dark.** 06:00 (Libyan Air Force) and 07:30 (Zintan statement) are both before the 08:05 sunrise. The photos were taken in daylight, so the team was on the ground at least two and a half hours.

3. **Two callsigns.** The Aviationist and Civ & Mil Air give **MAGMA30**; Guns.com gives **Magma 04**. Possibly two legs with two callsigns, or one is wrong.

4. **Numbers.** The Libyan Air Force and HoR member Ali Tekbali say 20 soldiers; about a dozen are visible in Photo 2.

5. **Equipment.** The Libyan Air Force says all their equipment was seized; NBC and Newsweek have the troops leaving with it. In Photo 1 a team member still holds a suppressed carbine.

6. **Vehicles.** Tekbali: "dropped with their vehicles". A Dornier 328 is a 30-seat turboprop; no second aircraft is reported, and the vehicle in Photo 3 may be a Libyan one.

7. **The second trip.** The C-146A went back toward Libya from Pantelleria the same day. That flight has never been explained.

4. What would settle it

Flightradar24 historical playback of 13097 / MAGMA30 for 13–15 Dec 2015 (the screenshot The Aviationist published shows FR24 had it). **OpenSky Network** historical database (research access) for the same aircraft, if any receiver heard it. **ENAV / Pantelleria airport** movement logs for 14 Dec 2015. **AFRICOM / SOCAFRICA** (FOIA): origin, second destination, who gave concurrence. **Sub-metre archive imagery** (Maxar/Airbus) of Al-Watiya on 14–15 Dec 2015, if any was collected.

Sources

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• Imagery: Copernicus Sentinel-2 L2A, 25 Nov and 25 Dec 2015 (RWI pipeline, data/history/al-watiya-2015-12-full/). Weather: ERA5 via Open-Meteo.