**Baltic Fury #3 – Warsaw Uprising**

**Playtest Report by AndrewJ Nov 2020**

**Situation**

We're back in the Baltic, where our battered forces are facing off against the Soviet horde, who are now in possession of the critical island of Bornholm. High command has issued us orders to hit Soviet forces on the island, knocking out air defences and crippling the airfields and ports they have established there. The problem is finding a way to do this...

Intel reports that the Soviets have two high-end SAM batteries on the island, plus numerous lesser ones accompanying the troops there, and that they're operating MiG-23s directly from Bornholm itself. MiG-29s and Su-27s are flying from the Baltic coast, and although they don't seem to have major naval units at sea, there should be plenty of small craft guarding the area. The other complication is Poland, which has now entered the war, and has added its own planes and SAM belts to the conflict. This includes an SA-5 installation, which is well placed to dominate the airspace south of Bornholm with its long-ranged SAMs.

Against this I have a dwindling quantity of aircraft and ships, and a dangerously reduced number of high-end munitions. I do have a pleasing number of Tornado IDS, and some F3s with good long-ranged SARH missiles, but fighters with AMRAAMs (mostly F-16s, and some F-4s) are in short supply. Our small naval craft have been hit very hard, and my swarms of missile boats are long gone. I have four small ships coming down past Helsingborg, and a destroyer coming out of Kiel, but that's the extent of it, other than a pair of tiny subs.

Oh yes, and the Unicorn. We mustn't forget the Unicorn, a lone Upholder all by itself, far to the east of Bornholm, on the wrong side of ASW patrols, MPA, and lurking submarines. We've got to get it home somehow, and resupply it with some real torpedoes, to replace the rather sad munitions it is currently equipped with.

**The Plan**

Looking at my objectives, the first thing I want to do is knock back the major long-ranged SAMs, reportedly two SA-10s on Bornholm, and an SA-5 in Poland. Ideally, a focused HARM and bombing attack on those three objectives is the way to begin, followed up by rapid attacks on the main objectives (ports and airfields). The complicating factor is that it is dusk already, and most of my strike aircraft have no night-vision capability at all. I have plenty of Tornado IDS loaded with various bombs, but they can't see a thing in the dark. (Command will let me attack with iron bombs at night, but I'm going to limit myself to hitting high-radar contrast targets that they could conceivably pick up on radar.)

Orders go out for a heavy fighter sweep to start, followed by a quick reconnaissance, and then the strikes against the SA-10s, and then the SA-5. Other airfield and port attacks will follow in succession, as it gets light enough to see. Unfortunately, this means Soviet low-level tactical air defences will be absolutely murderous, since I don't have vast numbers of LGB-toting attack planes to stay above their range. (The weather is a mess too, with low clouds to prevent high-level LGB attacks.)

After consideration, the Unicorn is ordered to go around the north side of Bornholm on its way home. The route is longer, and the passage is narrower and more easily blocked, but it's also closer to my forces, further from the Soviets, and the water is deeper. The last thing I need to do is blunder into some shallows, and be forced so high my masts are awash while the Soviets are patrolling directly overhead!

**Opening Moves**

Operations start with a surge of fighters, plus a few recce planes, aiming to clear out as many of the Bornhom MiG-23s as I can before my strikes begin. I'm putting a lot of faith in my Tornado F3s, with their long-ranged SARH missiles, to dash in, knock the Floggers down safely, and then withdraw for another load of missiles. Reality is a lot different however, and the Soviets throw my plans for a rapid sweep and strike into the scrap heap. The MiG-23s are there, all right, but I can't get at them. Despite repeated attempts, at high altitude and low, the SA-10s force me back again and again. They seem to be able to engage me out to the limits of their range (probably due to their damned elevated radars) even when I come in at sea-skimming altitude. I get a few shots off at the MiGs at extreme range, but these miss, and the MiGs refuse to come out of their SAM umbrella to be shot at. There's no way I can send a strike in amongst that. They'd be murdered.

Meanwhile, there's plenty of activity along the Baltic coast, as my MiG-29s start dueling with their MiG-29s, and I find my fighters getting sucked away from Bornholm and drawn into this unwanted engagement. My pilots manage to get a couple of them, and are about to dash home for more missiles when

***\*\*\*REDACTED\*\*\* Next section has SPOILERS, skip over if you have not played the scenario***

*Complications*

*Intel suddenly passes on a garbled report that some Polish pilots may be attempting to defect, and they're asking for cover as they flee west. Ruse de guerre, or reality? HQ makes a hasty decision to let them try. If it is a ruse, we'll pounce on them as they come in, and if not, we'll pounce on the Russians that are trying to stop them.*

*More of my fighters scramble, including some of my precious AMRAAM F-4s, and suddenly I'm trying to engage two flights of MiG-29s and, far worse, a flight of Su-27s. As the Russians head for the Polish coast, and the fleeing Polish planes, I find myself being drawn into their SAM belt, and engaged by that SA-5, and even some SA-2s. Their hit chance is rotten, but I can't ignore them, and my pilots have to go diving for the deck to break lock, putting them in very disadvantageous positions.*

*In the meantime, on the other side of the coastal SAM belt, MiG-21s are launching out of Swidwin, intent on cutting off the defectors. Some of my MiG-29s dash in across the Polish land border, threading the SAMs there, and managing to kill two of the little MiGs, until they are forced back by missiles from the Su-27s. As my MiGs turn in a futile attempt to burner away they are rescued by AMRAAMs from the F-4s, which manage to kill the Flankers just before their missiles hit. Then the fleeing Poles shoot down two more of the MiG-21s, which pretty much proves they're on our side after all, and manage to make their escape into our airspace.*

*While this engagement did gain me several good kills, plus whatever benefit the defectors may bring, it also used up a lot of resources, diverting about ten of my fighters from their primary objective of engaging the Bornholm CAP. I'm no closer to my objectives there.*

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**New Contacts**

One peculiar by-product of the fighting is that one of my MiG-29s, dashing low to dodge a missile, suddenly spots a periscope off the German coast with his IRST. The pilot radios in the contact, and an Atlantic is despatched on a very risky low-level flight to try and find the sub again and sink it. Fortunately, I have no ships in the area, so the sub’s not an immediate threat if I can't find it.

More ominously, I'm also picking up large numbers of fighter-sized contacts further east, moving in the direction of Bornholm. It looks like they may be more MiG-23s. Reinforcements for Bornholm? That's all I need. I haven't managed to kill a single plane from the Bornholm CAP yet, and they're already sending more? I may have to face a head-on fight and simply batter my way in. This could be grim...

**Soviet Strike**

Over the next half hour the situation clarifies itself, as our radar and ELINT assets confirm that there is a major Soviet strike inbound. We’re looking at two dozen MiG-23s inbound through Poland, headed in the direction of Neubrandenburg Airbase. It looks like half of them have their radars on (presumably escorts), and the rest are probably toting bombs. There are also numerous MiG-29s and Su-27s up along the coast, more MiG-23s from Bornholm, and swarms of MiG-21s in western Poland. We start scrambling plane after plane, and before long we’ve got essentially everything up in the air.

We’ve all been looking at the threat coming in from the east, but first kills go to my Tornadoes, who finally manage to cut through Sweden, fly around the top of Bornholm, and turn in from the NE. It turns out the SA-10s are mostly on the S side of the island, and the high ground gives a very thin low-level radar shadow we can use to approach the island. The Tornadoes manage to get a few MiG-23s this way (finally!) as well as a jammer plane, but hit rates are poor, and they withdraw once their long-ranged missiles are gone.

The storm hits as the Soviets arrive, and major air-to-air combat erupts over the Baltic east of Obsn Point, where the SA-5 keeps interfering with long-ranged shots to force me out of position. The F-4s and Tornadoes manage to drive off the fighters, getting good kills on the MiG-23s, and a few on the better fighters too. (AMRAAMs are crucial here.) My other fighters stack up on the Polish border to receive the charge of the Soviet attack, and again the AMRAAMs manage to fend off the fighters, while I scrape up enough Sidewinders to tackle the attackers. Often, I have to call back fighters which should be RTB-ing, because they have a missile or two left.

None of the strikers make it through, and my exhausted fighters withdraw, leaving only a swarm of MiG-21s behind them. Unfortunately, there’s also an Su-27 mixed in with the swarm, and though we try our best to run, it still gets its shots off before it decides to leave. That’s not the only Su-27 causing problems, and I also get a few of leakers through the Baltic. One of them gits a sniff of my Atlantic, which had already been ordered to flee the area at wavetop altitude, and hunts it down remorselessly, blowing off one of its engines before some Tornadoes come to the rescue. Another chases some of my fleeing F-4s, which manage to lead it right over my FFG, which lights up its radar and shoots the intruder down with two neatly placed Sea Sparrows.

**War at Sea**

My forces at sea may be modest, but they’re ready to fight. The Zeeland Patrol, composed of four assorted missile boats, has been hurrying down the channel between Sweden and Denmark, and now it’s in range of the Soviet ships in the ASW barrier NW of Bornholm. It starts by sniping the two closest patrol boats, with a pair of Harpoons each, but as it engages the ships which are closer to Bornholm, the defensive response of fighters and land-based SAMs keeps getting stronger. For its final shots, the Zeeland patrol sends a few missiles at the lesser targets, and a heavy salvo at the well-defended Krivak. AWACS sees no less then eight fighters trying to intercept the missiles, which is a good indication of just how heavy the Bornholm defences are.

Final score for the Zeeland Patrol is five assorted ASW patrol boats and a Krivak, which is quite respectable. They’re out of Harpoons now, and although they do have a few short-ranged Exocets left, I have no intention of taking them any closer to the planes and missile batteries at Bornholm. They are ordered to turn about and head N again, heading home to ask for more missiles. That leaves only one lone ASW boat left in the northern patrol zone, and it gets sunk a couple of hours later when a pair of Danish F-16s out of Skrystrup bomb it on radar.

Meanwhile, the Augsberg, my FFG is still hurrying east, its appetite whetted after the Su-27 shootdown. In addition to the northern ASW patrol, so ably shot up by the Zeeland Patrol, the Soviets have a second barrier patrol SE of Bornholm, and the Polish also have an isolated destroyer out to sea, and a couple of patrol boats near their coast. These are tempting targets, and the Augsberg is just within range of the Polish destroyer when

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*Further Complications*

*Intel suddenly reports that the isolated destroyer, the Warszawa, isn’t making a tactical blunder. It’s actually trying to defect! (I literally had the cursor hovering over the destroyer to select it for an attack when the message popped up. If I’d been thirty seconds sooner the missiles would have been underway.)*

*Naturally, I accept the opportunity, but the Polish captain has chosen a bad time and place. He’s provoking a Soviet response just when I had wanted to start my big SEAD strike on Bornholm, and he’s headed right for the place where we had spotted that enemy sub. It’s only a few minutes later that AWACS detects a stream of anti-shipping missiles headed towards the destroyer from Bornholm, and then his sonar operators pick up the sound of incoming torpedoes dead ahead! (This is way too much fun to resist, so I switch sides and take over the ship.)*

*“Jammers, sonar, radar, everything on!” yells the Captain, “Hard to port, flank speed!” The destroyer surges to its impressive 35 knot top speed, leaning as it turns. "Two-torpedo BOL spread, fire when they bear!" The two torpedoes come hissing out of their tubes moments later, headed for the torpedo launch point, as the destroyer turns for the coast, pointing it’s four stern-facing anti-shipping missiles at the Russian ASW boats near Bornholm. “Fire three at the Russian patrol boats, and one at the missile boat near our coast!”*

*“But that’s Captain Juraslefski’s boat!” protests the startled lieutenant.*

*“Juraslefski’s an asshole!” roars the captain. “Fire!”*

*The Polish missiles roar away in clouds of smoke, and then all the crew can do is wait for the Russian missiles to arrive, knowing all too well that their ancient SA-N-1s are ill-suited to shoot them down. The first enemy missiles clear the horizon, and the SAMs shoot, missing badly. But then the incoming missiles suddenly pitch down and crash into the ocean a few kilometers away. Out of fuel! “Cease fire,” orders the captain, and they all watch in amazement as the entire swarm of incoming missiles glides harmlessly down into the ocean.*

*Their own missile close on the Russian ASW patrol boats, but it’s no surprise when the Bornholm CAP and the Russian SAMs pounce on them and shoot them all down. Still, it made them spend missiles! Juraslefski doesn’t do so well, and vanishes in violent explosion that sinks his missile boat. The incoming torpedoes from the enemy sub zoom past, with no wires to allow them to correct their course, and run out of fuel without effect, but the destroyer’s counterfire spread hits home and sinks what will later be revealed as a Kilo.*

*With those two kills under its belt, the Warszawa heads for the coast of Rugen Island, then makes its way west, eventually getting a set of radios dropped off by helicopter, and making its way to the dubious safety of the embattled west.*

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**Bornholm SEAD and Airbase Attack**

By this time, my quick turnaround fighters have recycled, and my airbases begin launching their initial attack on Bornholm. We’ve detected so many SAMs on Bornholm that there’s no way we can afford to divert resources to the Polish SA-5, and all our efforts will be focused on Bornholm itself. Two packs of Tornadoes with HARMs will tackle the SA-10s, then the rest of the attack will be focused on SAMs near the Ronne airfield, and the airfield itself.

It starts with a huge fighter sweep, using essentially all my fighters, and I find myself involved in heavy fighting, particularly in the airspace NE of Rugen Island, where Russian fighters keep trying to come down the Baltic to interfere. (Fortunately, the SA-5 seems to be silent now. Out of missiles?)

The HARM-carrying Tornadoes arrive next, opening fire with 14 missile salvoes at each of the SA-10s, plus some adjacent search radars, and these hammer-blows manage to destroy the vital SA-10 radars, finally letting our planes get closer to the island. Next step is to engage the SA-11s, which infest the area, but now these stubbornly refuse to radiate, even when I launch a few more HARMs at surveillance radars to try and provoke them. My approaching attack planes are getting very nervous, and when the SA-11s finally do open up my remaining HARMs can only get a few of them.

My F-16s come in as low as they can with LGBs, aiming at the runway, and salvoing all their bombs from as far away as they can manage. There’s already tons of SA-11 counterfire, and then the SA-8s start engaging too, killing most of the incoming bombs, but a few slip through, and one’s a penetrator. That may be just enough to shut the runway. As the surviving F-16s dive for the deck and haul around to flee, the order goes out to abort the Tornadoes. Ten of them were inbound, intending to hit parking spaces and hangars with a mix of cluster bombs and iron bombs, but there’s no way they can hope to make it through that wall of SAMs. A couple get redirected to try and engage ASW ships, but most simply get sent home – and they’re damned glad to leave.

As the planes head home, analysts start analyzing the results. The runway seems to be shut, and the two SA-10s are out of service, for the moment. We seem to have knocked down the radar on an SA-6 site, hit five SA-11 radars, and five surveillance radars. This has cost us several of our best F-16s, and nearly 50 HARMs. A win? Maybe yes, sorta… But there are at least four undamaged SA-8s down there, plus at least five SA-11 batteries which are still at least partially functional, and I’ve done almost nothing to the island facilities I’m supposed to be destroying.

**More Fighting at Sea**

The Russians’ southern ASW barrier gets some more attention now. Some of the Tornadoes which used their HARMs on Bornholm, are also carrying Kormorans, and they fire these at the little ships, but hit rates and reliability are dismal, and they only manage to kill one. A brace of CBUs from a flight of land attack Tornadoes kills another. The Augsberg FFG is in Harpoon range now, and it manages to kill a Grisha III and a Stenka, before turning around to safety. An hour or so later another pair of Danish F-16s arrives and bombs the last lone Pauk patrol boat, leaving only the Krivak on guard.

**Cleanup**

Now that the SA-10s are down, and the MiG-23s aren’t swarming out of Bornholm, we have some breathing space to operate around the island.

There are a few residual engagements with fighters over the Baltic, and some of my F-4s make a policy of picking on the Polish MiG-21s near the border. Fighters work around the island (trying to avoid the angry SA-11 gunners, which are now quite happy to engage us), and manage to kill off a number of MPA, ELINT platforms, and cargo resupply flights.

My pilots also spot a group of five missile boats lurking off the east end of Bornholm, but they’re not a threat at the moment, and I intend to leave them alone for now. There’s also an inbound freighter, about 45 miles east of the port on Bornholm, which I will definitely attend to.

An Atlantic patrol is set up where recent intel suggests the enemy subs might be operating, and after an hour or so of operation it gets results, when an unlucky SSK happens to go right under a passive sonobuoy about ten miles from the Swedish shore. It is sunk forthwith.

**Next Steps**

It is now 04:00, and most of my planes have recycled and are ready to go. Things are quiet in the air. My plan is to launch another SEAD attack on Bornholm (probably using way too many HARMs), hopefully knocking back the SAMs enough to enable my conventionally armed attack planes to get through. We shall see!

The fight continues…

**Bornholm Strike 2**

The next strike at Bornholm happens around 04:30 hrs, and this time it goes a lot more smoothly. (It’s amazing the difference a pair of SA-10s can make!) First to arrive are a swarm of HARM carriers, both Tornadoes and F-16s, and they manage to engage some more of the SA-11 sites, when they open fire on recce aircraft flying provocatively off the coast. Still, the majority of the SAMs stay quiet, until attack on Ronne airfield begins.

F-16s with IR Mavericks are the next t contribute, attempting to engage coastal SA-8s, and that prompts a lot more SAM radars to light up and receive their dose of HARMs. More F-16s with LGBs are next, flattening some hangars, and putting two more gaping holes in the runway, just to be certain, and then the Tornadoes arrive. This time there’s no turning back, and the ten planes pop up with radars on and race in to dump tons of iron bombs and CBUs all over the general area. They bank hard right and turn back out to sea on full burner, racing away as low as they can while tracer fire and a swarm of shoulder-launched missiles pursue them into the night.

While this chaos is going on in Ronne, my Maverick-carrying F-16s, now free of munitions, use their LANTIRN pods to do some recce of their own, and strafe a pair of SA-11 sites that seem to be out of munitions. This also draws a lot of MANPADs fire, so they prudently retire into the night. Meanwhile, a pair of Tornadoes are using a combination of HARMs and Kormorans to get rid of that last Krivak. This still leaves the pack of missile boats hovering east of Bornholm, but for the moment they’re not an issue.

An hour or so after the strike, a recce-Draken goes screaming overhead at supersonic speed, its IR cameras recording the scene from a thousand feet up. The pilot can still see the burning remains of dozens of airframes littering the base, and reports that several of the surviving hangars are in flames. He also reports, after continuing his pass over the densely packed helipad, and making another run over the north side of the island, that there are a number of sites that still appear to hold undamaged SAM units of an unknown type. They’re not shooting, so maybe they’re out of missiles, but we’ll still need to be cautious.

**Bornholm Strike 3**

The Soviets are quiet for the next couple of hours, and when dawn comes, and my pilots can actually see targets on the ground, the third strike lifts off for Bornholm. First in are the Tornadoes, coming in low with cluster bombs to eradicate the remaining SAM sites and other soft targets. They get a blast of MANPADs in return, and while most of them miss the fast-moving swing wings, there are so many that a few hit home. One Tornado goes down in flames just off-shore, and another struggles home on a single engine. Still, the damage isn’t as bad as it might have been, and it looks like most of the SAMs and AAA, except those in the hinterlands, are gone.

Lesser strike planes strike next, with the Portuguese Alpha-Jets killing SSM batteries, and surface search radars on the SE of the island, as well as hitting the densely packed Akirkeby helibase, which erupts in a very satisfying series of secondary explosions. Danish F-16s hit the port with strings of 500 lb bombs, causing a suitable amount of chaos, and a modest amount of actual damage. Several more waves of strikers (Drakens, more F-16s) arrive later during the morning, and continue to pummel the buildings which eluded the first wave, until most of our objectives on the island have been destroyed. (Alas for the Akirkeby school, however, which gets flattened when the Drakens get a bit too cavalier with their 1000lb bombs. Still, it’s a Saturday, school’s out, and the kids don’t seem to mind…)

**Remaining Actions**

Bornholm is not the only center of operations. At sea, patrolling Atlantics, making use of intelligence data, manage to find and sink an SS, while the Unicorn continues to discretely cruise along the ocean floor towards her destination. By 11:00, the Unicorn is back in home waters, snorkelling towards Kiel, and recharging her nearly exhausted battery.

Shortly after noon, Tornadoes make an attack on the pack of Tarantul missile boats loitering off the east coast of Bornholm. The combination of Kormorans and a HARM or two makes an end of them, although they do put up a valiant defence with their CIWS.

At the same time, LGB-toting F-16s pay a visit to the SA-5 site. It’s not shooting now, but when they bring in a few more missiles it’ll be a thorn in my side again. To my surprise, the 2000lb LGBs don’t manage to wipe it out, and the fire control radars still seem to be intact, so eight Tornadoes are called in to carpet-bomb the installation with 500lb-ers, and that seems to do the trick. I have to use a few more of my dwindling HARM supply to suppress adjacent SAM batteries, but I think it’s worth it to get rid of the SA-5.

And after that, there was no significant action until the end of the scenario. Many thanks for the interesting fight. Hopefully I will have some time this weekend to look under the hood.

**Impressions**

Hoo boy, that is one tough little Island. I’m having flashbacks to Iceland! Anyone who tries charging in with unprotected low-level Tornadoes is in for a horrible time. Those SA-10s with elevated radars, and me having to approach over a vast open ocean with not a jot of cover is a really nasty situation. Even with the SA-10s down, it was still raining SA-11s, and it took me multiple efforts to get in. I’m sure I went way over my planners HARM expenditure projections. If I had tried to do it all in one strike, I’d predict anywhere from 25% to 40% casualties, and no certainty of decisive results.