**Caribbean Fury #1 – Hot Tamale**

**Playtest Report by AndrewJ June 2016**

It took a while, but I finally had a chance to play through Hot Tamales.

**DAY 1** was rough.

**CUBA**

As tensions rose I sent out a variety of MPA and recce craft to look around and assess the situation, and ships were ordered to close up and form task groups where possible. In addition to the Carrier Group there were orders for a 3-ship group around the Long Beach in the NE, and a four ship around the South Carolina in the SE. I debated sending TG Radford and the Westminster up north to join the carrier, but in the end decided to send them south to eventually meet up with the fuel-starved Dale and the Ouellet, and then bring them all back north to the land of fuel. The coast guard was generally told to head for port, or at least get clear of Cuba if possible.

The Cuban fighting began with a heavy strike headed for Key West airbase, and at first the assorted instructors there had a great time knocking off helpless Mig-21s, but things started getting worse when they started facing foes with front-aspect missiles. Viper and Jester don't do so well when they're being shot in the face... More capable planes rushing down from north were able to stabilize things somewhat, but then the really good Cuban planes started showing up, with Flankers of various shades and stripes, and even hints of Mig-31s lurking off in the distance. I ended up evacuating some planes to the (relative) safety of Homestead, and the Cubans managed to lay a few strings of bombs on Key West, scuffing some of the outer facilities. No major damage done, but Migs over Florida is not a good thing. The Cubans were even making strikes towards Homestead and north towards the Florida radars (where a Voodoo proved it still had teeth), although those were driven off before they could cause damage.

Over in Guantanamo things got really exciting when artillery started coming in, and wrecking my guard posts. My UAV went rushing out to find the battery so my A-4s could shut it down ASAP. This accomplished, the UAV came running back home, drawing a pile of Mig-23s who sacrificed themselves to my HAWK sites in an attempt to kill it. (Maybe a no-nav zone would be best for the Cuban CAP here?) As high-value assets (particularly the EC-130 jammers) fled the airfield at wavetop altitude, I seriously considered sending away all the aviation assets. Fortunately, I didn't, as the artillery was followed by a major ground assault, and my helicopters and the Abrams platoon were instrumental in dealing with this. I lost two UAVs keeping an eye on this invasion, one to Migs and one to an unexpected SA-10, but they were essential in determining what was going on. With the armoured thrust blunted after it caused minor damage the Abrams platoon did a raid of its own, killing off some local SAM sites (including destroying the radars on the SA-5) which were a great hazard to my aircraft operations, before returning safely to base. (I suspect in reality Guantanamo would be on the receiving end of a lot more than a single artillery battery and a single axis battalion(-) attack. If not overrun, I think the runways would be under artillery fire before long.)

**THE CANAL**

The Canal Zone started off with counter-insurgency work, with the little OV-10s hunting around while my helicopters and Dragonflies did their work (with help from the Columbians, no less). MANPADS proved to be a real pain but was worked around as best we could. However, the major attack on the locks and Howard AFB was not so easy to deal with. Despite the use of every single missile-armed plane I had (even the OV-10s were taking shots at passing Migs) my forces were simply outnumbered. I evacuated everything that could fly from Howard, and had it orbit out over the Pacific until the strike was over. (Well, except the aerostat.) In the end there was no damage to Howard itself, but one lock was destroyed, and another was damaged. The cost to the attackers was very high, and so far they've not tried to mount another strike.

As a result of this attack the Dale and Ouellet were immediately ordered back to the Atlantic end of the canal, despite the perilously low fuel condition of the Dale. I need those long-range SAMs! (Especially if Venezuela gets feisty.) I'll anchor her as a floating battery if necessary. I'm sure there's fuel in Cristobal if I really need it.

Counter-insurgency work continued after the strike, and I thought the AC-130s would be superb here, but the low cloud is preventing them from attacking in most cases, so they have had little impact. Helicopters and bombing did the bulk of the work.

**THE BRITS**

Further north the Brits came under intense pressure from the local rebellion there, and it wasn't long before I was evacuating northward and pulling in the perimeter around Belize City. I got many (but not all) of my southern troops out before they were bombed by the quite effective air-force from Honduras and Nicaragua. With no effective radar here, and my air force busy elsewhere, the enemy can appear, bomb, and vanish into the clouds before I can do much about them. The Harriers have done excellent service as makeshift interceptors, but it's not been enough to keep the skies clear. I've lost a bunch of high-value assets - my Scorpions, my Belizean trainer which was acting as a spotter, and worst of all, one of my invaluable artillery batteries which got nailed by a beautiful bomb run from a pair of Mig-23s. Still, the rebels seem to have been fought to a standstill, so I think northern Belize is secure for now.

(Literally a standstill. After a while the surviving rebels simply come to a halt in a semi-circle around Belize City. I suppose a direct advance against the concentrated Brits would be suicidal, but maybe they should pull back or disperse?)

**VENEZUELA**

So far no action. My Atlantiques patrol, keeping a periodic eye on their ships by radar. Their Mig-25s keep a periodic eye on the Atlantiques. I glare at them; they glare at me. Impasse... I'm glad to keep it that way.

**AFTERNOON/NIGHT DAY 1**

As my forces come on line later in the day I start to make better progress. A major fighter operation aimed at Cuba, with plenty of long range Phoenix support and AMRAAM toting F-15s and F-16s knocks down many of their better fighters, and some lightly loaded F-14s operating with long range tanker support come at Cuba from the South, to pick on the airborne jammers operating there. The SA-5s continue to be a perpetual nuisance during this time, but eventually they simply run out of missiles, allowing my support aircraft to edge in closer.

After the main operation several smaller but still powerful sweeps engage the remaining Cuban patrols which try forming up to meet them. The F-16s out of Homestead get a particularly good workout this way. By the end of the night the majority of the Cuban air force has been destroyed, and no new planes try to intercept probes.

In the water I've started having problems with patrol boats shooting up civilian traffic. They're too small to sink anything, but they might have bigger friends. TG Radford (and that wonderful Sea Skua equipped Lynx) start working over naval forces between Cuba and Mexico, and off the coast of Central America. Skyhawks and whatnot, along with the SSN 674 clear out most of the coastal traffic north of Cuba, and Dragonflies out of Howard start working on patrol boats in their area. They also start using the little island airfields off Nicaragua as pit stops, and places to overnight so they can strike at first light in the morning. Forces from Guantanamo also pop out to engage Cuban naval forces on that end of the island. Fortunately, there's nothing with any significant air defences, so iron bombs do a good job, although flack does take a toll of a few bombers.

Of the Cuban subs, so far I've seen nothing.

**DAY 2**

With first light comes a major offensive against the Havana area. Every Corsair that can carry a Shrike, most of my HARM shooters, a bunch of TALDs, all my jammers, and swarms of fighters descend on the island (needlessly for the fighters - no enemy AC launch), along with numerous bombers and Maverick toting jets. There are 6 SA-10 batteries in the area, plus a number of SA-6s and some older units, so there are plenty of targets. The Cubans ignore the incoming TALDs (since they have no positive ID on them) which is frustrating and renders the decoys ineffective. However, it also means that they ignore my incoming aircraft until they get a positive ID, which means my Shrike shooters can close in without getting slaughtered. When the massive wave of ARMs is finished I've damaged some of the SAM radars, but in other cases the SA-10s simply seem to have run out of ammunition (particularly that pair in the middle).

Now the it's the turn of the Maverick planes and conventional bombers to come in low under the clouds and try and destroy those sites before they can reload. This is when I discover that every single Grouse the Russians ever manufactured has been exported to Cuba. Enough of the planes get through and the sites are destroyed, but losses mount, and the iron bombers are waved off after their initial runs. Instead, they are sent to bomb by radar from above the clouds, now that the radar guided SAMs are down. This is much less accurate, but it still works well enough to do heavy damage to the command and control sites to the southwest of Havana. The Russian naval base also takes a pounding, although I do blow in the windows on the neighbouring hospital in my attempts to take out their command bunker.

Late in the afternoon, after planes have had a chance to recycle, a second smaller SEAD wave (no Shrikes left!) eliminates the smaller group of SAM sites on the west end of Cuba (2 more SA-10 plus SA-17 and friends, so not weaklings), allowing me to deal with the SSM batteries there (staying well above the clouds and using EO weapons with a man in the loop).

At dusk all the Corsairs and Phantoms lift off again with heavy iron bomb loads, and do their best to moonscape the various airfields and high value targets in the Havana and San Julian area. The boys spread their arms and drone along pretending to be B-17s, staying above the clouds and bombing by radar. They crater the runways and get most of the soft stuff (fuel, ammo, hangars, etc.), but only the 2000 pounders from the Corsairs do much to the shelters, and even that takes a lucky hit. They'd be much more effective with LGBs, but those clouds...

Out to sea more patrol boats and missile boats take hits, particularly around the E end of Cuba where two flotillas of Osas meet their end. Still no sign of the Cuban subs. My CV is patrolling in deep water+ 155 nm NW of Cuba, with various MPA carpeting the area with sonobuoys. An SSN (Spadefish) is hurrying from Galveston to catch up and provide some additional detection closer to the Cuban coast. The Trepang is now operating near the S tip of Florida, to cover commercial traffic there, Greenling is moving NW (after finishing off some patrol boats) towards the straits between Cuba and Mexico, and Sea Devil is still way out to sea in the Atlantic. Surely there's a Cuban sub somewhere?

And Honduras/Nicaragua are still harassing Belize, dammit. Lost a patrol boat and got strafed. Gotta do something about that.

**DAY 3**

With no enemy action I'm currently just running out the clock to see if anything unexpected shows up.

Lets assume I did another strike around Guantanamo with my remaining HARM stocks, and knocked off two more SA-10s on the E end of the island, leaving the central SAM belt alone, and then did more iron bombing in the East. I should have had enough HARMs and bombs for that.

No enemy subs so far. Venezuela and I maintain our truce, which suits me just fine. Sank another patrol boat in Central America. Killed a couple of ASW helicopters still hanging around in Cuba. Other than a few tuna-fish, nothing else to report.

Overall this is a fun one. Lots of things going on in Day 1, which can knock you back before your forces are fully readied, and then some heavy pounding to work away at on Day 2. Assorted lesser forces and regional conflicts to keep things different. Trimming the end time (as you already propose to do) would work well to remove the empty end-game.