**Caribbean Fury #1 – Hot Tamales**

**AAR by Tailhook, Sep 2016**

Quite the scenario! Not yet completed but I'm going to give a Spoiler Heavy account of the battle so far.

The setup is standard peace time operations in the Caribbean, with the JFK CVBG transiting from the Gulf of Mexico out to the eastern Caribbean for some training operations. There are various other SAGs and NATO frigates on patrol in various locations, as well as a couple SSNs. My orders are deliberately vague as I'm not supposed to be anticipating anything (this is simultaneous with the first three Northern Fury scenarios).

Out of nowhere, there are hazy reports of violence in Europe and before long Gitmo is under artillery fire from Cuban emplacements. Initial fires are directed at my Observation Posts and AT emplacements before shifting to the airfield. My own 105mm artillery responds against the Cuban infantry surrounding the base, and they are soon wiped out. I launch a RQ-2A Pioneer to attempt to find the battery to the NW which is the one hitting my airfield. It spots the offending battery in time before being swatted by an inbound MiG or SAM. The defensive I-HAWKs and Stinger units do an effective job of swatting the incoming CAP and strike MiGs, with only one getting through to bomb the airfield for minimal damage. In retaliation, I launch my single Snakeye equipped A-4 to bomb the artillery battery hitting the airfield before it can take out my small force of aircraft. It is successful, wiping the entire battery in a low and fast pass, but is shot down on final by another MiG. I send two more Skyhawks to bomb the SA-5 site just NW of the base to give myself a bit of breathing room. They don't wipe out the battery but BDA does reveal they took out most of the AAA guarding it, a few launch rails, and most importantly, all of the radar sets. After this initial excitement, Guantanamo lies quiet, swatting the occasional MiG striker. At least, for now.

To the Northwest a massive force of Cuban aircraft lifts off and presses North on Key West. I only have some Navy aggressor aircraft there, and while flown by experts they are poorly equipped and woefully outnumbered. Still though, they put up a hell of a fight and are soon reinforced by AMRAAM slinging F-16s out of Homestead ARB. These combined forces manage to clear the skies for the most part, although in one lull between waves a handful of MiGs get through to bomb Key West, taking out a few F-16s on the ground. A Coast Guard cutter gets lucky and downs one with a lucky burst of 20mm fire as it passes overhead, scoring one for the Puddle Pirates! I order more F-16s from NAS Jacksonville to fly down to Homestead and reinforce the squadrons there. There are a lot of reinforcements across the CONUS scheduled to fly into the area throughout the 3+ day scenario. Two notable twists occur: The Cubans spend a lot of ordnance sinking a 200,000 ton civilian cargo ship (which eats a lot of ordnance and lets me splash some of the attacking SU-24s). The other twist is the Cuban Air Force makes a push on Florida, sending a low raid against Homestead and the nearby Radar site. The Radar is lost but a pair of transiting AMRAAM equipped F-16s manage to splash or turn the attackers, who jettison their ordnance to flee. One F-16 is lost over South Florida though.

Meanwhile in Belize, some British infantry are dug in against some oncoming rebels. With the help of air power they turn the initial Rebel push in the Big Creek Area. However, I'm given orders to pull those defenders to join the bulk of the British forces in Belize City. This is done via 2 airlifts from Belize City, covered by the 3 Harriers I have in the area. I need the harriers because before long the Hondurans and Nicaraguans join the fight on the Soviet side. The Harriers tangle with F-5s, repelling them while I ferry my forces north. At the time of this posting there is a race to get the helicopter to pick up the last forces while a large force of Rebels moves on the Pickup zone. Stay tuned! I reinforce the city with a British Frigate, using its onboard radar to detect incoming Honduran aircraft, vectoring my Harriers behind them to ambush them. Some get through, and I lose all of my British (light) armor, as well as a Blowpipe team. The low clouds don't give them enough time to use the simple missiles to much effect in the defense.

The next major engagement is the defense of the Panama Canal. A small force of F-16s that had been on a training detachment find themselves squaring off against 50+ Nicaraguan attackers bent on destroying the Locks. Full disclosure, I adjust the readiness time of these units after seeing the size of the incoming force (6 vs 50 as opposed to 2 vs 50). It was a difference of a couple hours as opposed to the multi-day waits on aircraft elsewhere in the scenario. Amazingly, my humble force aided by local Stinger and Chaparral units is able to take out 30+ aircraft in some spectacular fighting, for the loss of a single F-16. A few attackers do break through, destroying the Centennial Bridge as well as the San Miguel Locks. This will undoubtedly slow the war effort, but with only a single lock destroyed I'm sure it can be fixed in time to assist the war effort. Troublingly, I have a whole mess of attack helicopters and gunships stationed in Panama. I order patrols into the air to the East and West to make sure there are no ground attacks incoming. A terrorist boat tried to ram the northern locks (stopped by a pair of gunboats), so I can't be too sure of their safety. I ferry in F-16s from Puerto Rico to reinforce the defenses in Panama, as well as a team of French advisors who have offered their assistance.

After several hours of skirmishing across the AO, the next development unfolds. A bunker spots a massive force of Cuban Armor closing on Gitmo. I launch 3 cobra gunships and they destroy a Regiments worth of tanks. I send a drone to orbit the base to give some more advanced warning.

There have been a few other small engagements, TLAM strikes on radars and a harpoon or two into isolated ships. I'm still on the reactionary side of the engagement but the situation is beginning to stabilize. I have 3 days left so we will see how it plays out from here.

I think I got a lucky rolls and some great saves from the Air Force F-16s keeping my southern bases in operation. Having a lot of fun though, trying to figure out my next moves.

**On the ground front:**

Gitmo continues to hold by the strength of the Cactus Air Force 2.0. The Cobras have been chewing up mechanized infantry formations to be backed up by the occasional Skyhawk bombing run as well as the M1A1 Platoon and artillery battery on base. I've killed a divisions worth of ground forces with those units. Properly micromanaged I can use TOWs against the AA guns before they get in range of my helos. If I break 1500' though there's a SA-10 to the NW that sends a missile my way. If I get some breathing space I might try and run a pair of Skyhawks out there to bomb him. Quick turn saved my ass here though. I think barring another serious aerial attack on my airfield I can hold out.

In Panama one of my patrols got lucky. An OV-10 overflew a column of rebels marching for the southern portion of the Panama Canal. I scrambled an AC-130 backed by some A-37s and made short but bloody work of the intruders. There was some odd behavior with all of the aircraft involved so this was a rather micromanage heavy defense on my part. The rest of the F-16s from the squadron have arrived from Puerto Rico so I can now establish proper, round the clock air defenses. The French Marines are on the final leg of their flight from Martinique.

**At Sea:**

I've begun to consolidate my scattered forces with the intent of forming larger SAGs. Right now I have a SAG centered on the CGN 37 South Carolina supported by a DDG sailing North West from off the Bahamas. The Dutch Frigate Banckert and Spanish Frigate Diana are making best speed to rendevous with them somewhere north of Antigua. A French Frigate, Ventôse is south of Haiti right now and will move north to meet them north of Puerto Rico. It is my intention to sail this force down to Guantanamo and secure the local area.

At some point a supply ship docked in Miami. I'm waiting to see if anything comes of this (more AMRAAMs at Homestead would be nice...)

West of Cuba I had a Naval skirmish between a small SAG consisting of the USS Arthur W. Radford and a pair of Knox frigates against a 5 strong pack of Cuban Osa missile boats spotted by the groups ASW screen. The missile boats were sunk, but one managed to get a shot off and sank one of my frigates in response. Luckily her helicopter was already airborne with a full load of fuel and has diverted 200 nm SW to the HMS Westminster, now parked off of Belize City. The Radford SAG has splashed a few other lone gunboats and is heading SE. I am sending the USS Dale, a Leahy class cruiser to join up with them several hundred miles south of Havana. I'm hoping to park this group right off the Cuban mainland and let them antagonize the Cuban Air Force. I, err, might have missed the Dale in the beginning of the mission because I probably would have sent it to screen Panama, where it would have made a mess of the Nicaraguan attack.

HMS Westminster is providing radar (the Hondurans managed to bomb the British radar), naval gunfire support, and SAM coverage of the British forces. The helicopters managed to evacuate all of the British forces to a consolidated position in Belize City. Just in time too as a helicopter has detected unknown ground forces approaching Belize City. Although their air assets aren't as strong as the Marines in Gitmo, I'm confident that with the Frigate on station and a tight defensive position that we can hold.

I have 3 SSNs at sea and another one leaving Galveston to sprint and catch up to the JFK CVBG. USS Trepang is between Cuba and Florida and I'm using it to sniff around for submarines in the area as the sky is much too hot to get any Orions down there into that chokepoint. Nothing yet. USS Greenling is 150 nm north of Columbia and making good time north to Gitmo. I'm hoping it can provide some ESM intel off of Santiago as well as deter any Cuban ships from the area. That's still a half day of sailing away though. USS Sea Devil (great name) is between South Carolina and Bermuda and tasked to go relieve/assist Trepang so that the latter may head west to join the CVBG.

**In the air:**

The battle of Key West has stabilized. I haven't seen a proper massed wave in a while now, with groups of no more than 4-8 attempting to push me, backed by some SA-5 sites near Havana (I think these are low on missiles because they don't fire often and are at max range to score hits besides a single fluke). I was feeling pretty good until the Cubans switched it up and brought up some MiG-31s and Flankers. I'm going to assume those are not Cuban pilots in those. I'm lucky that these much more capable aircraft have come in small groups because they did a number on my ANG F-16s armed with Sparrows. Jamming aircraft are orbiting over Cuba playing hell with my Sparrow shots, so I'm relying on AMRAAMS when they're available and Sidewinders (thankfully the pretty good M model) when I have to. Unfortunately, my only ECM aircraft that I can see are a pair of Compass Calls in Gitmo (still too risky to attempt to sneak these out), some ECM helicopters down in Panama (not a lot of good for me there), and the Prowlers on the JFK which I want to save for attacks. So the Cubans/Soviets enjoy a relatively unjammed angle to launch at my fighters. I took losses amongst the F-16s but not enough to break my back yet. Fortunately F-15s from Tyndall AFB have landed at Homestead ARB and are 2 hours from being ready to join the patrols.

Faced with the more capable Russian aircraft and having had enough time since hostilities to ready the Air Wing I launch F-14s to defend Key West, supported by tankers from the mainland. Their long range Phoenixes work wonders against the Russians and even more importantly let me snipe the ECM aircraft orbiting south of Havana, and can cover all of western Cuba. Local CVBG CAP is handled by Hornets so unless the Nicaraguans bought some Backfires I feel good about their safety. More importantly, with the MiG-31 problem now being handled and my gain of something resembling Air Superiority, I can fly my P-3s out of NAS Jacksonville to proof the CVBGs route farther than the groups organic S-3s and helos. My plan is to park this group off of Key West to reinforce it with a FFG from New Orleans as well as the USS Long Beach which is joined by another FFG and DDG. At this point the more powerful force will either sail East and proceed along the northern side of Cuba or turn around and go West of Cuba, following the Randolph groups hopefully submarine free path. It's really up to what Washington wants me to do because my orders at this point are still "Stabilize Situation in Gulf of Mexico/Caribbean".

USAF aircraft continue to pour into Florida from all across the country. It's mostly Phantoms and Corsairs, but most of the high end Cuban stuff should be dead by the time they're ready. Plus I have some fancy new jets that were being tested at Eglin.

So yeah that's the plan.

* -Deliver the KO over Key West. I think the Tomcats are going to do just that.
* -Get TG South Carolina (reinforced with Europe) to Gitmo.
* -Reinforce CVBG with TG Long Beach and other US small boys. Figure out what I'm supposed to do with all these tax dollars\*.
* -Get Orions over the CVBG. I've been pushing it but I figured at Flank speed it would be hard for any subs to catch me for now, but I'm getting closer to Cuba.
* -Strengthen TG Randolph (I might turn the French Frigate around too but it would be an easy kill if detected before joining the Americans) and position them south of Havana to annoy Castro.
* ?Sneak a Compass Call out of Gitmo to Florida. Likely doable, but risky.
* ?Send Snake eaters out of Gitmo to go after that SA-10 site. The more breathing space the better.
* ?Reinforce the Bahamas. Venezuela is causing the Dutch concern, but they haven't done anything remotely threatening yet. Still, better safe than sorry and I'm sure it will be a hard sell to convince NY National Guard boys to go from February in NY to the Bahamas...

One of the messages specifically mentioned the 3 squadrons marked "unavailable" at Eglin as going to be transferred away. I didn't see any mention of the Tyndall fighters, other than them being on sustained ops. They'll be nice to have but even if they go away I'm pretty sure the air battle over Key West is effectively over with the F-16s and F-14s. I err, might have forgotten about the New Orleans units. If the Air Force bureaucrats take any of my F-15Cs away I will fly these Cajuns down to take their place.

**Gitmo**:

A third wave of Cuban vehicles enters the valley west of Guantanamo. Once more, Cobras sweep over them, backed by the base artillery. Hundreds are killed and burning vehicles litter the valley. Only this time a pair of MiG-23s race towards the Gringos. Hawk missiles leap up to meet them in a race to save the helicopters so crucial to the defense. The Pioneer drone circling at 1000' falls prey to a missile, but the only Cobra fired upon has a near miss (PH - 53%, Result - 54) before both MiGs are blotted from the sky. There are now at least 2 divisions worth of dead Cubans west of the American holdout. I order my two Compass Call ECM aircraft, much needed over Florida, to use this opportunity to takeoff. They fly out over the wave tops to the South East, before turning for Haiti where they will then cut North and climb to altitude safely out of range of any Cuban threats.

**Key West:**

My F-14s continue to launch Phoenixes over the mainland, wiping out the airborne jammers and ELINT aircraft and also chipping away at the SU-27s and SU-30s that seem to be guarding Havana. These same Flankers, while yet to have scored a kill, keep launching long range Alamo missiles at my CAP, which without the Phoenixes don't have the range to engage them back, as too much of the Cuban IADS remains intact (although SA-5s seem to be depleted).

**Panama**:

A pair of Nicaraguan Mirages makes a play against my now heavily reinforced CAP. Armed with only short range IR missiles they are splashed by the Sparrow equipped F-16s guarding the area. However, a lone MiG-31 flies south from Havana (must be an AI oddity). For whatever reason, it closes to close range with one of my F-16 patrols and splashes one. The surprised wingman avenges his comrade, and a SAR helo is launched from Panama to his last known location (Have Pave Hawk, will travel). Meanwhile, a patrolling OV-10 thinks it spots movement in the bush West of the Canal Zone. A pair of rocket armed Hueys is launched to investigate. They (and the OV-10) find another wave of terrorists closing on the Northern half of the Canal Zone. Attack helicopters scramble and before long swarm the area like vultures, cutting down the rebels where they stand. Meanwhile, the French cargo plane lands and unloads a company of French Marines to help reinforce the area. (This script didn't seem to work if it exists, but the message given made it sound like I could move the French where I wished via the plane so I did so using the editor.)

**TG Randolph:**

TG Randolph is my closest Naval unit to the Cuban mainland, and only defended from Aerial threats by the Sea Sparrows of the Randolph (until Dale arrives). Nevertheless, the threat comes from not above the waves but below. A sonobuoy ahead of the formation gets a close whiff of a slow and shallow SSK. Although the helicopter who dropped it was already returning for fuel, his partner launches to localize the contact. Before long, the Seahawk has the sub identified as a Kilo, drops an active buoy on him followed by a Mk-46 to seal the fate of the submarine. This was my first ASW contact and I'm sure not my last this scenario.

Much further south, Dale encounters it's own moment of peril. A trio of patrol craft cross the horizon and are detected by the onboard surface search radar. They are identified as Honduran and closing fast. Dale has no gun larger than a 20mm and that's not a risk I want to take. Rather than waste a precious Harpoon which could be saved for a more lethal threat, I fire a pair of Standard Missiles used as AShMs into each. Two are left burning profusely while the third is dead in the water. I choose to save my SAMs and leave them as they are.