**Caribbean Fury #5 – Caribbean Cruise, 1994**

**Playtest Report by AndrewJ Aug 2021**

**SITUATION**  
  
The war rages on in the major theatres around Europe, but that doesn't mean there isn't significant work to be done here at home. Cargo ships are cris-crossing the Carribean, forming up to make eastbound convoys, and arriving from overseas. Although Cuba has been dealt with sternly, Russian submarine forces are still active in the region, and will need to be tracked down and dealt with before they can cut up the defenceless merchant traffic. This could probably be handled with reasonable confidence, but there is a big complicating factor in the form of Venezuela, which looks like it is contemplating a grab on nearby islands of Trinidad and Tobago or the Dutch possessions of Aruba, Bonaire, and Curacao. Venezuela is powerfully armed for its size, with a respectable navy and air-force. While it could be stomped by the US front-line units, those front-line units are busy elsewhere.  
  
What we have is a series of small surface task groups scattered throughout the region, typically an older cruiser with a frigate or destroyer escort, and number of single ships performing ASW patrol duties in the choke-points in the island arc from Cuba to Trinidad. We also have two older SSNs, one north of Aruba, and one south-east of Grenada. Our air-forces consist of a mix of British, French, and American ASW planes based throughout the region, some lesser fighters (mostly Sparrow-toting F-16 ADVs) and strike planes (A-4s), and an assortment of minor utility and patrol aircraft. No carriers, no AWACS, no AEGIS, no Phoenix. With this we are expected to guard the transiting shipping, and forestall any invasion of the islands.  
  
**THE PLAN**  
  
My first consideration is for ASW operations. Orders are given for the ships among the islands to use active sonars to clear their patrol zones, looking for the quiet SSKs that are expected to be sneaking into the area. TG Radford, my best ASW group with two Knoxes and a Spruance, is ordered to spread *out* (very unusual for me - I usually pull in tight) and hunt actively in the center of the AO. The active searches with powerful sonar should work well against normal torpedo-firing attack subs, but I am worried about meeting something like a Charlie, where my sonar will just be a beacon for a missile attack. My Sturgeon-class SSN will continue to patrol the Piracy Passage, while the Greenling, an old Permit, will continue east, about 100 miles north of the Venezuelan cost, hunting for any Soviet subs coming up from being resupplied in Venezuelan ports. MPA are assigned to lay sonobuoy corridors in front of our merchant shipping, hoping to find any subs lurking in their path. Unfortunately, I don't have enough planes to cover them all simultaneously.  
  
The Venezuelan situation is complicated by the fact that we're not at war yet, and we're not certain which direction the Venezuelans will go - if they go at all. TG Albany, with its ancient Talos-wielding heavy cruiser, is ordered south towards Curacao and Bonair, to interfere with any moves on the Dutch Antilles. TG Dale is ordered SE towards Trinidad and Tobago, to cover any moves there. The other two groups, South Carolina and Long Beach, are ordered to continue towards the center of the AO, until we can assess the situation. In the meantime, recce assets, mostly P-3s and local patrol aircraft, are sent to hunt for the Venezuelan navy, so we can better direct our forces. F-16s are sent out with tanker support to patrol about 150 miles from their coast, in case our recce planes need sudden support.

A map of the world

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**INITIAL RECONNAISSANCE**  
  
As my planes spread out, we start getting a picture of what the Venezuelans have out there. They've got a little HMG-armed patrol boat off Curacao and off Bonair, and my two patrol boats start shadowing them, staying outside of gun range for now and watching them on radar.  
  
Radar surveillance from the small patrol aircraft and helicopters on Curacao soon picks up the main body of the Venezuelan navy. They're operating in three-ship groups, with three groups coming from the Puerto Cabello region. The two outer groups are composed of a pair of LSTS and an old gun destroyer, and the central group is a set of modern Lupos. There's another group of three Lupos further east, and also two pairs of missile boats, one SW of Aruba, and one east of Bonaire. This is almost their entire navy, with the exception of their subs and two more missile boats which are still unaccounted for. The LSTs are on course for Bonaire and Curacao at 10 knots, and it's clear that any landing they make in the next day would have to be here, rather than in Trinidad.  
  
We also see signs of their air forces. There's an MPA doing radar reconnaissance off their coast, well within SAM range of the Albany, but officially not hostile, so we can only grit our teeth as he radios back the position of all our ships in the area. They've got a tanker up too, and a recce Foxbat, which is quite a surprise, and a few more slow movers who are presumably listening for our emissions.  
  
About this time we get a detailed intel briefing on the state of their armed forces, and it contains some sobering updates. In addition to the forces we knew about (F-16s, Mirages, F-5s), they've apparently been adding Soviet assets, including MiG-25 fighters and recce planes to their formation, plus some airborne jammers. They've also recently taken delivery of all-aspect IR AAMs, and 30 airborne Exocets, which could be a real problem.  
  
**NEW ORDERS**  
  
Based on this information, several new orders are sent out. First, and the easiest decision, the USS Greenling is ordered to hurry south between Bonaire and Curacao, to intercept the oncoming LSTs. With their outdated DD escorts they should be largely defenceless against submarine attack.  
  
The second order goes to TG Albany specifically, and to other southern TGs as an advisory. The enemy navy is equipped with Otomats, which have a 100-mile range. My Harpoons only have a 75-mile range, which means we can get shot long before we can return fire. Since the Albany has obsolescent SAM defences which cannot engage sea-skimmers, and the enemy already has me on radar, any further advance could be suicidal. Her escort, the Westminster, has some Sea Wolfs left, but not enough to ward off a determined attack. Therefore, TG Albany is ordered to turn back before it gets into range, and stay out of the enemy missile envelope.  
  
It's infuriating. Here we are, the mighty US Navy, and we're outgunned and being pushed away from the islands we need to defend by the missile boats of the Venezuelan navy! TG South Carolina does have effective SAM defences, but she's still well over 200 miles away, and it will be a long time before we can hope for her assistance.  
  
The third order is for TG Dale, which is steaming towards Trinidad. We know the LSTs are all closing on the Dutch Antilles, 500 miles away from Trinidad, so there won't be an amphibious invasion here. But what about paratroopers? The Venezuelans have half a dozen C-130s. Could they try to coup-de-main facilities on the island? Or some other trick with cargo vessels? Our intel suggests not, and recce runs have shown no ships hiding in harbour next door in Guiria, so after some debate TG Dale is turned around and sent west. That leaves Trinidad with no significant naval support, but that's probably an acceptable risk.

Map

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**SIGHTED SOMETHING, SANK SAME**  
  
The Soviet sub presence makes itself known when the Banckert, a Kortenaer class FFG, gets a strong active sonar contact in the Guadeloupe Passage. It's coming in at a steady 5 knots, but since it's an active contact, I have no idea what it is, and no way to find out unless I get extremely close. The captain decides to risk an engagement, and the Banckert's helicopter runs in, drops a torp, and sinks something. The breakup noises are unmistakable, but we're still not sure what it was.  
  
Moments later, a Nimrod patrolling the Piracy Passage gets a deep moving contact 13 miles directly ahead of the inbound Amazon Vista, but fortunately it's only a biological.  
  
The same is not true of the contact the Ouellet gets in the Anageda passage. Once again, it's an active contact, 5 kts, -40m, and the helicopter prosecutes and sinks something solid.  
  
Then it's the turn of the Greenling, which has a passive contact while approaching Curacao at full speed to intercept the LSTs. The captain immediately orders the throttles reduced to creep, and as the sub slows the sonarman suddenly calls out that it's fast and close: 16 knots, and less than two miles. "Snapshot! Both tubes! Cut the wires!" orders the captain, and two Mk48s launch towards the target, before the Greenling turns away, dives, and runs at flank speed, certain that Soviet torpedoes will be closing on them at any moment. Their only hope is that the enemy will turn away to flee, lose contact with them, and then they can dodge the torpedo with a sudden course change. But at this range? Faint hope...  
  
Then there's a thud of a distant explosion. A hit? The Greenling keeps running, before turning and slowing to listen. There are ongoing breakup noises, the distant sound of one Mk48 running off into the deep, and nothing else. No enemy torpedoes. They didn't fire! As for what it was, we never did get a definitive ID. *(Postwar analysis shows that this was not a Soviet sub at all. This was one of the Venezualan Type 209s, presumably manoeuvring at high speed to try and close on the transiting Greenling. Who started the war with Venezuela? Well, technically, we did...)*  
  
**STEALTHY SUB SINKS SPRINTER**  
  
Three subs down are good work, but we're not having our own way everywhere. At 12:53 local the container ship Sprinter, out in the middle of the Caribbean, starts making urgent radio calls that it's been hit. The transmission cuts off moments later, and our MPA report the loss of a radar surface contact in the corresponding location.  
  
The Sprinter was heading east, and although there were P-3s and ships proofing paths in the area, there just weren't enough of them to assign to every single merchantman. The Sprinter was one of the ones which was unprotected, and it was lost as a consequence. Multiple assets are directed to the area. TG Radford is ordered to hurry to the area, and three P-3s and a helicopter are diverted from other searches to hunt for the elusive enemy. It takes over two hours, but the sub is finally detected and sunk. This time we know what it was. Passive sonobuoys showed it to be a Victor III, presumably the same one that sank the other container ship near Puerto Rico several days ago.  
  
**ONGOING SURVEILLANCE**  
  
For the moment, things seem to be going about as well as can be expected. We’ve traded one merchant ship for four (well, three) enemy subs, which should significantly improve our chances of success. Meanwhile, we’re keeping a sharp eye on Venezuela, as their forces continue to close on Bonaire and Curacao. Will they turn back? It seems unlikely…

**VENEZUELAN APPROACH**  
  
As the afternoon rolls on, our forces continue to monitor the approach of the Venezuelan navy, which is continuing to steam towards Bonaire and Curacao at a steady 10 knots. By 15:20 in the afternoon they're about five hours out from the islands, and continuing their approach. Warning orders are sent out to our aircraft to be ready for action. The MPA based on Curacao have orders to evacuate the region and head for other more distant bases, one of the helicopters will proceed to find a home on TG South Carolina, and the other has relocated to Aruba and is on alert for immediate launch.  
  
The SSN Greenling is in the passage between Curacao and Bonaire, putting up a mast to get a final position update on the advancing ships. She is ordered to intercept the western group of LSTs, plots her course, and dives deep to hurry on her way. The captain is confident that, unless he runs over another sub en-route, he should just be able to catch them before they land. My aircraft are assigned to tackle the eastern LSTs. Missile-carrying P-3s will launch when the enemy is estimated to be three hours from landfall, with A-4s to follow-up if necessary.  
  
**VENEZUELAN SURGE**  
  
By 15:40, radar operators are reporting a string of new bogey contacts over Venezuela. There's a pair of MiG-25 fighters over El Liberatador, where four new fast-mover contacts (presumably F-16s) are observed taking off. We're also getting reports of MiG-21 radars and other unidentified contacts out of Manodez in the east, near Trinidad. The MiGs are a surprise. It looks like the Soviets have handed the Venezuelans more aircraft than we anticipated.  
  
No shots have been fired yet, but we have to assume this is the prelude to the attack. Orders are issued to launch our own aircraft in response. All available F-16s are scrambled, along with remaining tankers, and the slow-moving P-3s get underway (but not the A-4s yet). After a bit of deliberation, the Columbian Kfirs are also put into the air too, and sent overland ready to take the enemy in the flank. Evacuation orders are given to the remaing planes and helicopters on Curacao, which start hurrying to get out of the region.  
  
Meanwhile, radar is reporting more and more planes taking off from Manodez, with at least six of them on-course for Trinidad. The command staff start getting a bad feeling that they've misjudged the Venezuelans' intentions in the west. Are they actually making a grab for Trinidad too? The decision to redirect TG Dale to the west is starting to look questionable now. All the assorted Cessnas and helicopters on Trinidad are given emergency orders to scatter and flee north to airbases in the neighbouring islands, and the patrol boats in the region turn and head NE at flank speed, hoping to get out of the line of fire.  
  
**FIRST SHOTS IN THE WEST**  
  
Around 16:00, Venezuelan F-16s briefly charge the aircraft retiring from Curacao. The Albany is ordered to engage with extreme-range Talos missile shots, and although they lose lock and miss (possibly due to the airborne jammer which is radiating now) the F-16s turn aside, and my planes continue to fly away. There's no point in denying that hostilities are underway now, and the general order goes out to engage the Venezuelan armed forces wherever practical.  
  
Venezuela proves the point moments later, when long-range rocket fire from the mainland starts slamming into the airbase on the peaceful island of Aruba. The crew of the helicopter there hastily spin up the blades and flee the airbase, and fortunately they manage to escape without being struck.  
  
Our patrol boats near Curacao and Bonaire aren't so lucky. With hostilities under way, they immediately make flank speed to engage the smaller Venezuelan patrol boats there, but before they can get into gun range the lookouts start yelling about incoming missiles. One Otomat strikes each patrol boat, sinking them instantly. The report raises eyebrows in the command center. Wasting Otomats on PBs? That's two less which can engage my main warships. Little comfort for the crews, though...  
  
Meantime, my closest F-16 ADVs arrive on the scene, and start tangling with the MiG-25s and (confusingly) F-16s. Sparrows are a big advantage when the enemy only has Sidewinders, and the MiG-25s are clumsy and have poor countermeasures, so the F-16s manage to shoot down the enemy without loss. They press southwards towards the coast, where they can see swarms of F-5s coming from the direction of Jacinto Lara, and that's when they find a coastal SAM site, which lights up with a powerful radar and sends my F-16s diving to the deck and scurrying back over Curacao.  
  
Waiting there, they manage to pounce on the incoming F-5s as they approach to make their bomb runs, but our pilots are low on missiles. Although they manage to kill or damage a respectable number of the enemy with their remaining Sidewinders and guns, many get through, and the airbase on Curacao is bombed. Fortunately, the planes which were based there have already fled the region, and although there is damage to some of the base facilities there are no immediately critical losses.  
  
**TRINIDAD UNDER ATTACK**  
  
The situation is worse in the east, where heavy strikes are headed for Trinidad, which has been left completely undefended, under the assumption that Venezuela would commit all their efforts in the west. The main airbase at Port of Spain is hit heavily, destroying a hangar and leaving one more in flames. No aircraft are left there to be caught on the ground, but the adjacent surveillance radar is struck and destroyed, which punches a big hole in my situational awareness on that flank.  
  
Not all the planes head for Trinidad. My little scout helicopters, fleeing towards Grenada at wavetop height, spot MiG-23s blasting by overhead, en-route to bomb American communications installations on that island. They radio the news of these unexpected MiGs back to base, but then they're plunged into a struggle to survive, as MiG-21 escorts peel off and try to gun down the nimble little helicopters. The pilots desperately dodge and jink, turning inside the less maneuverable MiGs, and avoiding multiple passes, until the enemy breaks off and retires.  
  
In the meantime, the radar operators on TG Dale are picking up numerous Mirages taking off from Garcia AB, and spreading out towards Trinidad. Moments later everyone's hearts sink when there are reports of slow-moving aircraft taking off from El Libertador, where the C-130s are based, and heading east. Have we completely misjudged the situation, and a paratroop-lead invasion is underway? Maybe not, as the planes speed up, and ESM reports them to be Mirage 50EVs, some of them burnering eastwards at high mach.  
  
**DECISIONS**  
  
The scope of the effort in the east is much larger than expected, and the staff is coming to the realization that even if there isn't an invasion planned, the Mirages now have access to the merchant shipping which is approaching from the Atlantic. Thankfully, it looks like it's mostly the conventional attack variants involved, not Exocet carriers, but even they can still do horrible damage. Is there anything we can do to defend the ships, or are they to be left to the wolves?  
  
My incoming F-16s are redirected SE, and ordered up to military power, with tankers following as quickly as they can. They won’t be able to interfere with the Mirages before they reach the ships, but they will try and cut them off on the way back and prevent a second attack. Of course, sending the F-16s east means no cover for my ships in the west, and if those Exocet-toting Mirages decide to come in low and have a shot at TG Albany, there is nothing to stop them except a handful of Sea-Wolf missiles. (Or little to stop a C-130 drop on Aruba either, for that matter.)  
  
The two patrol boats running away from Trinidad could try and save themselves, but instead we decide to order them to angle towards the merchant ships at flank speed. Maybe (faint hope), they can act as a diversion, or provide a little AAA protection if they get there intact. (The third PB ducked into harbour on Trinidad to hide, and is unavailable.) Other than this, there's little else we can do immediately.  
  
TG Dale, which could have been providing support in this area with its long-range SAMs, is still headed west. Should it turn back? It's too late, so the decision is no. TG Dale is ordered to keep steaming west. There's a group of three Lupos ahead of it, and it will have to tackle them, probably some time in the night. TG South Carolina, on the other hand, is much closer to the action. It's been coming in from the far west, and staying out of Otomat range, but now we need to take some pressure off the center. It's decided to order the group into tight anti-missile formation, and send them SE at high speed, and try to engage the pair of missile boats in the mouth of the Gulf of Venezuela. This is a rather risky decision, but I need to get into support range of TG Albany, and this seems to be the best way to do it.  
  
Have my choices left the eastern cargo ships at the mercy of the enemy? Will any of these new decisions pay off? Time will tell...

Next episode!  
  
**DANGER IN THE EAST**  
  
As the Venezuelan attacks continue, my forces struggle to inflict what damage they can to contain the large number of enemy aircraft in the area. The ground attack on Trinidad and Grenada has already headed home, but swarms of Mirages are operating throughout the region, threatening ships in the area. TG Dale manages to take long-ranged shots at some of them with its SM-2ERs, hitting two, but most are able to beam the missiles, causing them to go blind.  
  
The other Mirages press on east, homing in on one of my small patrol boats operating ahead of the merchants between Trinidad and Grenada. The crew do what they can with their feeble autocannon armament, but it’s not enough, and several sticks of bombs crash into the little vessel, obliterating it in moments. Then, for whatever reason, the rest of the aircraft turn around and head back for base. Perhaps they’re low on fuel, or don’t have target locations on any other ships? In any case, disaster is averted, for now.  
  
Further north, my four incoming F-16s jump four patrolling Mirage 50EVs in their path, knocking them down with Sparrow shots, before pressing on towards the main Mirage base at Garcia, 100 miles further south. Plunging into the stream of landing Mirages, they manage to knock down seven of them, and get damaging hits on a couple more, as well as knocking down one of their good MPA and, best of all, killing their tanker which was RTB-ing too. This heavy blow takes a lot of pressure off the merchants in the region, although we’ll have to guard against follow-up attacks from the survivors.  
  
**DANGER IN THE WEST**  
  
The Venezuelans are attacking out west too, while their amphibious formations continue to advance towards Curacao and Bonaire. Radar spots four slow-movers headed north towards Curacao, cleverly heading through the airspace controlled by that big coastal SAM (soon to be ID-ed as an SA-10). Are these the C-130s we’ve been worried about? TG Albany is ordered to turn south towards the islands, preparatory to engaging with its long-ranged Talos SAMs, but then four more slow movers are spotted, and then another four. These can’t possibly be C-130s, which means they’re probably Tucanos coming up from Jacinto Lara. Trying to engage would put TG Albany at risk for minimal return, so the course change is countermanded.  
  
The Tucanos arrive unopposed, swarming the airbase and blasting it with a storm of rockets and light bombs. They add to havoc caused by the F-5s, but fortunately they seem to ignore the big air surveillance radar adjacent to the airport, and it continues to provide valuable early warning of operations in the area. The Tucano pilots jauntily turn back for base, completely unscathed, and confident that the SAM will prevent anyone from following them. Little do they know, that there’s a surprise lurking in wait.  
  
Four Kfirs have flown overland from Columbia, hoping to get into the rear area unopposed, and catch aircraft landing at Jacinto Lara – like those helpless Tucanos! They’re just a moment too late to catch the returning F-5s, only shooting down the last damaged F-5 just before touchdown. Looking around, they head further east to snap up an ELINT plane, and then decide to make a run on the tanker, but they’re shooed away by approaching MiG-25s patrolling the rear area and accomplish nothing. Hurrying west again, to get away from the Foxbats, they stumble over a pair of escort F-5s. They manage to shoot them both down, but one of our planes takes a missile hit and staggers away to base, and the remainder follow.  
  
Which, of course, leaves Jacinto Lara completely open for the Tucanos, who land happily, pleasantly surprised about how easy the mission was!

Map

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**FIGHT, ALBANY, FIGHT!**  
  
Suddenly, radarmen on TG Albany start shouting about two incoming Vampires from the SW! These have to be Otomats from the western pair of missile boats, but how? We thought they were still a few miles out of range, but evidently one of them darted in closer when we were distracted. The Norfolk’s Sea Wolf knocks them down, one-two. We’ve still got fifteen missiles left, so we should be able to handle the other missile boat without difficulty.  
  
However, the sensor guys are also reporting hints of Mirage 50EVs to the SE of us, and they seem to have dropped below radar now. Do they have missiles? It’s only a few minutes more before missile seeker heads click on, and we’re getting urgent reports of half a dozen live Exocets coming in. Fortunately, most of them are on the wrong course, passing 13 miles astern, except for the last one, which dekes in and takes two SAMs to kill. Thirteen left. A moment of rest, and then two more Exocets, coming in hot. This time there’s a lot more missing, and it takes five SAMs to kill them. Eight left.  
  
Westminster has only 8 SAMs left, and no CIWS. Albany is completely defenceless against sea-skimmers. Staying to fight is no longer an option, and TG Albany turns WNW and flees at flank speed towards TG South Carolina, which is still 150 miles away. Run, Albany, run! For a few minutes it seems like we’re withdrawing unopposed. Then two Mirages suddenly appear on radar near the Albany, popping up homeward bound from low altitude, and the Albany hits them both with Talos missiles. Unfortunately, their own missiles are already inbound, and it takes two more SAMs to kill them. Six left.  
  
Other homeward bound Mirages are popping up now, but they’re too far away for Albany to hit. TG Dale takes some long-range shots, but both miss, and in total it looks like there are (at least) eight missile-carrying Mirages still alive and returning to base. Meanwhile our engines roar and our screws churn the water as we withdraw westward. How long ‘till the next attack?  
  
***Observations*** *I very nearly lost the entire TG Albany here. The decision to send the F-16s east, to engage the other Mirages trying to bomb the merchants, left TG Albany completely exposed. Even a single pair of covering F-16s could have had a major impact on the number of Exocet-carrying Mirages able to reach their launch points. As it was, I had no fighter cover at all, and the only thing that saved me was the fact that five of the Exocets got fired on an axis which couldn’t hit. If all of those had arrived at once, my chances of survival were low. Yes, I did have six more missiles, but their individual hit chance was only about 33%. You can do the math…*

A bit more time to game, therefore…  
  
**ASSEMBLING FORCES**  
  
While TG Albany continues to run away from enemy missile attacks, other forces continue to maneuver. TG South Carolina is heading SE towards the closest pair of missile boats in the west, although one of those is retiring for more missiles, the ungrateful little sod. TG Dale, in the east, is being pushed back out to sea by the trio of Lupos on the enemy’s right flank. They seem to have gotten a sniff of me, and have turned east at 16 knots. Take on a 24-Otomat salvo? Possibly survivable, but I’d rather not risk it. They seem to have trouble judging the range, because they fire two missiles at TG Dale, which run out of fuel a mile or two away, and fall harmlessly into the ocean.  
  
More F-16s and tankers are coming to our assistance. Two are flying in from Puerto Rico in the N, and two from Panama in the W. The latter get a bit of a surprise from as they pass the western point of the Gulf of Venezuela, and they are suddenly fired on by a SAM site on the headland. An afterburner dive manages to get them below the radar horizon in time, and fortunately the tankers are nearby to top them up again. We’ve also got two P-3s, loaded with four Harpoon missiles apiece, coming down to prepare for an attack on the incoming LSTs.  
  
Best of all, USS Greenling has made its way between Curacao and Bonaire, and is now angling west to intercept the western LST group.  
  
**INVASION IMMINENT**  
  
At 17:13 local, radar operators on Curacao report a pair of slow movers heading NW from the direction of Liberatador AFB, and these, we assume, must finally be the paratroop C-130s we’ve been worrying about. The operators watch them head towards the SAM cover (smart, dammit…) dipping below radar and vanishing from view for now.  
  
By 17:30, USS Greenling is settling into position 8 miles in front of the western group of LSTs, moving in at a gentle 5 knots as they continue to advance. The Lupos, which were between the two LST groups, seem to have fallen back to creep speed, leaving the LSTs to advance alone. Our P-3s are loitering at low altitude just within missile range of the eastern LST group, while four enemy F-16s loiter over their ships.  
  
Both sides are poised for action.  
  
**INVASION FORCE ATTACK**  
  
Our four F-16s are the only ready fighters we’ll have for a couple of hours, and the pilots are torn between engaging the enemy fighters, which can stop our anti-shipping missiles, or the incoming C-130s. The order is given to hit the fighters first, and a blast of Sparrow missiles eliminates three of the enemy, but the fourth one dodges and weaves and eludes numerous Sidewinders before finally dying. Our pilots have just enough missiles to catch the incoming C-130s, one a few miles out from Bonaire, and the other headed for Curacao. Both succumb to head-on Sidewinder shots, and the pilots turn for home. (And the ones headed for Panama discover that there’s a SAM site on the other headland too, dammit, but once again they manage to elude the shots.)  
  
Now that the air is clear of enemy fighters, the P-3s turn south to launch their eight-missile Harpoon salvo at the eastern LSTs, aiming four at each of the landing craft. More enemy F-16s are spotted lifting off from their airbase and heading north, but unless they burner all the way they won’t make it in time to intercept the missiles. For a moment things are tense in HQ, but the Venezuelans advance at cruise speed, and soon it’s clear they won’t be able to catch the missiles, even if they accelerate now. At 17:52 the low-flying missiles reach the group, achieving multiple impacts and sinking both LSTs.  
  
Around the same time, USS Greenling has detected a course change from the western LST group, and puts up its periscope for final target confirmation. All three ships are there as expected: two LSTs and an old DL. Three Mk48s are fired, at ranges from 2 to 4 miles, and they track cleanly towards their victims, striking and sinking them without warning. The Greenling lowers its scope and turns east, heading for the next group of ships.  
  
It’s 17:56 now, and all the LSTs are sunk, and the C-130s are down. The invasion is over.  
**FOLLOW ON ATTACKS**  
  
The invasion may be over, but there are still dangerous enemy forces at sea. TG South Carolina is finally within range of the first of the western missile boats, and Harpoons it with a single well-placed shot. Apparently, it had still been trying to fight, because the TG Albany detects another incoming Otomat a few minutes later. The missile must have been fired at a sensor ghost, because it’s off course and runs out of fuel without actually threatening the group.  
  
On the other flank, two flights of A-4s hit the pair of eastern missile boats, sinking them multiple strings of bombs and cannon fire, but it’s not without risk. The newly arrive enemy F-16s and MiG-25s turn to give chase, and I have no fighters to oppose them. The A-4s flee towards TG Dale, hoping its long-ranged SAMs can cover them. Fortunately, the enemy fighters turn back before they get too close, and the A-4s make it safely back to base.  
  
TG South Carolina continues to advance SW, finally coming within range of the remaining missile boat, and sinking it with another Harpoon. By now it’s 18:40 local, the invasion force is gone, as are both the pairs of missile boats. (According to Intel there are two more somewhere, but we have seen no sign of them.) Therefore, the two groups are ordered to turn and hurry towards each other. They will finally make one robust task group with reasonable anti-missile defences.  
  
**GREENLING AT WORK**  
  
The captain of the Greenling is not content with his work so far, and after an hour comes to periscope depth for an update on positions of other ships in the area. After a conversation with the MPA monitoring the area, he uses a single Harpoon to sink the helpless DL which is left over from the eastern LST group, before setting course for the group of three Lupos which are south of him.  
  
Creeping in slowly, the Greenling gets within five miles of the Lupos, and opens fire with two torpedoes. (Five miles, because no-escape range for the Mk48 is six miles, and the enemy’s defensive torpedo range is four miles. He’s not engaging all three, since he only has four torps left, and wants to save his last two for self defence.) Things are going well, with no sign the enemy has heard him, when suddenly there’s the sound of an active dipping sonar about a mile behind him. They’ve been had! The Greenling dives at flank speed and runs for the depths, but there’s a splash and a little torpedo bores in relentlessly, gets distracted by a noisemaker, wheels about, and charges again. It gets closer and closer, and then suddenly runs out of fuel. If it hadn’t been for the loop around the noisemaker, we’d have been hit.  
  
In all the distraction, the crew barely has time to notice the two impacts of Mk48s striking and sinking their targets, and the Greenling continues to flee east at flank speed. Newly arrived F-16s notice the new helicopter contacts, and shoot one down while it’s dipping, and then pursue and shoot down another as it retreats towards the coast.  
  
Eventually, the Greenling slows, comes up, and hears yet another helicopter sonaring away about 12 miles to the west. (Apparently the F-16s didn’t find them all.) The lone Lupo is making plenty of noise, running at 35 kts, which our sub has no hope of catching. All three of their remaining anti-shipping missiles are launched at the Lupo, which doesn’t detect them in time. Multiple hits break the ship in two, and the crew of the Greenling gradually start to calm down.  
  
A homeward course is set, heading north between Bonaire and the other Lupo group, and the Greenling leaves the area hoping to avoid any other surprises.  
  
**SKIRMISHING IN THE NIGHT**  
  
Other forces have been busy while the Greenling is conducting its war. A momentary absence of enemy fighters allows ours to dart in and pick off multiple soft targets, including that pesky jammer plane. When they return, ongoing skirmishing lets us gradually claim more victories; the Sparrow range advantage is decisive. Still, we don’t get everything, and a few more F-5s manage to sneak in and bomb Curacao again while we’re out of position.  
  
TG South Carolina joins up with TG Albany, and together the ships advance with determination, heading towards the passage between Curacao and Bonaire, radars sonars and jammers blaring, ready to take on all comers.  
  
Far out east, in the Piracy Passage between Trinidad and Grenada, a patrolling Nimrod picks up a passive contact on a sonobuoy, and it turns out to be a tough old Victor II, which absorbs an impressive three torpedo hits, before finally succumbing to the fourth.  
  
Meanwhile, TG Radford, on ASW patrol in the middle of the Caribbean, is feeling quite left out. However, they have our only four TLAMs, and now seems to be the perfect time to use them. The feeling is that the Exocet-carrying Mirages at El Liberatador are the most dangerous forces the Venezuelans have, but we’re not sure where on the base they might be. Open parking? Hangars? We’ve only got four shots, so they’re allocated to the first four hangars on the list. The missiles fly off into the dark, following their pre-plotted course that takes them over the mountains, and into the base through the valley to the east, around 20:30 local. Did they work? Nobody knows… *(Satellite BDA in the following days reveals impact holes in all four hangars, and eventually a scrap-heap including the tail sections of 7 Mirages. A very useful strike indeed!)*  
  
The last group of three Lupos have been moving back and forth indecisively, and at one point they head NE towards TG Dale, which has been shadowing them. TG Dale turns away ESE, in the direction of Trinidad, and holds the distance. Shortly before midnight another P-3 uses our last four airborne Harpoons to engage the group with a night-time BOL attack, but the results poor: 1 hit, 1 near-miss, 1 malfunction, 1 spoof, and no sinkings.  
  
**END OF DAY**  
  
And that’s where we sit at the end of the day. The Venezuelan invasion of the Dutch Antilles has been decisively defeated, and most of their navy is underwater. However, their air-force still has the potential to reach out and cripple passing merchant traffic, and they have given no signs of standing down. There’s a sub out there somewhere too (not counting any the Soviets have on the scene). Hopefully the State department can extract some sort of drawdown from their government, and free up our resources to be used elsewhere.

And the final episode...  
  
**MIDNIGHT**  
  
It’s just past midnight, in the warm clear waters of the Caribbean. Our MPA and ASW ships are patrolling their zones, TG Long Beach continues to head S through the AO, TG Dale is headed back to Trinidad to cover that area, and the expanded TG Albany (including the ships of former TG South Carolina) is approaching the straits between Curacao and Bonaire.  
  
At first there’s not too much happening. The Albany puts a Talos into a high-altitude recce Foxbat, F-16s skirmish with MiG-25s, and MPA pick up radar emissions from 2 SAM sites near Guiria (SA-8 and SA-2?) and another (SA-3?) on Isla de Margarita, or possibly the nearby mainland.  
  
**VENEZUELAN ATTACKS**  
  
At 0300, Venezuelan forces in the east try to make another strike on Trinidad, using 8 MiG-23s. By this point, all our F-16s are available for use, and we have a standing patrol operating over the merchant ships between Trinidad and Grenada. They are quickly vectored in, and manage to intercept the MiGs before they reach their targets, and none return home.  
  
There’s a brief moment of calm, while the A-4s try to sneak attack the surveillance radar south of Curacao with Shrikes, but it doesn’t work, and the nearby SA-10 neatly shoots down all the incoming missiles.  
  
Then we start seeing multiple aircraft lifting off from the western mainland bases, including at least eight conventional Mirages from Garcia, and what are probably two Exocet carriers from Liberatador, and slow moving Tucanos from Jacinto Lara. By 0350 local it’s clear that a major attack is underway. F-16s are hurried back from their tankers, Kfirs are scrambled, and all ships are placed on alert.  
  
TG Albany is between the islands now, and its radar suddenly spots incoming ASMs, crossing Bonaire and heading their way. These are the Otomats from the remaining Lupos, which are now in range to the east. While our F-16s tackle the Mirages, the Tattnall and South Carolina put their SAMs to good use on the Otomats, effectively defending the task group. Many of the Otomats miss to the north, and don’t need to be engaged at all, and the task group merrily goes to work on the remaining Mirages and Tucanos, wreaking great execution with its SAMs. A few Tucanos get through the SAMs to drop their bombs, and the waiting Kfirs pounce on them on the way home, until the squadron is extinct.  
  
**THE ADVENTURES OF ALMIRANTE LYNCH**  
  
It’s worth a moment to consider the course of the Almirante Lynch. She’s a Chilean Leander, with ancient Sea Cat missiles, a four-pack of Exocets, one gun, and all the verve and flair of a Caribbean adventurer.

Map

Description automatically generated

She starts off speeding down the west coast of Curacao alone, and using her Exocets to put an end to the pair of Venezuelan patrol boats in the region, before dashing south to the mainland. Approaching the coast, she tries to find the SA-10 battery there, but can’t quite pin it down in the dark, so she bombards the surveillance radar instead, wrecking it before turning north again. Of course, the SAM site spotted her, which is probably what provoked the Venezuelan anti-shipping strike. In mid-water she’s saved from an incoming Exocet by an F-16, and distinguishes herself by shooting down three passing Tucanos with her antique four-shot missile launcher. Turning back south, she does speculative area bombardment of the SA-10, and gets reports that it has stopped transmitting. When morning comes, she launches her spotter helicopter, which immediately pinpoints the battered SAM site, and she shells it until it is destroyed. That accomplished, she zips up the coast to the east headland of the Gulf of Venezuela, and bombards the suspected location of the SA-3 there. That doesn’t seem to do much, so Westminster’s Lynx comes over, and uses its FLIR to help spot the site, which the Almirante cheerfully bombards into oblivion. Three planes, two patrol boats, two SAM sites, and a surveillance radar. Not bad!  
  
*(Yes, the big ship formations do the serious work, but sometimes the little ships are more fun! I really enjoy how Command lets you see both ends of the spectrum.)*  
  
**LAST OF THE LUPOS**  
  
TG Albany comes around the bottom of Bonaire shortly before dawn, and turns east towards the Lupos, which are moving around in a confused fashion. An initial missile shot hits and damages one of them, although not the one that was aimed at. A spread salvo of three follows, hitting and sinking two of them. That just leaves one damaged Lupo, burning and listing, which is sunk at dawn by a single Harpoon from TG Long Beach, which has finally reached the battle from the north.  
  
TG Albany then turns back to patrol south of Curacao and Bonaire, where she will remain for the rest of the day, while TG Long Beach turns east, to help guard merchant shipping coming into the Caribbean from the Atlantic.  
  
**LESSER OPERATIONS**  
  
The situation is calmer now in the morning light, and our forces continue to guard the merchants against Soviet attack, while F-16s patrol off the Venezuelan coast.  
  
Two flights of A-4s make runs into western Venezuela, bombing the surveillance radars near Jacinto Lara. Other A-4s attack the SA-3 on the western headland, using fast-moving F-16s to provoke the battery to engage, and then hitting it with a combination of Shrikes and bombs.  
  
In the east, the crew of the patrol boat Buccoo Reef have heard about the exploits of the Almirante Lynch, and decide to see if they can find the SAM battery that’s on Isla da Margarita. They don’t manage to spot it, but the SAM site sees them easily, in the clear light of day, and calls a Mirage to investigate. My F-16s hurry to intercept, but then they’re fired on by the SA-3! They manage to get the incoming attacker with Sparrows, just as it’s passing over the island, and then dodge behind the hilltop to screen themselves from the SAMs. The foolish Buccoo Reef scurries away to safer waters.  
  
A little later, TG Dale tries the same thing near Guiria, where several SAM radars were detected during the night. Nothing is spotted, so the Coontz puts a few rounds into approximate locations, and then the TG sails away without any apparent result. (Yes, they could use their helicopter to spot, but one of the SAM sites is reported to be an SA-8, so that would be suicidal. Wish we had a drone.) This action also draws a Mirage to investigate, but the Dale swats it with an SM-2ER, and withdraws without any further concern.  
  
And that brings the scenario to a conclusion. Many thanks for writing it for us.

**Play Observations**  
  
I really enjoyed this one. It’s got a great combination of limited resources, credible opposition, and interesting tasks and objectives to accomplish.  
  
The fact that I was outranged by the Otomats, and dispersed into small two-ship groups with modest or nonexistent sea-skimmer defences really kept me on the back foot, and I was constantly being shoved around by the enemy ships. Despite my precautions, I very nearly lost the Albany to Exocet attack.  
  
Thank heavens for the F-16 ADV! Their Sparrow missiles were essential to my success, allowing me to hit most of their fighters with massive range advantage, and tackle the MiG-25s at parity. Without them, the situation would have been very different.  
  
The lack of AWACS made the scenario much more interesting. Normally I can see where everything is, and there’s no hope of sneaking up on me. Here, I had to resort to ship radar, broadcasting a big ‘here I am’ signal to the enemy, and even so I had enemy aircraft vanishing below my radar horizons and popping up again in unexpected locations. (Such as those Exocet carriers…)  
  
I was completely paranoid about air landings, and the number of times I misidentified anything slow moving as ‘C-130s’ was rather funny, in retrospect. Once it was clear they were tackling the Dutch Islands, I had started to expect the C-130s to have a go at Aruba, although that never developed.  
  
I never spotted the Soviet Tango (no ships were really going where it was), nor the second Venezuelan submarine. TG Albany actually came fairly close to it, within about 20 miles or so, but fortunately it had flattened its batteries and was unable to intercept me.