**Mediterranean Fury #3– Casbah Crunch**

**Playtest Report by AndrewJ July 2017**

So I'm still only a few hours into this one, but I have to say I'm really enjoying the environment. It feels 'live', as if you're surrounded by a real world with fishing fleets (full of spies), passing freighters (full of spies), and a high command that keeps trying to divert your resources. (They're probably full of spies too...) The power balance is nice as well. You don't have a big enough qualitative advantage to simply beat up on the Africans and force your way in with technological might. I find myself feeling stymied, and really having to look carefully at what I can do, which is definitely a good thing.

**Playthrough**

My initial situation is dangerously spread out, and the first commands which go out are to turn and run away from tattletales, then tighten up formations, hurry isolated ships towards each other to make task groups, and get clearance from the south coast. The carrier groups are much too dispersed to give effective AAW support to each other, particularly the Brits who are spread out as if they are hunting subs in the empty North Atlantic. (Just like the other Brit task groups up in Scandinavia in Northern Fury.) Their Sea Wolf missiles are effective, but very short ranged, so I move them in very tight to provide mutual support.

MPA go out to look around. The American CVBG is directed to head south at modest speed. The French are sent between Corsica and Sardinia, with plans to cut down between Sicily and the toe of Italy. I see no need for them to snuggle up to the enemy coast before they reach their duty station. The Italians come south at good speed, eyeing the suspicious Tunisian freighter who has more surveillance radars than I would normally expect. I glare at them. They wave innocently at me. Hmmmm.... The Orangeleaf, all alone, heads for the Greek airbases and anchors under the flightpath, waiting to join the Italians as they pass south. I don't want her out there all alone.

The ASW environment on the south coast is probably reasonably benign (particularly in the east), so my subs turn and start snorkelling in the direction of Tripoli and Oran. I'm pinning a lot of my hopes on the Marconi, which starts heading along the coast towards the Soviet ships. If she can get in and torpedo the big guys this will remove a major obstacle. When she gets closer she'll hug the bottom and creep, but at the moment she stays masts up and provides ESM information.

I take the first offensive move, by sneaking in some F-14s towards Tripoli at wavetop level, with jammers fuzzing things up in the background. The F-14s take long-range Phoenix shots at the Russian AEW helicopters while keeping their radars off, thus remaining covert, and the slow-moving helicopters don't get far enough to elude the active seekers on the Phoenixes. The Libyans never see my planes, so they can't be sure where the missiles came from, and this allows us to remain at peace for the moment. Our ambassador expresses concern about the unfortunate maintenance failures on the Russian helicopters, and hopes no Libyans were harmed by the Russian negligence. Both AEW helicopters are destroyed, which is a genuinely Good Thing.

A few hours in the Libyans make their move, and massive strikes are launched towards my ships south of Italy. Fortunately, with my ships now over the horizon from the tattletales, the Libyans have bad targeting information, and at first they don't proceed directly to the actual positions of my ships. My F-104s prove their high-speed dash makes them very useful for hurtling down from Italy in time to interfere with the western branch of the attack before they can get to my ships there, and some fighters from the American carriers arrive to help too. The eastern branch untangles itself after some confusion, and when the Blinders manage to get a fresh radar hit on the British carrier group the planes turn and attack. Fortunately, they don't all arrive at once, so there is time for a combination of Harriers, every single Greek F-4 with an AAW loadout, and a number of carefully allocated SAMs to defeat the attack.

My shooting at the Libyan strike causes the Algerians to go hostile, and they start trying to hunt my P-3s, so I'm forced to shoot down a Mig-29 with my cruiser, earning me some more diplomatic bad-boy points.

In the general engagement which follows large numbers of Mig-25s and Mig-23s emerge from Libya. The Foxbats are more spread out, and many are handled by AMRAAM equipped Harriers (consequently I now have only 4 AMRAAMs in the entire fleet). The Mig-23s are in a tighter cluster, and they head north as I'm about to bring my fleet of AMXs into Pantelleria. My heavy Phoenix reserve deals with that very nicely, and the AMXs make a safe landing. (I have to admit I'm quite nervous about all those planes at Pantelleria, which is quite vulnerable, and I'm worried about air strikes or even naval raids there. I'm also surprised there's been no attack on my radar station at Lampedusa yet, which continues to give me very useful information.)

The Libyan navy also starts heading north, and some of my ships around Sicily have to dodge incoming ASMs. Fortunately, these seem to have been fired at obsolete target information, so they pass harmlessly by, too distant to pick me up. I'm currently out of the range of the Krivak's OTH radars and they've got no radars airborne, so I suspect there's something else submarine-shaped out there listening for me. (An Atlantique has sunk a Tango west of Sicily, but so far no other sub contacts in my area.) My airborne radar is effective, however, so a combination of Harrier strikes and Otomats deal with the isolated ships on the leading edge of the enemy flotilla. There's a lot of more capable missile boats further south, but for the moment they're out of range of my missiles, I don't have a good fix on them, and I'm not sure I want to send aircraft deeply into SAM cover (SA-5 and SA-N-6) to engage them. I may wait until daylight and send the AMXs after them when they can actually see again.

I've been given orders to engage Libyan land targets, but with the dense SAM belt around Tripoli and the dratted task group parked in the harbour with their advanced missiles, I don't think I've got a good way in yet. I definitely don't want to send iron bombers (or even LGBs) in on it without ARM support, because casualties will be appalling. I think I'll have to wait until the navy is down before dealing with the land attack. Fortunately I've still got a day and a half left.

In the east there's been some skirmishing with Mig-23s south of Crete. I used my last few TLAMs to engage the surveillance radars near Benghazi, in advance of strikes there, but an attempt to hit the radars for the Tobruk area did not succeed, and the missiles were shot down by enemy fighters. I know there are a few missile boats in the area, which I will tackle soon with Harpoons under cover of darkness. The trick will be getting a precise location on them without losing my observer. I've also flown in some more of my Greek F-4s to provide cover for the ferrying aircraft, which are starting to come through. So far nobody has interfered with the first few F-15s, although I wonder if there will be a determined effort when the transports come through.

Out west, my submarine heading for Oran gets into a pack of Algerian missile boats, which are completely blind to submarine threats, and begins to systematically execute them. F-18s from Spain, Etendards off the French carrier, and missiles from the Spanish ships destroy most of the others, and at the moment I believe I've gotten rid of all but two of them (unless more are in port). I need them gone before the Rota task group enters the Med, and the progress is heartening.

In the air, the Algerian Mig-29s prove to be a real problem to handle, and it takes coordinated pack tactics using F-18s and Mirages to deal with them and the Mig-25s. After darkness falls the A-7s head south to bomb the airfield near Oran, but despite dropping scores of 500 lb bombs on the runways the damage is modest. They have better luck bombing hangars and strafing tarmac spaces, which destroys most of the remaining aircraft on the field, but occasional Mig-29s still pop up during the night. The Algerians launch an anti-shipping attack in the east, but this is costly with the American carrier so close nearby.

I also try some attacks on the Algerian's eastern and western surveillance radars, which prove to be guarded by SA-6s, and it takes some terrain masking and dodging to try and find a way in. The radars go down, but I'm not sure it will make a significant difference, since SAM radars and Tunisian radars will fill the gap.

My SSKs are sooo slooooow. Can I wait for the sub to get to Tripoli? I'll lose most of a day. Should I try an ASM strike first? The Russians have great ASM defences. Although an SSN would be awesome for zooming into Tripoli, the scenario is much better balanced with the SSK. An excellent way to inflict some decision-making agony on the player!

So once again, this is a really good one, with lots to do, good operational tension, and enough surprises and uncertainty to keep the player guessing. Thanks for writing it.

Wait a minute... Does the Tunisian fishing fleet sail home every morning, as part of their routine operations? Or is something unusual going on? Presumably the Italians would know?

(My shoulder blades are itching. Am I about to get a Tunisian knife in the back?)

Edit: maybe the smaller boats are headed home to refuel. They should be running low at this point.

Have I mentioned this scenario is awesome? You've got me so paranoid for tricks that I'm calculating fuel expenditures of fishing boats...

Well, this scenario certainly isn't as quick as I had anticipated. I finally had time to play the rest of it, so here's what happened in somewhat abbreviated form.

**Playthrough**

**CENTER**

In the center, I decided not to wait for the SSK to arrive at Tripoli, and went ahead with a night-time anti-shipping strike, bringing in every Harpoon and SLAM carrying aircraft I had, including S-3s and even EF-18s from Spain, and covering them with HARMs and heavy jamming (3 Prowlers) and a strong fighter escort to keep the enemy out of my missiles. (F-14s are essential here to reach into the enemy SAM envelope with Phoenixes.) After intense fighter combat, I launched a concentrated single axis attack on the enemy fleet. The combination worked, with multiple hits on all units, sinking some outright, and leaving the others to burn out. (if you let the AI spread out your missiles this won't work. You must manually set them for a single straight line attack down the jamming strobe, and time them so the enemy wastes its initial SAMs hitting HARMs instead of your Harpoons.) The crew of the submarine Marconi, only 55 miles away, could only listen in frustration to the distant rumbling as their targets broke up and sank. They spent the rest of the scenario patrolling off Tripoli and gathering ESM information.

In the meantime, the bulk of the Libyan missile boat fleet was headed north, sending long-range Otomat shots towards my ships, who were trying to take long-range Otomat shots of their own. There were several desperate dashes by F-104s to intercept the enemy missiles, and some heavy SAM work by TG Grecale (the Ardito, Grecale, and Monmouth in close formation, relying heavily on the Monmouth's Sea Wolf VLS system) to keep the group alive. In the end I had air cover and airborne radar and they did not, and my group was able to shoot-look-shoot to whittle down the enemy forces. A cluster bomb strike by returning F-18s which had expended their HARMs down south was also useful for slowing down the La Combattantes (the only ones with long-range Otomats), and the French helped out with a long-range Etendard/Exocet strike from the Clemenceau, and the Libyan flotilla was under water by dawn. (The Osas south of Crete met a similar fate, taken by surprise by missiles arriving out of the dark.) TG Grecale was out of SSMs, but the Minervas hadn't reached the enemy in time to engage so they were still fully loaded. Both groups went to patrol around Pantelleria, alert for possible Tunisian action, for the remainder of the scenario.

The strike on the Russian task group off Tripoli had revealed a new player - a very dangerous SA-10 system - which would cause a great deal of trouble for any attack on the targets in the region. Accordingly, the morning strike was planned with the primary goal of SEAD: heavy jamming, heavy fighter cover, and then 30 of my remaining 40 HARMs and all my SLAMs intended for the SA-10, timed to arrive along with a salvo of TLAMs to deal with the SA-3s and SA-5. I was pretty pleased with my math (after all, the SA-10 only has so many missiles, and had used some trying to hit my fighters), until my barrage of HARM shots at the SA-10 provoked a barrage of fire from the four surrounding medium range SAM sites and the SHORADs site that had been lying in wait. My reserve HARMs were immediately fired at these new threats, and SLAMs were redirected to deal with them. A few shots from my main salvo made it through the gauntlet to shut down the SA-10, and since the new SAM sites had used most of their missiles, my remaining shots were able to take down the new threats. I had expected a token SA-10 to keep the Libyans quiet. Clearly the Russians had not agreed.

Nonetheless, the sites were down and the signal was given for the three dozen AMXs (which had overnighted at Pantelleria) to launch their attack. Naturally, the moment this happened I started getting ESM hits from a massive swarm of Mig-25s heading north. Anything airborne with a long-range missile (heck, or even a short range missile) was ordered to form up and receive the charge, and stop it before it could wreck the AMX attack. After furious air-to-air combat the Migs were vanquished, and the AMXs came scooting in at treetop level, shutting down Tripoli airbase with Durandals, going after the SA-2s and radars with cluster bombs, and beating up on barracks and bases with iron bombs. Their attack complete, they retired to Pantelleria for a well-earned celebration.

**EAST**

In the eastern end of the Med things had been quieter. A force of the Greek F-4s had flown in to Souda to provide cover for the ferry and cargo flights to Egypt, and they set up patrols SE of Crete. The Andromeda was sent further south, two thirds of the way to Egypt, in order to act as a radar picket in case the Libyans tried sneaking along the coast. The Libyans never made an attempt on those aircraft, so patrols continued quietly for the rest of the scenario.

After the main attack in the center was over, a smaller attack was launched at the facilities around Benina. Long range Italian jammers flew in, along with some fighter cover and my remaining HARMs from the American carrier, and Greek attack planes flew in from the mainland and Crete. A combination of HARMs and TLAMs dealt with the SA-3s and SA-5, and the low level attacks dealt with the SA-2s, but the overall threat level here was significantly lower, and the attack planes were able to batter away at the airfield and nearby facilities. (The main lesson here was 'don't waste 500lb warheads on runways'.)

Follow-up attacks happened during the night with carrier aircraft (Harriers with night-vision) and land based aircraft the next day to finish off targets in the area. F-4s from Crete kept ganging up on the Mig-23s operating out of the Tobruk area, using numerical superiority and longer-ranged missiles to keep control of the situation, and they racked up a good score without reprisals. There were no other significant actions in the east for the rest of the scenario.

**WEST**

In the west the Algerians proved that they could still be troublesome. My proud Spanish submarine, fresh from its victories over the missile boats near Oran, headed north to clear the expected route along the north coast for my task group coming through Gibraltar. Mentally measuring up the broomstick he was going to tie to his mast, the captain ordered the sub to snorkel along at good speed, and went to measure his uniform to see if it could hold enough medals. That's when the sonarman started screaming about incoming torps. A desperate turn to bring the stern tubes (the only full ones) to bear, two shots down the enemy bearing, flank speed below the layer, then a boom, breakup noises and silence. Five minutes later another boom and breakup noises as the Kilo met the same fate. A mutual kill in the warm Mediterranean waters.

A second night bombing raid by the A-7s from Monte Real, this time carrying 2000 pounders, does a much better job of wrecking the airfield near Oran, and the two Spanish frigates also arrive in time for some night-time naval bombardment of radars and SAM sites in the area. They don't realize it at the time, but those two frigates were extremely lucky - they arrived at night from the north, in an area where the Square Tie surface search radar had been destroyed as an afterthought by strafing attack planes on the way home from bombing the airfield. The frigates are in a bay literally in between two undetected SSM sites, one five miles east, one five miles west, and since none of them can see my frigates they do not fire. My ships sail away cheerfully, ignorant of how close they came to being sunk.

During the day the Spanish light attack planes make some attempts to destroy SAM sites further along the coast by low level bombing, and it works, sort of. The sites can be killed, but it usually takes a plane or two to do it, so after some successes the attacks are called off, since it's not worth the exchange. The frigates are headed east, and they plan to stop by at Algiers for some more naval fire support there, which should be safer (hah!) than using the planes. In the meantime, the airmen ask the Spanish government to buy some HARMs.

**OVERNIGHT**

As the day of Feb 15th comes to a close, and the major attacks were over, forces withdrew to rest, rearm and regroup. TG Detroit is proceeding along the Spanish coast, and the Ray is past Sicily and en-route to Toulon. The small NATO carriers continue closing in on their RV, with support ships in attendance. The Eisenhower, which had been hiding north of Sicily, turned and started heading west towards its RV point. A Soviet Victor gets caught off the East coast of Sicily, and is sunk by MPA.

By this point the Ike is nearly black on air-to-air munitions. I can count my remaining Phoenixes on the fingers of one hand, I've got literally a dozen Sparrows, and even Sidewinders are in short supply. I have no HARMs, no SLAMs. I'm putting fighter aircraft on Ferry loadouts just so I can evacuate them in an emergency. However, I do have some TALDs and IR Mavericks left, as well as iron bombs, so I load my attack planes with those.

In the midst of all this the Soviet bombers arrive, flying north through Tunisia, and they're dangerously close. Scramble! F-104s go to crazed afterburner dash, and my CAP turns south to violate Tunisian neutrality. But then, just as I'm about to activate my task group's radars, the bombers turn about and fly south! Mystified, we continue to patrol... (It turns out that what happened was a couple of hours earlier some of my planes carelessly got too close to Tunisian airspace, and provoked some of their F-5s to come out and ID my planes. In doing so some of them overflew the carrier group and got an ID, which they shared with the Russians. However, it took the Russians two hours to lift off and head north, and in that time the Tunisians lost the contact. When the uncertainty zone expired the Russians continued for a couple of minutes, seeing nothing, and then turned for home.)

I conduct two attacks overnight, both in the west. Newly arrived F-16s fly from Sigonella to hit the Algerian airfield at Ain Beida, and carrier aircraft and the Spanish A-7s hit the Mig-25 base at Ain Oussera. (Those IR Mavericks reveal the horde of SA-6s at the latter site, and deal with them from a safe standoff before the A-7s arrive). The Spanish frigates decide to fly their FLIR-equipped helicopter up the coast in the dark at extremely low altitude and hunt for hidden SAM sites. What they find is hidden SSM sites! The naval bombardment of Algiers is postponed until the surface search radar can be knocked out...

**NEXT DAY**

Morning comes with another strike in Algeria, this time a dawn raid by Mirages on Laghouat, shutting down the runways with BAP-1000s and Durandals, and strafing and bombing the large number of planes there. F-16s fly OCAPs near Tripoli, and F-4s do the same near Tobruk, but other than that there is no significant action, and my task groups continue to their destination.

Hmmm. That probably wasn't so abbreviated after all. Miscellaneous comments to follow later.

**But did you like it?**

Heck yes! This is one of my favorites so far. So many things going on, a living environment, potential threats at every quarter, and you don't have massive overmatch to just stomp the foe. An excellent scenario overall.