**Caribbean Fury #4 – Show of Force**

**Summary by fitzpatv, Oct 2022**

The US has detected a Soviet base at Manodez airport in Eastern Venezuela. While unwilling to provoke the Venezuelans into entering the war, they aim to send them a strong signal and thwart Soviet plans by mounting a raid on the base using Stealth aircraft. Targets include recon and ELINT planes, some Foxbat fighters and an intelligence complex located on the site. There is also a covert operations centre nearby, but this is surrounded by civilian housing and collateral damage is to be avoided. It is believed that the base’s prime function is to locate shipping and pass intel to Soviet subs.

A heavy emphasis is placed on keeping the strike force undetected. While this makes sense in terms of preventing it from being intercepted en route, it is hard to understand the rationale for this potentially costing the player VP. After all, if the airbase has been hit with missiles and, especially, if the strike forces loses any planes, are the Venezuelans going to be left in much doubt as to who was responsible?.

The strike is to be preceded by a recon flight by an SR-71 Blackbird, which has to fly all the way from Beale AB in California and requires KC-135Q tankers for refuelling (needed every four hours or so).

A total of 16 F-117A Night Hawks, based at Roosevelt Roads in Puerto Rico, are available for the strike, along with a B-2 (the Spirit of California) which has to make its way from Whiteman, Missouri. All of these aircraft have pre-set loadouts which can’t be altered due to turnround times. The B-2 has a formidable arsenal of GBU-36s, which can launch from 12nm at high altitude, enabling it to stay out of harm’s way. The Night Hawks have a selection of Paveways and Mavericks, plus a couple of HARMs.

In support, you have plenty of tankers, an Aries and a pair of Orions for maritime recon and ELINT and a selection of fighters in Puerto Rico and Florida. Those at Homestead, Miami include some AMRAAM-carriers and are worth bringing forward with tanker support as escorts, with the proviso that they have to be kept out of Venezuelan airspace and shouldn’t engage Venezuelan aircraft except in dire emergencies. Useful if you get chased by Foxbats, though. Some F-16s in Puerto Rico have Sparrows and could be helpful in a tight spot. You also have some less-capable fighters that are best kept grounded and a few SAR choppers that you almost certainly won’t be able to use effectively, as they can’t safely get near Manodez.

At sea, the SSN Trepang is cruising off the Venezuelan coast, but is of little use apart from ELINT at periscope depth.

The Russians have Foxbat fighter and recon types, Bears, a Cub ELINT plane and a Tu-154 transport on the base, which is otherwise protected by several Grouse and Venezuelan Rayrider MANPAD teams. Venezuelan bases house a selection of F-16s and Mirages, with tanker and ELINT support. At sea, there are several Mariscal Sucre class frigates (Italian design) with short-ranged SAMs and decent radar. An array of radars combines to provide comprehensive coverage across the republic’s territory.

19/2/94 : 14:00L : Studying the map, it was quickly apparent that the best route to the base was from the NE, coming-in over Guyana which, unlike Colombia, allows overflight in this scenario. This allows a short transit across Venezuelan territory and minimal time spent under their radar umbrella. It makes sense to attack at night and, helpfully, the timings work-out conveniently for this. I did a series of calculations and drew-up a schedule which got the strike together where it was needed at the same time, following on the heels of the SR-71 mission.

At first, despite the presence of an AI-controlled Delta Force team near the base, not all targets are visible and, while this gradually improves, the SR-71 flight is needed to get the fullest-possible picture. The Soviets don’t maintain a CAP, leaving this chore to the Venezuelans. The latter only have a tanker and a couple of other support aircraft in the air to begin-with.

I launched the Blackbird and aimed to have it rendezvous with a KC-135Q S of Tyndall AB to refuel. An Orion and Aries were sent up to perform maritime recon and ELINT gathering.

20:00 : By this point, a total of six Venezuelan frigates had been located, maintaining continuous radar coverage across the coast. This underlined the need to go around them and approach via Guyana, where the coast was clear.

22:00 : Having refuelled, the SR-71 headed for Martinique with the tanker, now re-based to Puerto Rico, keeping it company.

23:30 : The B-2 lifted-off from Whiteman, a second KC-135Q from Altus AB in Oklahoma, all four tankers at MacDill and six AMRAAM-capable fighters from Homestead. By now, the Venezuelans had a couple of Mirage 5V fighters on patrol, but these have only basic radar and rear-aspect missiles and don’t constitute too much of a threat.

20/2/94 01:00L : The SR-71 refuelled again from its attendant tanker over Martinique and the KC-135Q then went to Roosevelt Roads to ready for the return flight. The Blackbird set course for Guyana.

03:00 : Flying at 90,000’, the SR-71 did a double-pass over Manodez, acquiring some useful intel, including the locations of parked Soviet aircraft. It might have been spotted, as a Mirage headed its way at Military speed, but the Venezuelan couldn’t remotely hope to intercept the intruder and gave-up when it crossed the Guyanese border. The flight neither scored nor cost any VP.

04:00 : The F-117s launched individually, so as to optimise targeting. Fuel would clearly be an issue, but I had twelve tankers in support. The six F-16s from Miami, now re-based to Puerto Rico, flew as an escort, with orders to go no further than Guyana. The Aries remained on station to confirm the positions of the Venezuelan frigates.

06:00 : After a major refuelling session off the Guyanese coast, the strike arrived at Manodez, apparently undetected thus far. This didn’t last as, coming-in at 2,000’ AGL, the Night Hawks began taking fire from enemy MANPADs.

Thankfully, this was none too accurate and only two SAMs hit, downing one F-117 for 107VP and damaging another. I’d approached from the S to avoid the three teams detected by recon, but it made little difference as, inevitably, there were more of them. The lost plane had much to do with a problem whereby aircraft went RTB after firing and headed directly for Puerto Rico, contrary to instructions (which had to be repeated) to fly to the tankers waiting over Guyana. Needless to say, we incurred a Downed Pilot and were given next to no time to rescue him, even if it had been possible.

On the positive side, the strike eliminated all six Foxbat fighters before they could scramble, along with two Foxbat recon models, three Bears, a Cub and the Tu-154. Each of these scored 25VP. We also destroyed six hangars, an ammo shelter, two barracks, a KGB station, a transformer station, two radio masts, a comms bunker, a command and control centre and the base’s ATC radar. Most of these scored 10VP, but one of the hangars was a Venezuelan one and cost us -10. The imperfect accuracy of our weapons also meant that three Venezuelan transport planes were smashed, costing a further 30VP total.

The slow speed of the B-2 meant that it arrived later than was ideal, though its impressive firepower compensated and cleared-up much of what had been missed by the Night Hawks. By this stage, a couple of Mirages were inbound and I decided to call-off several F-117s without attacking, as any damage they might have done was outweighed by the risk of suffering another massive penalty for losing one.

The Mirages were unable to locate the strike as it withdrew E and, after more refuelling, all surviving planes made it back to base. Careful tanker support ensured that the SR-71 did the same.

So it finished with a score of +318, which is Average. If I’d avoided losses and hit all other potential targets, I calculate that it would have been +492, which still sounds like no more than a Minor Victory. Of course, the strike did not prevent Venezuela from entering the war, so any success has to be considered relative.

Overall, the scenario is a bit of a slow-burner, requiring a degree of organisation and planning, with a few minutes of high excitement when the strike goes in. It is hard to avoid any losses or collateral damage, so winning requires a considerable degree of luck.

Next time, we fight Venezuela for real and, needless to say, with severely stretched resources.