**Indian Ocean Fury #1 – Persian Pounce**

**AAR by fitzpatv, Feb 2023**

So, the intention is to alternate Indian Ocean Fury with the four NFZ scenarios, with the latter replacing my abandoned Chains of War series.

Cutting off the West’s supply of oil from the Persian Gulf was always likely to be part of the USSR’s grand strategy and, given the long-standing difficulties between the US and Iran, Moscow had a ready-made ally in the vicinity, assuming that pragmatism could overcome ideological differences.

Following a quiet day, evening is approaching in the Gulf and NATO has a multi-national force of destroyers and frigates strung-out between Kuwait and the Straits of Hormuz, endeavouring to protect the stream of tankers and other vessels using the waterway. None of these are front-line warships and they are unable to rely on each other for support in most cases.

Outside the Gulf in the Arabian Sea, the Saratoga CVBG provides distant cover, with the flat top escorted by three cruisers and two destroyers. Nearer the Straits are the cruiser Wainwright, with two more destroyers. Sailing individually you have the SSN Buffalo and four more destroyers or frigates (the American Leftwich, British Argyll, Spanish Cataluna and Australian Sydney).

In port at Bahrain are the helicopter carrier Tripoli and a selection of minesweepers and auxiliaries.

Various air groups are stationed across the Arabian Peninsula, with the most potent US squadrons at Ahmed Al Jaber airbase, Kuwait, Sheikh Isa in Bahrain and Al Dhafra in Abu Dhabi. Secondary groups are present at Ali Al Salem in Kuwait (Anglo-American) and King Abdulaziz, Saudi Arabia (French). There are support aircraft elsewhere, notably in Oman, where there are even two B-1 Lancer bombers, albeit with iron bombs instead of stand-off weapons.

In addition, the West’s Gulf allies (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE and Oman) have their own resources in the form of missile boats and a mixture of US and French-made fighters and support aircraft. These start under AI control.

Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and Abu Dhabi have area defence from Patriot missile batteries, but their reach across the Gulf is limited.

Iraq is still ruled by Saddam Hussain, but is militarily impotent for the purposes of this scenario, at least.

Across the Gulf, Iran has a large force of aircraft, mostly rather dated, but including some dangerous F-14s and MiG-29s and Mirage and Fencer attack planes. These can be expected to be reinforced by Soviet regiments operating out of Turkmenistan and featuring lots of Fencers, Bears, Badgers and Blinders. It is believed that the Russians have only been able to allocate Floggers as fighter cover, with more modern types needed elsewhere.

Iran’s Navy has a selection of frigates and destroyers, some of which are armed with anti-shipping missiles, plus large numbers of small patrol craft, armed with anything from missiles to rockets to machine guns. As they have done in the past, they have the capability to close the Straits by minelaying. This can be supplemented by Sardine and Seersucker SSM batteries and covered by SAMs. One battery of Gammons is known to command the Straits themselves, while there is another at Bushehr, from where it can interdict much of the upper Gulf. One ray of light is that these batteries have just four components each and are less durable and dangerous than some of those fielded by the Warsaw Pact in other theatres.

There is also a submarine threat, with Iran having modified Kilos and the USSR being known to have stationed at least one Victor III and Kilo in the Arabian Sea region.

First Attempt

This really is a massive scenario and just analysing it and preparing my forces involved many hours of play over several days. Wish I could say it did me much good…

It would be great if someone could fix the introduced bug which prevents EMCON being set on or off for blocks of aircraft. Having to do it plane-by-plane is a time-consuming nuisance. Using the new Alert Level rules to do it for the whole side creates as many problems as it solves.

It would also be most welcome if the EMCON Obedience pop-ups (Doctrine and Sensors windows) could be removed from the game. They make the above problem doubly annoying and serve no purpose apart from irritating the player.

Perhaps realistically, you are left in the dark about what you are expected to do at the start. Orders are to maintain at least one frigate or destroyer in each of 12 marked patrol zones, of which two (outside the Gulf) start empty. However, this seems impractical given the weakness of most of the available ships and the oncoming horde of Soviet and Iranian strike planes (and Iranian warships) swarming towards you at the outset. Similarly, protecting neutral shipping and escorting the American fleet auxiliary Sgt Button out of the Gulf seem like tall asks.

As far as possible, I tried to get units out of the way, but the ones near the Straits were evidently doomed. I also felt the need to role-play things and not fire first unless fired upon. Quite apart from anything else, there could have been a points penalty for initiating hostilities. Another concern was getting into simultaneous aerial combats at different points along the Gulf, with the additional hazard of having planes sniped-at by Gammons while I wasn’t looking. This dissuaded me from making an early SEAD strike at the Gammons near Bushehr and also made me slow off the mark in scrambling fighters from Kuwait and Bahrain, which cost me.

Another factor was that this was the first large scenario I’d played since (finally, categorically) downloading the ‘Tiny’ update, so I had a lot of unfamiliar rules and settings to contend with. In particular, the new Side Alert settings caused me to adjourn the session and download the latest draft manual from the Forum.

13/2/94 14:00Z: Numerous additional aircraft, presumed Soviet, were seen approaching over Iran to supplement the existing screen of Phantoms and support aircraft. Meanwhile, a flotilla of small craft sortied from the Abu Musa oil platform in mid-Gulf opposite the UAE. A minelayer was spotted in the Straits, but there was no immediate attack. I moved my two AWACS planes over Oman back in case the Phantoms tried rushing them and sent a couple of F-16s across to screen them. This turned-out to be a bad guess and there was no later indication that the Iranians had this in mind. On the patrol ships, operators hunched over their weapons and lined them up on Iranian warships, ready for the balloon to go up.

Hostilities began when a Soviet Fencer (probably armed with bombs) got too close to the frigate USS Gallery off Abu Dhabi. Soviets were fair game under the Rules of Engagement. I began to realise that, despite my hours of preparation, I’d been hung out to dry by the scenario default set-up as the Perry-class frigate turned-out to have Harpoons on her rail instead of SAMs. Thankfully, the switchover was quick enough to engage and down the Su-24 before it could strike, scoring 3VP.

The Iranians responded by firing SSMs from Abu Musa, so I took the gloves off. The French frigate La Fayette loosed Exocets and sank her Iranian counterpart Alvand for a whole VP. I found that all surface ships were on Weapons Hold, but this piece of sabotage was easy enough to deal with. The AI also had the Frenchman fire at the cluster around Abu Musa and this worked well, accounting for the frigates Bayandor and Naghdi and a pair of Toragh patrol boats. Given the choice, I would not have fired at the latter, but had not adjusted WRA. Then again, at least the Exocets got used this way, as La Fayette was then sunk by a volley of Sardine SSMs.

The Italian frigate Aliseo laid about her, getting the drop on the adjacent gun-armed destroyer Palang and damaging her with 127mm fire. Meanwhile, she launched her four Otomats to sink the Kaman-class missile boat Neyzeh. The Alvand-class Alborz should have suffered a similar fate, but made two 20% spoof rolls. Aliseo also used Aspides to dispose of an incoming Fencer, but was then overwhelmed by a storm of missiles and sunk. This cost 25VP, plus 6 more for the loss of her choppers, so one second-line NATO frigate is worth 31 Iranian frigates. The Downed Pilot script kicked in, but seems to have trouble generating pilots for planes lost on the ground under Tiny, with Lua messages resulting. Quite possibly, this still doesn’t prevent later points loss. This scenario is hard enough without giving the player the additional handicap of this script. As usual, rescue will usually be impractical. Palang and Alborz were later sunk by Harpoons fired by the destroyer Leftwich.

The other French frigate, the Drogou, was only armed with guns and used these to damage the Kaman-class Tabarzin before being ripped apart by a Seersucker.

The UAE’s patrol craft responded to the loss of two of their Alouette choppers over Abu Musa (AI-controlled planes don’t cost points, it seems) by firing Exocets indiscriminately at the Toraghs, sinking four when they might have saved their ammo for larger targets.

USS Gallery was hit by a missile, but was able to fight on, switching back to Harpoons and disposing of the Iranian frigate Sabalan. However, despite the intervention of an F-16 from Abu Dhabi, there were too many incoming planes and missiles and she, too, was sunk.

Further NW, the Italian Lupo put up a brave fight, downing three Fencers, but the odds were too great and she was destroyed in turn.

Back in the Straits, the weak Italian corvette Libra never had a hope. She tried to get into range of the minelayer with her guns, but it was never going to happen and a Seersucker blew her to pieces.

The Spanish Perry Santa Maria and the American Crommelin also found that they had Harpoons ready instead of SAMs. The former took two or three aircraft with her after adjusting in time, but succumbed. Crommelin wasn’t seriously attacked as she moved to help the SAM-less frigate Elmer Montgomery and her charge, the Sgt Button. The Fencers concentrated on the Montgomery and sank her with the last missile fired.

Near Kuwait, the British frigate Coventry found her Sea Wolf battery an inadequate defence and was destroyed as well. In all, the Russians lost 11 Fencers during the strike.

I then had a dose of ‘surprise rules’. An F-16 tried to intervene over the Straits, encouraged by the lack of emissions from the Gammons and keeping to 12,000’ to facilitate a quick dive while intercepting the Fencers. Her way was blocked by two pairs of Iranian Phantoms over the N tip of Oman. Puzzlingly, I found that I could only engage the further pair, due to ‘vertical boresight’ issues, even after the height difference had been reduced to about 2,000’ by climbing. This didn’t stop the F-4s firing at her. As the two AMRAAMs loosed at the further pair were outrun by the fleeing Phantoms, the Falcon turned and got clear. She was then able to reverse course and, this time, nail both pursuing F-4s with her remaining missiles. It was perplexing and not good for confidence. Neither was the realisation that Iranian aircraft score no VP whatsoever…

I then had to pull back an F-16 that had pursued retreating Fencers too far across the Gulf and evade Gammons fired at my late-arriving CAP from Kuwait. Meanwhile, outside the Gulf, the Spanish Cataluna had to check-out a probably false submarine contact.

As she was doing this, the destroyer USS Leftwich, further NW, was suddenly ambushed and sunk by a real sub, which cost another 56VP. I later realised that she had been set-up for this by having her ASW choppers unavailable for the first 4.5 hours of the game.

This was the last straw and I conceded defeat. Quite apart from anything else, I didn’t have a clue how I was going to score any substantial VP to make-up the huge deficit.

Having read other AARs, lessons are as follows:

1. Ensure that all ships have SAMs loaded!

2. Ensure that all surface ships are on Weapons Tight.

3. AndrewJ found that turning-off radars immunised some of his ships against enemy ARMs. We’ll see how much difference this makes in practice.

4. Scramble CAP straightaway, assign to Missions protecting the vulnerable ships outside the Straits (those in the narrows are probably doomed) and damn the Gammons.

5. Unassign all ships from Patrol Zones and move them towards SAM cover at Flank. It just might make a difference.

6. Give Leftwich a chance by keeping her at Creep. She has decent SAMs and an ASROC.

7. Retreat all ships to the SE of the Straits and cover them with Saratoga and the SSN.

8. Worth putting up a Hercules jammer from Thumrait, Oman. Otherwise make sure that every available platform has OECM on.

9. Judging from Andrew’s report, not all the Iranian F-14s will have Phoenixes, which should help. He recommends bombing the docks at Abu Musa to contain excessive swarms of Iranian small craft and warns that the latter will be supplemented by a few converted container ships mounting 127mm guns and MANPADs.

10. Andrew also warns that the Russians will flood Floggers into the airbases near the Straits and suggests a TLAM strike to close the runways after they have landed.

AARs where the player always wins are boring, aren't they?. I’ll give this another go in the next few days and report back.

**Second Attempt**

So I tried again, implementing the measures listed above. The action unfolded much as before, but with all of our available fighters arriving sooner and the Fencers (or, at least, some of their missiles) getting intercepted en route to their targets.

In the Straits, La Fayette sank the frigate Alvand with an Exocet and the Aliseo disposed of the missile boat Neyzeh with an Otomat. The Italians’ guns and a Harpoon from Leftwich accounted for the Palang. Retaliating, the Iranians sank the hapless Libra with a Seersucker (how is she worth 25VP?). La Fayette fired at the Abu Musa flotilla and sank the frigates Bayandor and Naghdi, as before. She and the Emirati patrol boats also put down 7 Toraghs in this phase. I really think that the scoring should differentiate between Toraghs and the like and larger vessels such as frigates and missile boats, which are surely worth more.

A Seersucker destroyed the gun-armed Drogou (trying to run away is useless). Leftwich sank the frigate Alborz, but La Fayette then succumbed to Sardines and Aliseo was wrecked by a Krypton. In practice, while you can turn radars off, the AI will just switch them on again unless you uncheck Ignore EMCON under Attack, which I hadn’t thought to do (even if it was wise).

Given a breathing space by our fighters, Gallery switched to Harpoons and put away the frigate Sabalan, then switched back. Leftwich looked for more targets and destroyed the missile boat Tabarzin. A couple of Aliseo’s Otomats were still in flight and these sank an Iran Ajr minelayer (unsure how many mines this prevented being laid) and the missile boat Khanjar.

There weren’t enough fighters to stop all the Soviet Fencer attacks and some Kazoos got through to destroy the Santa Maria.

Meanwhile, I’d sent three RAF Tornadoes to retaliate against the Bushehr Gammon site. It needed some persuasion to light-up, but was then disabled by a volley of ALARMs, as was a nearby I-HAWK battery.

The aerial battles cost us a Mirage and Harrier for 14 Russian Fencers – only three more than before due to the effort spent intercepting missiles. The Omanis lost their Wessex and a patrol boat, the UAE a couple of Alouettes. HMS Coventry took 80% damage and, ridiculously unable to dock at Kuwait, was sent to a hopefully obscure spot on the Saudi coast to fight her fires – I wasn’t hopeful. The score at this point was -85, a Major Defeat and we had just four escorts left inside the Gulf of which one, the Lupo, was down to a single SAM round.

You would think that all neutral shipping would have headed away from the Gulf at this point but, no, they kept mindlessly to their original courses. There was very little that I could now do to help them (though the AI-controlled Arab navies tried) and the constant light gun attacks upon them by the Iranians chronically slowed the game down.

While she still could, Leftwich tried to hit the Bandar Abbas Gammon site with her eight TLAMs and I backed this up with a couple of HARM F-16s from Al Dhafra. Unfortunately, I hadn’t reckoned with the sheer numbers of defending SAMs. In particular, I hadn’t realised that there were Soviet SAMs on site, having not checked their land facilities in Scenario Platforms on the assumption that they were all in Turkmenistan. In practice, they had four Grumble battalions at the narrows, plus Gadflies and Gauntlets, so the attack got nowhere beyond using-up quite a few of them.

Gradually, most of the Gulf allies agreed to help NATO, though the Saudis elected to sit on the fence for now (even after their units were attacked). This was apparently a game balance decision as the Saudi Air Force, in particular, would have made it ‘too easy’ for the player. Hmmmm. A consequence of this was the need to do another round of Doctrine micro-management for the Arab units in mid-game. It would help if the default settings weren’t so often the opposite of what I prefer.

While I was watching the attempted HARM strike (micro-management was needed to time the launches for when the Gammon lit-up), about seven Kaman-class missile boats sortied from ports on the Arabian Sea. The first I knew about it was a message telling me that the Cataluna had been sunk – the Iranians used 15 Harpoons on her.

HMS Argyll could not engage the nearest trio of Kamans because of their OECM and repeated checking was required before she got the necessary windows of opportunity. Either her own jamming was effective or the enemy had fired everything at Cataluna, as they didn’t fire back. All three Kamans were sunk for a wonderful 3VP. Saratoga mounted a strike to get the rest and do something about Phantoms off the Arabian Sea ports and a couple of interloping Badgers.

15:00Z: As the conflict moved into only its second hour, the Arab patrol boats and attack choppers did some useful work around Abu Musa, destroying some 16 Toraghs and similar.

One of the Badgers flew too close to Saratoga and fell to a SAM before the strike escorts could get it. I then noticed that my two ASW aircraft over the CVBG had done nothing since launching, despite being assigned to a Mission. Investigation showed that they were neither on the Mission Units List in War Planner, nor on the list of assignable units. I cured this by unassigning them manually, then re-assigning them in War Planner. It was also necessary to spoon-feed them with transit, station and attack altitudes before they would behave normally. I also discovered that the new default is not to show sonobuoys on the map unless the player requests it. I guess it’s inevitable that a major change like ‘Tiny’ would bring a shower of bugs in its wake…

At 15:20, a delegation of 5th Fleet officers requested that I organise an evacuation of the auxiliary ships docked at Bahrain from the Gulf. They even suggested that TG Wainwright, currently heading away in the opposite direction at Full, might thread the narrows to provide additional escort. Given the realities of the situation, the idea was simply ludicrous, so I did nothing, even though I was painfully aware that it might be one of the few ways to (potentially) score serious VP in this scenario. The auxiliaries were much safer in Bahrain under SAM and fighter cover and should sanely wait for relief.

At this point, four Iranian Phantoms decided to be annoying and crossed the Gulf to attack AI-controlled Arab choppers near Bahrain. I sent six Bahraini F-16s to engage and a farcical duel ensued, with maybe two F-4s downed without loss beyond, inevitably, the choppers. This required micro-management and, while my attention was absorbed, a force of Iranian Fencers approached unseen (by me) and launched missiles at the nearby shipping. No doubt, this was timed to coincide with the departure of the auxiliaries from Bahrain. As this hadn’t happened, the attackers sank the Lupo and a couple of Arab boats and damaged the Crommelin 50% (her RIM-66Es being powerless to protect her under the current settings). One Fencer was shot down by the mostly out-of-ammo Bahraini fighters and it was all over before other CAP could scramble. The disparity between numbers of stand-off weapons available to the two sides is enormous.

While this was going on, Saratoga’s strike was nearing its targets and I couldn’t manage both at once, so I left the AI to deal with three F-18s with AMRAAMs tackling four Phantoms E of the Kamans. However, you can’t trust the AI with anything and an aircraft loss message had me hurrying across. Two of the F-18s had gone Unassigned in the middle of the fight and I only just saved the second one. Three F-4s were destroyed but, with more airborne and others taking-off from Char Behar in SE Iran, one remaining escort wasn’t going to cover the strike. I called it off and the game with it.

Unfortunately, I have to say that I found this scenario almost unplayable under the current settings. Performance is poor and the need to manage activities in widely-dispersed locations was a problem I struggled to handle, even with the help of missions. There seem to be serious issues with the scoring and play balance and there is no way I can think of to prevent the closure of the Straits given what the player and the enemy have available.

**Notes from update**:

Scoring: I've broken out the various Iranian boats and ships to give them better value, and have done the same to NATO frigates so you'll lose less with the less capable 'gunboats' nations send to defenselessly wave the flag. You should have always received points for Iranian AC so I rebuilt that trigger and hopefully it now works. Raised the score for a couple other bits as well

Adjusted a few other bits, extended Kuwait's port to extend past the shallow water, re-aligned the default starting load for US FFGs, it used to be SMs but obviously changed to Harpoon in one of the updates. Adjusted the Helo setup on Leftwich etc.