**Indian Ocean Fury #8 – Red Sea Rumble**

**Playtest Report by AndrewJ Oct 2022**

**SITUATION**

The extreme hot war in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden is dying down, but there are still hostile forces around which want to limit our freedom of navigation, and disrupt our merchant traffic in this area. Case in point, we’ve been assigned to get a major merchant convoy (PG-FR 01) west along the Gulf of Aden, turn it north through the Bab al Mandab, and then escort it to the northern end of the Red Sea. The bulk of the convoy’s currently in the middle of the Gulf of Aden, another half dozen are waiting at Djibouti, and there are two more stragglers back around Socotra. We have a scattering of warships in the region, some isolated, some with the convoy. The French have a feeble mini-group based around their old helicopter carrier Jeanne d’Arc, and we also have a medium-sized marine amphibious group based around the LHA Peleliu. Both of these want to head into the Red Sea, so we will gladly accept their assistance with the convoy transit.

Our other forces include a pair of SSNs in the Gulf of Aden, and an Italian SS up in the Red Sea, and a group of minesweepers working to clear the Bab al Mandab. Djibouti’s home to a hodgepodge of aircraft: a good number of Harriers, some recce, SAR, MPA, and utility aircraft, and our only four supersonic fighters, a quartet of Mirage F.1Cs. There’s some more MPA and tankers in Socotra and Oman, and an entire squadron of Omani Jaguars at Thumrait, but the Omanis don’t want them used far afield, so they may not play a major role. Importantly, we have no AWACS, so our ability to detect enemy aircraft is limited! Radars will need to be active on many of our warships.

Winning the prize for “I’m alone and unsupported” is HMS Lancaster, a lone British frigate way up north in the Red Sea. She’s a good ASW ship, but her air defences are modest (Sea Wolf), so she’s at risk of being snapped up if there are enemy forces in the area.

**PLAN**

There’s not a lot of flexibility at this point. Our big convoy is ordered to proceed towards the Bab al Mandab, picking up the French and other isolated warships in the region en-route. The Marines will proceed slowly towards the Bab, covering the sweepers with their SAMs and allowing the convoy to catch up, eventually adopting a position 20-30 miles ahead as a vanguard. The pair of trailing ships are ordered around the south side of Socotra, to rendezvous with escorts WSW of the island, after which they will hurry at flank speed to try and catch up (or at least close the distance) with the convoy. Meanwhile, the minesweepers are ordered to commence working on the minefield which is expected in the Bab al Mandab. Without their success, the convoy transit won’t happen!

Our air activity will be cautious at first. MPA are ordered to lay sonobuoy fields in the path of the convoy, and to conduct radar reconnaissance out at sea, while our two Mirage recce planes check out coastal areas and airfields for potential shore-based missiles and air defences. I don’t have a lot of fighter cover, so big standing CAPs are not planned for the moment, and some cautious probes are authorized instead. (I do make one pre-game edit to the airpower. Most of my Harriers are already outfitted with laser guided munitions, but as far as I can tell I only have one airborne designator pod in the theatre, which could be carried by one of the recce Mirages, and the designators on four of my best attack helicopters, which means I really can’t make use of those munitions yet. Therefore, I edited the Harriers over to a mix of iron bombs and cluster munitions instead.)

**FEB 27, NOON - INITIAL RECCE ACTIVITY**

Our recce assets spread out, and before long we start getting reports. First of all, there’s the powerful radar emissions of a Badger patrolling over Sudan, which could be a real problem for ships trying to stay hidden in the Red Sea. (Uh-oh for the Lancaster…) On the other shore, we’re also detecting MiG-23s patrolling south of Sana’a in Yemen.

The seas are swarming with small fishing boats, as you would expect in such a coastal region. My P-3 near Socotra overflies dozens of them, and with its powerful cameras it can see that many of them have been outfitted with weapons, which is a problem, since I have those two trailing merchant ships trying to pass through the region. Recce in the Red Sea shows the same situation: armed small craft mixed in with a larger civilian flotilla, along with occasional oddities, like a semi-submersible near the Yemeni coast.

On land, the Mirages find a scattering of Yemeni ground forces along the line of contact N and NE of our troops on the east shore of the Bab. They also start trying to check out airbases and ports in the region, but as they approach Hodeida they’re chased away by some Yemeni MiG-21s, forcing them to retire to other areas.

**OPENING AIR SKIRMISH**

We’ve got a pair of Harriers up over our minesweepers, and they move in to cut off the MiGs, shooting down the first pair, and then two more individuals which try to follow them in. No more come up for the moment, which seems like a good sign, so the Mirage’s are given the go-ahead to make a run on the pair of MiG-23s up near Sana’a. This goes well, and the Mirages dash in and manage to hit them both with radar guided missiles, but then someone at Sana’a opens fire with a powerful long-range SAM, forcing our pilots into afterburner dives to get below the radar horizon. Worse, four more bogeys pop up from Sana’a, and these turn out to be modern MiG-29s. This is not in our favour, and our Mirages run for Djibouti at maximum burner, while two more MiG-23s come up to join the fun. Fortunately, they don’t pursue far, preferring to loiter inland.

Still, this makes it clear that Sana’a is a no-go zone. I’ve got nothing which can tackle the big SAM, and I’m definitely outclassed by MiG-29s. If they’re hiding strike assets there, they’ll remain unmolested.

We watch the fighters carefully for nearly half an hour, and when staff are confident they’re not headed for the coast, our recce Mirages get back to work over the Red Sea. Hodeida looks empty now, except for surrounding AAA, while Kamaran’s got a few transports, some MANPADS and AAA, and some sort of tent-farm HQ. On the other coast, Dahlak island airport’s got plenty of light AAA, but doesn’t seem to have any local fighters based there.

**FISHING NEAR SOCOTRA**

Out near Socotra, the Perry-class frigate USS Cromelin starts working on the fishing problem. There are armed fishing boats threatening to report on our two nearby merchants, which seems an easy enough solution for such a mighty warship, and she starts dashing about at flank speed to bombard them with her 76mm gun. But it takes a lot of little 3” shells to sink a ship, even one as small as a fishing boat, and the captain soon realizes that his magazines are quickly running out, and there are plenty more angry Socotrans in the region. He doesn’t want to waste Harpoons on these, so he tries a few SAMs, but they don’t seem to be fuzing properly. In the end, he empties his 76mm magazine, and has to resort to his 25mm cannons, using a few shells here and there, just enough to damage the nearby enemy until they turn for home. Many of the hostiles simply have to be left un-molested if they’re too far away to catch our merchants.

(The question about what those spy boats were doing is resolved later that evening by the SSN HMS Trenchant, when it comes off a sprint about 10 miles south of Abd al Kuri, and gets a direct path contact to something submerged. It turns out to be a Charlie, which, with its long-range missiles and proper cueing from a ‘fisherman’, is a potent threat to passing merchants. Two Spearfish torpedoes make a long low-speed chase (55 knots, instead of 80!), and wreck the enemy sub before it can do any damage.)

**AIR FIGHTING – PART II**

After a pause (they glare at us, we glare at them), our Harriers knock off a pair of MiG-21s over Eritrea, and our other pair of Mirages take a stab at two more MiG-23s, getting them while the MiG-29s are out of position. This seems to provoke the Fulcrums to spread out and go hunting, and some of them come south over the Gulf of Aden (maybe looking for our P-3s?), blundering into range of the escorting frigate’s SAMs. They can’t see us under the clouds, but our radars work just fine in reverse, and the USS Gallery manages to shoot down two of the high-performance fighters, and scare a third one, which dodges numerous shots before escaping. This is a huge victory for us, and the loss of those highly capable aircraft is a great relief.

Emboldened by all this, two of our Harriers from Djibouti elect to make a run to the WNW, on the Badger that’s been loitering in the vicinity of Kassala. No enemy planes bar their progress, and the Badger goes down to a frontal Sidewinder shot, taking its powerful surface search radar with it. That’s when 18 (yes, eighteen!) MiG-21-alikes come boiling up out of the Sudanese airbases, intent on revenge. The Harriers run, turn back a moment to kill the leading two pursuers, and run again, hollering for help as loudly as they can. Two more Mirages and two Harriers scramble from Djibouti and go dashing towards the enemy, managing to kill another eight, before they disengage, delaying the pursuit until everyone escapes back home.

Fortunately, not all the enemy are pursuing my retiring planes, and the rest of them spread out to the east. Some of my Harriers have been working over spy ships and armed dhows in the Red Sea, hitting them with iron bombs and cannon fire, and once their munitions are expended, they turn west and engage the incoming fighters. Frontal aspect missiles give our pilots a huge advantage, and they manage to claim more of the enemy without loss. That’s not to say the foe aren’t dangerous. Some retiring MiG-21s somehow manage to spot our EP-3, which was loitering at high altitude over Ethiopia, safely beyond radar cover, and they make a run at it. It’s only by dodging down into the clouds and changing course that the EP-3 manages to escape. That would have been a very embarrassing loss…

**CAREFUL LANCASTER…**

Amid all the afternoon’s air-to-air, there is another attack ongoing, as the enemy tries to hit HMS Lancaster, up in the north end of the Red Sea. Eight planes are detected coming in, and they turn out to be a mix of MiG-21s and MiG-23s. Radars are on, Sea Wolf crews are ready, and guns are loaded, as the enemy closes on their position. But then, radar reports that the attackers’ course will take them north of the Lancaster. They pass about eight miles away, just beyond the extreme edge of our SAM range. The Lancaster continues hurrying south at flank speed, as the enemy strike flies past, and then turns around and heads back to shore.

This near miss is presumably because the attackers were relying on an obsolete contact, but it’s safe to assume that they’ll be back later. Based on their course, it looks like they were coming from the direction of Port Sudan Military Airfield. That information gets passed along the chain. Maybe someone can do something about it. In the meantime, the Lancaster keeps hurrying south towards allied support.

**BADGERING THE ENEMY**

A few hours later at dusk, stung by the lack of competence demonstrated on our deployment of the EP-3, a few of our last ready fighters head back to the skies around Kassala (now empty of MiGs) and shoot down another Badger. This time there’s no pursuit. Honour is satisfied!

**FEB 27, EVENING SITUATION ASSESSMENT**

The situation is going reasonably well so far. I think I’ve managed to extricate the two trailing freighters from trouble, and the French have joined the main convoy and are about 180 miles from the Bab. The minesweepers are at work clearing a lane, and the Marines are in a position 50 miles away, to support them or Djibouti with fighter and (distant) SAM cover. I’ve taken a big bite out of Sudanese air power, and even managed to kill some of the good WarPac fighters in Sana’a.

Next steps? Harriers have managed to engage some spy ships in the southern Red Sea, but there are more further N which need to sink, and I need to start working on reducing the defences near Dahlak and Karaman for eventual Marine assault. (More on that later.) I’d also like to crimp the Sudanese ability to launch anti-shipping strikes out of Port Sudan, and I’ve got four TLAMs which might be very helpful in that regard.

Let’s see what the targeters say!

**EVENING OF FEB 27**

The evening commences with a recce along the S coast of Yemen, looking for shore based anti-ship missiles or other military formations, and checking in at the airbases in the area. Nothing turns up at Ataq, Riyan, or Al Ghaydah, but a lone MiG-23 is flying near Sana’a, and our fighters take the opportunity to pick it off when it ventures away from its SAM cover. Our recce operations in Yemen also take a look in the area immediately to the east of our troops, and they manage to find several units of infantry and trucks. Our night-vision equipped Harriers work the area over with iron bombs and cluster munitions, dispersing the units, and a few more are sent up into the Red Sea to sink more of the small craft there.

Our targeteers complete their work setting up the four TLAMs, and program them to hit four out of the five hangars in Port Sudan. The missiles launch around 2000 local, and proceed up the center of the Red Sea in the dark, before turning west to hit their targets. All of them make it through, and later reconnaissance will confirm that four planes (a combination of MiG-21 escorts and MiG-23 attackers) were destroyed in the blasts.

Around midnight, we receive new orders from HQ, directing us to attack targets of economic importance near Salif Port. These are mixed in with civil targets which we want to avoid, and that means we’ll need precision munitions to do the job. The problem is, we only have one airborne laser designator pod, and mounting that means taking one of our valuable recce Mirages out of service. Still, we have no other realistic option (our best attack helicopters, which also have designators, are still too far away), so the Mirage and the Harriers at Djibouti are ordered to start loading up LGBs and Mavericks for a morning attack.

**MIDNIGHT ONWARDS**

Shortly after midnight, two MiG-29s start patrolling south of Sana’a, and command decides that it’s worth the risk to remove them now, since they could definitely make a mess of operations around Salif in the morning. All four of our Mirages launch and charge the enemy on full afterburner, salvoing the first four of their radar guided missiles to put the enemy on the defensive, and then the next four as they close on the turning foe. Both MiGs are struck down by the second volley, but one of them manages an over-the-shoulder shot with an AA-11, which appears out of the darkness without warning, detonating just off the wing of one of the Mirages. The blazing flames of spilling fuel light up the night, and the pilot anxiously turns for home, while the flames flare and dwindle and flare again, before finally going out when the fuel in that tank has all drained away. He manages to coax the crippled plane back to Djibouti and land safely, but it will be over a day before repairs can be completed. That’s a quarter of our best fighters gone for now…

Our Harriers on the Peleliu are not prepping for the Salif strike, so their iron bombs are put to good use hunting down more of the small armed ships in the Red Sea, and then bombing some of the air defences on Dahlak Island. As they approach, one of our allied ships reports a very slow-moving airborne contact in the region, presumably a UAV of some sort. The pilots complete their bomb runs and then move to investigate, only to find that the “UAV” is actually a creaky old AN-2, which they dispose of with a missile that is probably worth more than the airplane. The next two Harriers sweep in with cluster bombs, only to find that there’s MANPADS down there too, and one of the planes gets riddled with fragments from a near-miss, forcing it to head home. His wingman does a bit of boat strafing in the area, and then follows suit. Fortunately, the Eritreans don’t interfere, even though they have airbases only a short distance away.

Our favorite Brit, the HMS Lancaster, has been hurrying down the Red Sea at a fast sprint and drift, and decides to get in on the boat-popping fun with her Sea Skua armed Lynx. Slowing to launch the helicopter, she suddenly gets a hard active sonar contact directly ahead, and scrambles her ASW bird instead. A few minutes later there’s a pleasing thud of a torpedo detonation, as some sort of SS (a Foxtrot, it will later turn out) is sent on a short journey to the sea floor. The other Lynx launches after that, and claims a few more small boats, including a SAM-armed go-fast near Kamaran.

**CONVOY PROGRESS – FEB 28 AM**

Our own ships continue to advance, but other than a number of Goblin scares, all false contacts or biologicals, nothing gets in their way. The Marines are the first to pass through the straits, shortly after midnight, transiting the cleared lane in the Bab al Mandab minefield in the dark, with Harriers loitering overhead. Once through, they slow to creep, letting their Spruance search carefully for subs, and allowing the convoy to catch up.

The merchant ships at Djibouti get underway now, with the little Floreal providing a token guard en-route. These vessels pass the Bab at about 0600 local, leaving the Floreal on the south side. The French arrive next, with their helicopter carrier passing through around 0730, although their best warship (the Jean de Vienne) is also instructed to stay behind. Finally, the main body of the convoy passes through about an hour later, leaving only the two last stragglers in the Gulf of Aden. The enemy makes no attempt to interfere with the passage of the narrow strait, which is a great comfort to all our sailors.

**MORNING AIR ATTACKS**

In the growing light of dawn, our Salif strike starts launching from Djibouti: Harriers with LGBs and laser-Mavericks, Mirage and Harrier fighters for top cover, one of our KC-135 tankers, and one absolutely crucial recce Mirage with our only laser designator pod. Loss of this plane means failure of the entire strike! Our fighters keep a keen eye in the direction of Sana’a, in case any MiGs scramble to threaten our attack, but the air remains clear of enemy planes.

The first target isn’t actually at Salif itself, but on neighbouring Kamaran Island, where some sort of mobile SAM system was spotted by earlier reconnaissance. We’re not sure exactly what type it is, but my suspicion is that it is an SA-8, and that means it might be able to interfere with the Salif strike. Harriers charge in to bombard it with laser Mavericks (our only ‘stand-off’ weapon with any range at all), and they manage to kill what turns out to be a lesser SA-9. The rest of the strike turns its attention to Salif itself, one bomb at a time, in accordance with the commands from our Mirage designator, who is king of the entire show. Most of the major infrastructure is wrecked, but some of the lesser stuff is simply too close to the civilian buildings to engage with big LGBs.

While the Salif strike is ongoing, HQ sends us another set of targeting orders. It seems that the Yemeni forces have assembled a battalion of some sort south of Sana’a, and are threatening to send it towards our ground forces on the east bank of the Bab. Naturally, we are expected to strike soonest! Of course, all our Djibouti planes are busy at Salif, and all our Peleliu Harriers are reloading after Dahlak, which leaves us with no fixed wing assets of our own. We could try to bring in the Omani Jaguars, but going that close to the heavy SAMs at Sana’a, and prompting any interceptors there, could be disastrous. I’m reluctant to try it. So that only leaves attack helicopters!

The Peleliu amphibious group is ordered to turn NE and close the range to the target, leaving the convoy wondering where the heck their escort and SAM cover is going! The Marine Cobras spool up and launch, flying towards the target at low discrete altitude through the rugged terrain, until they find the battalion laid out in the Dhamar valley. The area is swarming with 57mm AAA installations, which the Cobras ignore, weaving amongst them to shoot up exposed trucks and infantry. Units which are inside the AAA envelope are engaged by long-range Hellfire missiles, which allows the Cobras to strike from safety. Within minutes, the battalion is a smoking ruin, and the helicopters sneak away and back to their ships again. Once everyone is recovered, the Marines turn back west again to resume guarding the convoy.

**CONVOY PROGRESS – FEB 28 MIDDAY**

By 1230 local, our main convoys have merged about 30 miles east of Mocha port, headed NNW at 14 knots. We have two long lines of merchants, with the French and Italians in between to provide some anti-aircraft cover. Three frigates mount a close guard the front of the convoy, while another trails at the rear. Our Spruance is a few miles out front, banging away on her active sonar, and hunting for subs. The Peleliu amphibious group is about thirty miles further ahead, passing west of Great Anish Island, with their own Spruance screening out front too.

**REDACTED** (Spoilers included, skip a couple paragraphs to avoid)

Early afternoon, at 1147 Zulu, DD982 USS Nicholson, the Spruance ahead of our main convoy, breaks its back in a violent explosion, and rolls over and sinks within moments. With no enemy aircraft or ships in the area, and the powerful active sonar having seen no sign of subs, we can only conclude it’s a mine. This is probably the second most constrained choke point in the Red Sea, between Great Anish Island and the Eritrean coast, so it’s a sensible place for a minefield.

The entire convoy comes to as quick a halt as it can manage, while urgent calls are sent to the minesweepers and mine-sweeping helicopters which are all still operating back in the Bab al Mandab area. The helicopters are the first to arrive, and they soon confirm that there are mines in the area, although they seem much sparser than at the Bab. This explains how the entire Marine amphibious group made it through the mined area two hours ago without hitting a single one of them! The convoy master gets to work, chivvying the merchants into a long single file, lead by our cheapest frigate. There’s no way we’re going through here on a broad front, and there’s no way we’re putting another high value ship in the lead. The clock is ticking, and the convoy gets underway again, this time with minesweeper support, and manages to make it through without further loss. There’s going to be a lot of finger-pointing on this one, but the sailors can’t sit around waiting, and they get on with the job.

**END REDACTION**

**KAMARAN ISLAND RAID**

Late in the afternoon the Harriers head north with their laser-designating buddy again. They finish off the last of the Salif infrastructure with small warhead weapons (Mavericks) before pounding the Kamaran airfield defences from a safe distance. In addition to the airfield, there’s an HQ on this island which our Intel guys want a look at, and at dusk the CH-46s from the Peleliu arrive with a modest detachment of marines to occupy the area. It takes about four hours for the marines to scrub the area of everything useful, and then the helicopters arrive to take them back home again slightly after midnight.

**DAHLAK ISLAND OCCUPIED**

While the Marines are poking around in the wreckage at Kamaran, the Cobras arrive at Dahlak Island in the dark, and start shooting up the airbase defences there. They already know about the MANPADS in the area, and by carefully keeping low and using their night vision, they are able to eliminate them without being engaged. HMS Lancaster’s Lynx shows up too, and uses its Sea Skua missiles to eliminate some of the Eritrean patrol boats which are loitering around the area.

The reason for all this effort is that HQ wants the Dahlak airfield occupied and held. At 0330 local time our helicopters on the Peleliu, who are having a busy night, get the “go” to do the insertion. In two lifts, they plan to take in about three quarters of our Marine infantry, our mortars, and all of our Stinger air defence. I’m worried that the Eritreans or Sudanese might try and take the base back, so we need some reasonably robust forces on the ground. The first lift is unopposed, and the Marines spread out around the Dahlak airbase, but then there’s a sudden warning call. Bogey inbound! As the fast mover comes dashing in from Eritrea, I suddenly realize that my CAP is way too far east to catch it in time. Helicopters in the area turn and flee as best they can, but fortunately the bogey’s coming in low and the Stinger gunners manage to down it with a salvo of four missiles. We don’t even get a warning about the next bogey, just a sudden blast of rocket pods revealing the enemy plane. Two more Stingers get that one (some sort of light attack plane) as it flees, and we’re left wondering how they can see us in the dark.

Fortunately, there are no more attacks after that. CAP is moved up to a better location, the second lift brings in the last of the Marines, and HQ sends orders to base some SAR and utility aircraft here. These arrive over the next few hours, and by mid-morning we have a rudimentary air station starting to become operational.

**OTHER OVERNIGHT ACTIVITY – FEB 28/MAR 1**

Merchant movements continue throughout the night. The last two stragglers pass the Bab, waving goodbye to the Crommelin and Jean de Viennes (and the two SSNs, although they don’t know about them) who all stay in the Gulf of Aden. The Scylla stays with the convoy, and torpedoes a wreck on the way through, just for good measure.

At midnight, HQ sends in its usual request for more strikes. This time they want to hit oil facilities up near Port Sudan, which is almost 600 miles from Djibouti. We’ll need tankers for that one, and good CAP because of the nearby airfield. Our SLAR-carrying recce Mirage is sent zooming up the coast in the dark for a look at the area. It reports about a dozen stationary ships loitering around Sawakin Port (civvies? or a lurking swarm?), an extensive nest of AAA at Port Sudan Military Airport, but nothing at all at the oil facilities in between. The probe doesn’t trigger any interception either, which seems promising.

In other good news, the aircrew report that they have completed repairs on that damaged Mirage. We have four fast fighters once again!

**MORNING STRIKES – MAR 1**

Just after dawn, Harriers from the Peleliu hit more small targets around the area (ammo revetment in Yemen, dock on the Yemeni coast, etc.), but the big activity is the oil facility strike. At 0730 local the long line of Harriers and CAP come flying up the Red Sea from Djibouti, pause to refuel in mid-sea, and then commence the bombardment. Once again, our lone Mirage and his designator pod are the king of the show. It takes a lot of loitering and refuelling with just one designator, but the job is eventually done, and by 1030 local all the pipelines and facilities are wrecked. Our planners don’t bother to hit the dispersed construction equipment, which would take an enormous amount of ordnance to destroy. We’re already running out of LGBs and Mavericks in Djibouti, and it’s not worth expending them on targets like these. We may revisit them with iron bombs later, if necessary. However, patrol boats and the local sea surveillance radar do get hit, just in case.

**FINAL MOVES – MAR 1 & 2**

We continue to patrol as our convoys head north. People are suspicious of boat swarms, so packs of fishermen get a hard look from our helicopters, but nothing turns up. MPA are at work, sowing the final sonobuoy corridor en-route to the destination zone, but they’re hearing nothing but biologicals. Everything seems quiet.

All our ships have caught up and assembled together into one ‘mega-convoy’ by 1700 hrs, and continue to head north under CAP and MPA cover. Our attack helicopters move around to clean up a few more armed fishing boats and light patrol vessels, but there is no significant enemy activity until midnight, when the USS Fletcher gets a hard return 12 miles ahead on its powerful active sonar array. Helicopters and MPA go dashing to the site, and HMS Lancaster’s Lynx manages to get there first, dropping a Stingray on the suspected target. The sub (a Kilo) makes a brief effort to dash away, but it’s hopeless, and the Lancaster claims its second kill. (This actually means the British can claim all three of the sub kills in this scenario, which is unusual when there is so much more American ASW available.)

Finally, at 0600hrs on March 2, all the merchant ships are able to report that they have arrived in their destination zone. Next step, the Suez Canal, and then on to Europe to deliver that valuable cargo!

**Impressions**

Well, this one’s a lesson in taking responsible precautions. Got too lazy with a dull and unglamorous task, and lost one of my better warships! Could have been a lot worse too. Had a very near miss with the ‘phibs and their cruiser in the same place, pure luck that they escaped. Very foolish on my part. Almost ran over a diesel sub too, charging around with the Lancaster. The player has multiple opportunities to get lax and shoot themselves in the foot.

I spent much of the game worrying that a fast-mover swarm was going to pop up somewhere, and kept doing coastal recce runs for them (and for coastal SSMs). The presence of that big SAM at Sana’a kept me well away from it. No way I was going to try and tackle it with my complete lack of ARMs, and the simultaneous threat of MiG-29s. This kept the Jaguars out of the fight. Just too risky to use them nearby.

The extra missions seem to work well, although the Salif one is tricky, since some of the targets are so close to civilian infrastructure that only a tiny guided warhead can safely kill them. The fact that the player only has the one day-only laser designator pod makes for an interesting constraint. Unless your Marines are close enough for the Super-Cobras to do some designating, you’re only going to be engaging one target at a time. (The player may not actually realise that they have the pod, tucked away in a bunker in Djibouti. Maybe a note in the briefing could help them with that? Also, since the pod’s not ready at the start of the game, maybe the ready Harriers would not have laser guided weapons to begin with?)

***Note that this is a playtest report, and several things have changes in the scenario since it was written.***