**Baltic Fury #2 – Borscht on Bornholm**

**Playtest Report by AndrewJ June 2020**

I've finally found some time to give this one a try, so here goes!

**SITUATION**

We're up in the Baltic, and HQ has ordered us to oversee the seizure of the island of Bornholm, by airdrop and amphibious landing. Our large amphibious fleet is currently loading in the Kaliningrad area, behind two lines of screening ASW patrol boats operating across the mouth of Gdansk Bay. Out to sea we have a strong surface group based around the cruiser Grozny, and several smaller groups of missile boats, ASW patrol craft, ASW frigates, and minesweepers en-route to the Bornholm area. I've also got a number of diesel subs around Bornholm. Only one is a modern Kilo, but even the old Foxtrots and Romeos could be useful if a ship comes their way. Against NATO subs, however, they're probably going to be flaming (bubbling?) datums. Air assets (aside from the paratroopers' cargo planes) include a very nice force of modern Flankers, good numbers of MiG-23s, and MiG-27s, plus assorted reconnaissance, AEW, and ASW assets.

The enemy's disposition is uncertain. The area is well within reach of NATO air-power, but a lot of that may be tied up with heavy fighting in Germany, so it's not certain how much will reach us. German Kormoran-carrying Tornadoes will be a special concern. Surface forces may show up, but we should be able to see them coming in time to counter them. The main risk will be the swarm of NATO's almost-midget diesel subs that are sure to be infesting the area. And the mines...

**THE PLAN**

Night has just fallen, and my attack planes are not night-vision equipped. Realistically, any strikes and parachute landings will have to wait for morning. In the meantime, my amphibs are ordered to complete loading, form a tight convoy, and begin heading for Bornholm, escorted by ASW patrol craft and mine-sweeping helicopters. My major surface group will hurry south to meet them, and provide SAM cover from expected air attacks, while land-based ASW helicopters and MPA sweep their transit lane for subs.

Lesser naval forces (forward ASW patrols and missile boats) will do their best to operate in the approaches to Bornholm. They are essentially defenceless against aircraft or anti-shipping missiles, so Flankers and MiG-23s are assigned to provide some cover. I would prefer to reserve most of my planes for decisive action, so the CAP will have to be light to begin with. I am most concerned about the survivability of my minesweepers, which will need to operate unsupported and within sight of the shore for an extended period. They will be most vulnerable of all.

Bombardment of Bornholm is expected to begin at first light, with parachute assaults and amphibious landings scheduled to follow in the early afternoon, after my attack planes are ready for a second wave. I don't anticipate too much resistance on Bornholm itself, but there are sure to be counter-strikes as my forces arrive in the theatre and after they have landed.

**OPENING NIGHT**

**Sub clashes, Part 1**

Operations begin with CAP, surveillance, and ASW aircraft lifting off and heading for their stations, while ships and submarines slow to creep and listen for nearby foes.

Almost immediately, the captain of the S-212, a Romeo class sub, is startled to get a contact on a fast-moving sub 6 miles to his N, moving at 16 knots. There's no way he can catch it, even at flank speed, and he'd only deafen himself and make an absurd amount of noise if he tried, so he sticks up an antenna, contacts the Krivak that's operating in his region, and radios in a spotting report. Minutes later an SS-N-14 is dropping an ASW torpedo on the contact, and after a few close passes there is a satisfying thud, and the NATO sub (the Unicorn, a very modern British boat) settles lifelessly on the Baltic sea floor.

It's only a few minutes later that the ASW patrol group operating NE of Bornholm detects incoming torpedoes - this time NATO saw us first! The little ships scatter, turning to flee at flank speed, and blindly firing ASW torpedoes over their shoulders along the bearing to the enemy weapons. The incoming torpedoes are fast, but, fortunately, short ranged, and they run out of fuel before they can reach my retiring ships. As my captains swing about to re-engage they hear another explosive thud, as one of their torpedoes hits something. They continue to search the area cautiously, but find nothing, and they tentatively write it up as a kill. (Postwar records show that this was the patrol area for the Danish sub Nordkaperen.)

**Bornholm Recce**

By this point my reconnaissance aircraft are starting to get a better picture of the theatre. There's a single surveillance radar radiating in the centre of Bornholm, a very slow moving aerial contact over the island, possibly some sort of drone, and a surface contact west of the island, moving further west at 12 knots. There's the possibility that this could be a civilian ferry, or something like that, but a close pass by a recce Su-24 reveals it to be a minelayer. Probably empty by now, dammit...

My SEAD Fitters (which can work quite happily in the darkness) arrive at this point, and destroy the surveillance radar with a single well-placed ARM. The Su-24 swings around to make a low-level high-speed pass over Bornholm itself, trusting in speed and darkness to keep it safe. A Stinger gunner proves that to be unwise, wrecking the port engine, but the plane manages to get home and report. Analysis of the tapes and footage shows no signs of ships or aircraft at the port and airfield, which is a relief, and although there are some indications of ground units, there don't seem to be any major SAM sites or anti-shipping missile batteries. (Unless they're still hiding.)

Meanwhile, my distant shore-based Sepal missile batteries have fired a single shot at the minelayer, and when the massive missile finally arrives it plunges in towards the isolated target, and promptly malfunctions and misses completely. Fortunately, the minelayer turned on its radars to try and shoot down the Sepal, which allows the Fitters to fire a pair of ARMs at it. Those do not malfunction, and the hits start a fierce fire, which soon brings the wounded listing ship to a halt. It eventually burns out and sinks during the night.

NATO doesn't seem to be sending any aircraft into the region (other than the Bornholm drone, which is swiftly shot down), and my advancing ELINT MiG-25s and Bears approach the western limits of our area of operation. The Bear's radar operator spots a German frigate operating alone near the Neustadt naval base, but there don't seem to be any other NATO ships at sea yet. The ELINT planes also pick up the strong emissions of NATO AWACS planes, operating safely within their airspace, and ground based radars too. These are all beyond my assigned AO, and probably amid fierce fighting, so there's nothing I can do about them. I have to accept that my operations will be under observation the whole time.

**Sub clashes, Part 2**

NATO doesn't want my southern ASW group to feel left out, and they're fired on by torpedoes too. The captains know the drill, and they turn to flee while firing torpedoes, but this time the results are inconclusive. I manage to outrun the enemy torpedoes, which are slower but longer-ranged than the ones I encountered in the north, but none of my shots hit either. My ships turn around to start hunting again, but initially they find nothing.

Since NATO doesn't seem to be sending fighters into the region, it seems safe to send a Be-12 ASW plane into the area to assist. When it arrives and turns on its radar it immediately gets a small contact, which is much too far away to be the sub which fired on my ASW group. Another sub snorkelling? Floating garbage? The Be-12 abandons the ASW group and flies over to investigate, soon gets a sonobuoy contact on some sort of SS, and gleefully pounces on it and kills it with a single torpedo.

Meanwhile the other sub fires on the ASW group again, forcing me to flee and fire defensively once more. The Be-12 comes hurrying back, and picks up the submarine contact with a sonobuoy, just in time to hear one of my defensively fired torpedoes home in and strike it. Four down!

**UPCOMING**

Four enemy subs sunk within the first hour and a half is a very encouraging start. The worrying part is that the two subs which fired at me were completely undetected by my ASW ships before they attacked. If something like that happens to the amphibs, they won't be able to turn and run like ASW corvettes - there will be hits. There are probably more subs still out there, possibly along the route my amphibs have to travel before they get to Bornholm. I think I'll need to adjust the ASW patrol plans for my convoy, to provide more local direct screening on the route of travel, rather than trying to do wide barrier lines.

The other thing I'm worried about is the lack of enemy air activity. They've definitely spotted and ID-ed my aircraft as hostile, and even shot AAA and SAMs at them, but so far there's been no attempt to intercept me or give cover to Bornholm. I'd been hoping to start whittling the enemy fighters down in air-to-air combat, where my Flankers should have the range advantage, but I can't do that if they won't come up to fight. The ungrateful rotters...

The operation continues...

**SMALL HOURS OF THE NIGHT**

**Naval and air operations**

As the main convoy gets underway, the screen of small ASW escorts is brought closer in, and forms up in a series of small three-ship patrols along the expected path of the convoy. These will hopefully be able to stumble over any submarines en-route, before they can get close enough to attack the amphibs. My Krivaks, which are currently operating independently, are ordered to get closer to the vulnerable small craft (minesweepers, ASW corvettes, amd missile boats) in the Bornholm area, so they can react more quickly to air and sub threats to those vulnerable assets.

I also move some of my aircraft up into Polish airbases closer to Bornholm. The four minesweeping helicopters go to Kolobrzeg, on the Polish coast, and two flights of Flankers move in to Swidwin. They won't have any munitions there, so they can't reload, but they will form an emergency quick-reaction reserve that is hundreds of miles closer to the expected combat zone than their current airbase.

**Sub Pincer**

NATO makes the next move, when another hidden sub fires a pair of torpedoes at my ASW group north of Bornholm. The shots come in from the west, and are aimed at the southern-most Parchim, which counterfires and turns to run away. My torpedo doesn't hit anything, and theirs run out of fuel, so the Parchim starts turning around to re-engage, when it's suddenly fired on from the east. We're between two hostile subs!

Fortunately, the supporting Krivak has been closing in, and it's now close enough to fire an SS-N-14 on the suspected sub position. It's a good shot, and the unmistakeable sound of a detonating torpedo signals the demise of the sub. Deprived of guidance updates, the incoming torpedoes go into straight-line search mode, and the Parchim is able to turn south and sprint out of their path, making it to safety by a few hundred meters. (I'd never been a big fan of Krivaks before, but now I see how they work. The little corvettes trip over the enemy, and the Krivak immediately drops a torpedo on top of them from a safe distance. Not bad...)

That still leaves the other sub, somewhere to the east, and the corvettes form up to start hunting it again. They don't find much, until a Be-12 flying boat arrives, and starts deploying sonobuoys. These soon pick up the sound of an old Type 205, but it's frustratingly elusive, and the sonar operators are having great difficulty pinpointing its actual location. It's not until the first torpedo drop, on an incorrect best-guess estimation, forces the sub to speed up to evade that they are able to determine approximately where it is, and then the second torp manages to make the kill.

**NATO Missile Boats**

As the dark hours continue, HQ passes on a warning that NATO is preparing to make some sort of major air operation in the morning. Fortunately, most of our fighters are ready and our pilots are well rested, so we should be able to generate a strong surge to meet them in the morning. The next warning is of an imminent threat; NATO missile boats are surging from Danish harbours, and will be attacking shortly!

The radar operators on the orbiting Bear start calling in contacts almost immediately. There seem to be three main packs of them: a group of six up near Copenhagen, another half dozen down by the frigate we spotted earlier, and a group of four in between. They're moving east towards us, and they're almost in Harpoon range of our ASW groups near Bornholm. Bold and decisive action is required. Run away!

My small ships all turn and dash for the cover of the nearby Krivaks, hoping their SAMs will be able to knock down any incoming missiles, and then they head east as fast as they can, trying to stay out of range of enemy missiles. The situation is especially tense for my slow-moving minesweepers, which had almost started sweeping on the east end of Bornholm. The enemy are twice as fast as they are, and they have no hope of escape in a long pursuit.

By now my various ELINT and ESM sensors have gotten a better idea of the enemy's composition. The missile boats in the south are Gepards, dripping with modern RAM missiles, and thus essentially immune to anything short of a massive saturation attack. Fortunately, they've only got short-ranged Exocets. The boats in the center and north, however, are much more weakly defended, and they're the ones with long-range Harpoon missiles. They are the primary target.

The distant cruiser Grozny arms its launchers, gets final coordinates from the orbiting Bear, and starts firing massive Shaddock missiles at the small missile boats. Then, as the missile boats get closer, the shore-based Sepal batteries near Kaliningrad start adding their fire, one missile per target at a time. A few shots malfunction, some get decoyed by chaff, and one or two get knocked down by SAMs from the German frigate, but those that hit blow the missile boats to fragments. It may seem like overkill, but it works, and none of the missile boats get within launch range.

I haven't fired a single shot at the well-defended Gepards, when the radar operators on the Bear report that they seem to have turned around and are headed SW, in the direction of Lubeck. If they're leaving (which would make some sense, given the loss of 10 of their comrades) then I'm content to let them go for the moment, since I had no effective way to engage them. That only leaves the German frigate (now identified as the Niedersachen), which has come far enough forward that it can be engaged by my Kilo, which manages to torpedo it in absurdly shallow water, with the sail barely awash.

**PRE-DAWN**

With dawn an hour away, I have a bit of a dilemma. I had hoped to get some minesweeping done in the dark, but when I was driven away by the missile boats, I lost that opportunity. Do I turn around west again, and resume minesweeping and ASW patrols just as dawn breaks, artillery can see me, and NATO's suspected air offensive arrives? Or do I continue to pull back the small craft, make my own Bornholm air-strikes, and only then resume naval operations around the island?

Staff are assigned to examine the options.

he invasion draws closer...

**NAVAL ACTIVITY**

Now that NATO's missile boats have retired, staff consider how to handle our small ships near Bornholm. The decision is made to turn them around towards Bornholm again, but not to rush them into position yet. We'll let the first round of airstrikes resolve itself before moving in to start minesweeping. In the mean time, the main amphibious force continues to steam sedately along the Polish coast, about ten miles out, screened by ASW patrol boats and preceded by the Grozny surface group. They're in no rush yet, and are aiming to arrive at Bornholm in the afternoon.

**DAWN STRIKE AT BORNHOLM**

As the skies lighten, the leading planes of a massive air strike arrive over Bornholm from the east. Reconaissance Su-17s and Su-24s fly low over the island, hunting for ground forces, and hoping to pinpoint the infantry formations who have been firing Stingers at us during the night. They manage to find plenty of Danish infantry and some of their artillery (particularly along the NE side of the island), but Stingers in the center of the island, and near the port of Ronne, keep forcing the recce planes away.

The first of the MiG-27s arrive, and attempt to suppress the Stingers and AAA with rockets. The nasty little creatures are essentially invisible in the early light, and although we know the area where the missiles are coming from, nobody can actually get eyes on them to make an attack. How I wish I had FLIR! After several fruitless passes, and damaging SAM hits, the attempt is called off, and the next wave of MiG-27s is directed to attack the Danish forces deployed along the north and eastern side of the island. This goes much better, and, with Su-17 recce planes acting as spotters, the MiGs begin to inflict crushing blows on the infantry formations.

The Stingers can't be ignored, however. They must be dealt with before the vulnerable paratroopers arrive this afternoon. So, once full daylight arrives, the recce planes and MiGs make another attempt. This time a combination of better light and dwindling Stinger magazines leads to success. It takes multiple passes to spot the tiny hidden units (and their 40mm AAA defenders), but they are gradually found and killed (or at least run out of ammunition).

In the process of finding the Stingers, my recce planes also identify a formation of armour and a couple of artillery batteries in the vicinity of Ronne. The MiG-27s continue to fly in from the east, and the Su-17 FACs direct them to the new targets. Dozens of flights of MiGs sweep over the island, until all identified enemy units have been attacked and disrupted. In the end, some of the MiGs are sent home with their bombs, while the recce Su-17s fly back and forth over the island at low altitude, without drawing any return fire.

Overall, the attack has gone very well. Some of my planes are headed home with shredded tailfeathers, or 40mm holes punched in the wing, and a few sad examples are smoking craters on Bornholm, but my force of MiGs is essentially intact. Surprisingly, NATO made no attempt at all to intercept the attack, and my watchful Su-30 pilots patrolling nearby had nothing to do during the entire strike. Of course, that just means all of NATO's fighters will be perfectly intact when they hit our landing forces later today...

**MINESWEEPING**

Once the Bornholm strike is over, and the Su-17s have confirmed nobody else is shooting near the shore, minesweeping operations are ordered to begin. The first to arrive are the helicopters from Kolobrzeg, who start sweeping directly along the coast, nervously waiting for some hidden SAM gunner to step out of a seaside bathing hut and put an end to their lives. Nobody takes a shot (yet), and the helicopter crews fly down the coast, drawing an impressive tail of explosions behind them. The Danes definitely don't want anyone landing here!

The minesweepers arrive a few hours later, and join the fun, slowly moving along the south coast, from east to west. It looks like the helicopters are doing a good job, and most of the mines are already gone, but the ships still find a few more. Most are immediately along the shore, with only a few further out at sea.

**NATO ATTACKS!**

Mid-morning, we start getting a series of increasingly worrying reports of heavy air fighting in the west. At first it sounds like our comrades are holding their own, but then we start getting reports that our pilots are falling back under pressure, and then that the front has essentially collapsed. NATO's coming and they're loaded for Bear!

When the first reports come in, a couple of Flankers are despatched to patrol the region, and forward-deployed light craft (missile boats and ASW corvettes) are ordered to tighten up into air-defence formation, closing in on their escorting Krivaks, and turn back east, hurrying to get clearance from any incoming attack. The minesweepers, however, are ordered to keep working at their vital task.

When the second report comes in I decide the sweepers better get out of there too, and they turn around to close on their Krivaks and retire. The four Flankers which are forward based at Swidwin get scrambled, as well as about half the MiG-23s and distant Flankers, and when the third report comes in the final surge of fighters get's launched. I've left two flights of Flankers and one of MiG-23s at their bases, for later convoy escort duties, but other than that everything is in the air.

NATO arrives with a surge of fighters from Laage, and an enormous swarm of Tornadoes and F-16s from Denmark and northern Germany. The Laage fighters are older F-4s, carrying modern AMRAAMs, and ex East German MiG-29s, which we all agree is cheating. Those should be ours! My forward-based Flankers from Swidwin prove to be essential here, along with the first few arriving from the Riga area, and they manage to use their long-ranged Alamo-Cs to knock down the Phantoms and drive back the MiG-29s before they can launch.

As more planes pour into the area, a colossal firefight rages over the shallow waters at the east end of the Baltic. At first, I hope my range advantage should lead to a turkey-shoot against the helpless incoming attackers, but my missiles suffer greatly against ultra-low-level Tornadoes, and hit rates are not great. Plus, my SARH missiles are limited to one shot at a time, and can't fire an AMRAAM-like salvo. Before I know it, I'm in a desperate furball, trying to dash in and out of heat-seeker range, without getting cut down by Sidewinders. Meanwhile, additional fighters are trying to sneak in from Laage and mess me up.

It looks like the enemy may be dividing into two streams, some possibly headed for the swiftly retreating Tarantul missile boats north of Bornholm, and others going for the plodding minesweepers, which are trying to run for it in the south. I manage to kill off and drive back the northern attack, which turns out to include some old Drakens. My MiG-23 pilots, every one an aviation enthusiast, are delighted to see these unique-looking old jets, and shed a sorrowful tear for every one they mercilessly shoot down. Even one of my Su-24 recce planes (on ELINT duty over Sweden) manages to swoop in from behind and get one with an AA-8.

The southern fight doesn't go as well, with constant interference from additional Laage fighters diverting my fighters from attacking the Tornadoes. Most of my planes are attempting to disengage now, with nothing but cannon-shells left on board, my last three inbound flights of Flankers aren't quite in range yet, and the onrushing Tornadoes start launching Kormorans at the minesweepers. Blast!

The Flankers dive on full afterburner to try and get between the ships and the missiles, while the pair of Krivaks guarding the minesweepers look anxiously for the incoming attackers. There may be two of them, but only one of them has modern missiles that can hit the low-flying anti-shipping missiles, and there are so many minesweepers to guard. Their radars are still off. Should they risk activating them and getting a HARM in return? Fingers hover anxiously over control panels, as the operators wait for the commands.

The Flankers go roaring overhead, firing a stream of missiles at the incoming Kormorans, and managing to knock them down in time, but this leaves them in a very bad position. They're at low altitude, mostly out of missiles, and facing the remaining planes of the enemy attack. They have rescued the minsweepers, but who's going to rescue them? They fight hard to make their escape, and the Krivaks and the flotilla open fire to assist as the dogfight passes by, but not all of the Flankers go home again.

**RETIRE AND REGROUP**

As my fighters head back to base, you can count the missiles they have left on the fingers of one thumb. (Actually, not quite true. One MiG-23 still has an Apex left, but its radar has been wrecked by Sidewinder fragments, so it can't use it.) NATO is still in pursuit, with a few F-16s and Tornado F3s (with dangerous long-ranged missiles) trying to get at my defenceless planes. But fortunately, we've got one more trick to play...

Down below, cutting smartly through the waves, are the lean predatory shapes of the Sovremenny destroyers, leading the amphibious convoy to Bornholm. Their captains smile grimly as missile launchers elevate, radars click on, and the highly trained crews press the firing keys to launch their most advanced long-ranged missiles at the startled enemy planes. They shoot! And shoot. And shoot and shoot and shoot. And shoot some more. Finally, after ten shots they manage to get their first hit. The admiral looks the other way, and pretends not to notice... Appalling hit rates aside, the SAM fire does turn the enemy fighters away, allowing my retiring fighters to complete their escape. The SAM gunners seem to have the hang of it now, and get a couple more NATO planes, but some remedial training seems to be in order.

Now that the attack is over, the minesweepers turn around again, and hurry back to the minefield once more, hoping to get the job done before the landing force arrives. The main amphibious convoy is only a few hours away, and the hovercraft are setting out on their high-speed journey from Kaliningrad, so they can't postpone the mine-clearing any more. My fighters are landing to re-arm, and the Su-30 pilots are surprised to learn that they are already running out of their long-ranged missiles. They can reload with light loadouts of two AA-10 As, but that is all. (Despite the fact that I have plenty of Bs and Ds left, the absence of Cs means I’m not allowed to use them. The inability to use partial loadouts has always been a frustration.)

Meanwhile, more NATO air activity is detected, as additional F-16s, Tornado F3s, and even some RF-4s lift off and start heading for the Bornholm area. The fighters are probably drawn by my ELINT, ASW, and minesweeping aircraft, which should be clearly visible on enemy radar, but I'm not sure what the RF-4s are trying to accomplish. The F3s from Nordholz are my main concern. Thankfully, I have two flights of Su-30s held in reserve, and over the next couple of hours they do a good job shooting down the enemy, which is much easier when they only come two at a time at high altitude. Nonetheless, the F3s do manage to knock an engine off a Be-12 that doesn't flee in time.

**LANDING**

The occupation of Bornholm happens in the mid-afternoon. A surge of recce aircraft is the first to arrive, skimming back and forth over the island at low altitude to look for any new military activity, while flights of fighters and attack planes wait at high altitude to respond to anything they discover. Fortunately, nothing shows up, and NATO doesn't seem to mount an air or sea-based response.

Paratroop landings happen in the farmland NE of Ronne, dropping off an artillery park, which remains stationary, while a large infantry formation forms up and heads for the port. Half an hour later the hovercraft arrive, with the Aists dropping off their troops in Ronne itself, while the Pormorniks land theirs at the nearby airfield. The main landing takes place across the broad beaches in the SE corner of the island. There doesn't seem to be any opposition. Evidently the shattering air-strikes in the morning have broken the enemy's will to fight, and Bornholm is ours.

**FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS**

As the day continues, consolidation continues on Bornholm. The port and airfield are occupied, and a heliport is constructed in the farmland east of the airfield. There is still some mine-clearing to do (the waters off the port of Ronne are infested with them), but that is well in hand, and a few hours later the minesweepers turn and head back to Kaliningrad.

Meanwhile, our short-ranged hovercraft are refuelling at Ronne, and the long-range ones are headed south to Kolobrzeg, on the Polish coast, where they refuel too, before heading back to Kaliningrad. The amphibious task group continues to unload cargo, guarded by a screen of patrolling ASW corvettes, and then they turn to head home as well. Missile boats are refuelling in Poland, and readying themselves on the coast in case NATO tries something with those Gepards, which are still at sea near the Neustadt naval base.

The last act comes with the docking of the freighter Vilyuy in Ronne. Its airfield equipment will allow us to send in some MiG-23s to be based on the island.

With all this in place, success of the Soviet revolution is assured!