**Northern Fury – Swift, Silent and Deadly**

**Playtest Report by AndrewJ Aug 2017**

"A quick scan of the Drop Zone names however, reminds you that on operations such as these things don’t always go right!"

**Playthrough #1**

(The scenario actually starts with carrier-based CAP getting tangled up with Russian ELINT and CAP in the Keflavik area, and the Russians then moving to engage support aircraft in the carrier group. I restarted, went into the NATO side, and put the carrier CAP on a tighter leash to avoid this.)

Initial launch and refueling went well, and the formation moved towards Iceland in good order. My thought was to pick off support aircraft from the north, and try and draw off any defending fighters in that direction and destroy them before the C-130s came in from the west.

On the ground one of the SOF reported BMDs patrolling in the drop zone area, so the F-18s were tasked to overfly those zones before the drop. Then the BMD actually spotted the SOF and destroyed them (basic optics at night, with no thermals, vs carefully hidden infantry – what were the odds?). Either bad luck, or something going wrong.

A pair of Eagles went in first, staying low then popping up to destroy both Su-24s. There was no response at first, but then after a couple of minutes things started erupting all over the place. The Eagles knocked off a couple of Mig-23s in the NW, and made a nasty discovery. The Russians have been ordered to push their attacks without evading, and they don’t turn aside to dodge incoming missiles. This means they’re not abandoning their own SARH missile shots. No free rides simply by putting a Sparrow down the bearing any more.

Now the main group of Eagles finds itself facing Flankers and Fulcrums, with an enemy ground based jammer fuzzing things up between my planes and their planes. My jammers are there too, but all they’re doing is preventing the Su-27s from using their Alamo-Cs at long range where I might be able to dodge them. Now they’re only firing well inside the no-escape zone! Still, I manage to shoot the enemy down at the cost of almost all my Sparrows.

The C-130s are down at wavetop height now, and the F-18s fly in to start working over the drop zones, killing the jammer and clearing the first two zones. That’s when the Russians surge their fighters, and suddenly I’m facing fresh Flankers, Fulcrums, and Foxhounds all at very close range. C-130 vs Mig-31? Hell no. The call goes out to abort.

The C-130s wheel about and flee as best they can. The F-18s try and dodge the salvo of incoming heavy missiles, nape-of-the-earth and beaming on afterburner, but all four of them are lost in quick succession. The F-15s press in using their last few Sparrows, and then they switch to Sidewinders as they try to cover the retiring C-130s. Several Eagles are shot down, but they manage to take down the most dangerous pursuers, and the C-130s flee into the night. None are lost, and the valuable troops on board survive to fight another day. Meanwhile the remaining Russian fighters patrol over Reykjavik…

Could I have gotten in? Maybe… I’m pretty sure it would have cost me all my Eagles to try and take out the fighters. Even one surviving enemy fighter could take out a few of the C-130s, and I would have been facing opposition on at least two of the drop zones. If there’d been two more fresh fighters popping up it would have been enough to make it a complete massacre. (And it turns out that there were a lot more than 2 available…)

What's this scenario called? Swift, Silent, and Deadly? All right then, let’s have another go…

**Playthrough #2**

This time the C-130s come in first at very low level from the north, and the enemy surveillance planes and ground patrols are left alone. The F-18s are up north behind the C-130s, and the Eagles are patrolling off the west coast. There’s been a bit of air-to-air skirmishing in that area (some with the carrier), but not a lot.

The C-130s get to their drop zones undetected, pop up to 900 feet, and unload their troops, before diving again and retreating. Some hop over the ridgeline and head west along the fjord towards the Eagles, one heads back north along its original route, and some swing south towards the carrier group.

Now that the troops are on the ground they need protection in their drop zones, and the F-18s come in low using their night vision pods to find and attack the Russian patrols. This goes well, and soon two F-18s head west for the Eagles, and two head south towards the cover of the carrier group.

The F-18 attacks seem to be what prompts the Russian response, and swarms of fighters take off shortly after the first bombs hit. The Eagles immediately engage, but in many cases they are out-ranged (Alamo Cs, AA-9), and as more enemy take off they soon become outnumbered too. The Eagles do a fighting retirement to the west, saving the retreating F-18s, but the C-130s in the area have a problem. Now that the enemy fighters are up and their radars are on the C-130s are easily visible (despite my jammers), and they’re not far enough away yet to be safe, or fast enough to outrun the approaching foe. The Eagles do what they can with their remaining missiles, but some are shot down nonetheless.

A similar problem faces my retreating F-18s and C-130s in the south. They had been relying on low-level evasion to escape towards the carrier, but once the enemy fighters are airborne my planes are painfully obvious on radar. Carrier-based fighters try and help, but the fighters pouring out of Keflavik interfere enough that they can’t save all the C-130s. Ship-based SAMs start engaging too, and that, combined with an F-14 surge, is just enough to save the F-18s (fleeing on fumes), which barely make it to the S-3 tanker. (I took manual control of allied forces in this area.)

The final result in this case is much better. The troops and supplies are safely on the ground, and local Russian patrols have been destroyed. A good number of enemy aircraft have been destroyed, including some very valuable MiG-31s. The Combat Talons took severe losses, but only after dropping their troops. Overall, the mission is graded a success this time.

This is a very interesting scenario, requiring stealth and self-control (ahem) to achieve mission objectives. My usual overt ‘I can take you in the air’ methods don’t pay off here. If you’re sneaky you can get in. The real trick is getting out again. If you don’t engage immediately with the F-18s then you can probably get the C-130s out intact, but then you run the risk of losing your troops in the drop zones to enemy ground forces. How long can you afford to wait? Again, this is a really good scenario for forcing the player to evaluate the situation and make the proper decisions to ensure success.