**Northern Fury – Battlewagons to War!**

**Playtest Report by AndrewJ Aug 2017**

Time to snuggle up to the enemy shore!

I just know there's a sub lurking there somewhere with my name on it... Probably right in front of the hidden ASM batteries!

**The Situation**

Looking at the situation at the start, I have a lot of different objectives to attend to. I need to get a dozen observation teams landed by various means, provide logistical support to my little island airport, and disperse my battleship task groups to their patrol zones by morning. While doing this I'm expected to recce for the Russian tank reserve, engage ground targets if possible, and protect my airstrip. While there are three carrier groups in the region, they've elected to proceed stealthily for the moment, and even their AEW assets are remaining covert, which is a little alarming. There's an E-3 out west, but I may effectively be blind in the center and east of my main operating area unless I want to turn on a radar and broadcast my presence.

What's the threat? I have limited confidence in high command's assurances that most of the Russians' main assets have been neutralized. I'm most nervous about enemy subs. A Kilo or Tango lurking along the shore, taking advantage of the shallow bottom, could take a big bite out of one of my task groups. Even a Charlie could cause a problem if I elect to proceed with radars off, since I won't see their missiles in the dead of night until their active seekers turn on, and at that point it may be too late to engage. And I'm pretty sure we never did account for that Oscar... Camouflaged missile batteries on the shore line present a similar problem. Aircraft are clearly a big possible threat in my radar-less condition, depending on how many strike planes they have left, and a surge of Su-24s could be dangerous given that I'll nearly be in range the moment they take off. Fighters popping up out of Keflavik/Reykjavik could also pounce on my slow-moving helicopters and Harriers. It would only take a couple to make a total mess of things. Big ships probably aren't an issue anymore, and I'm not sure if I should worry about missile boats. Could Osas cross the North Atlantic in brutal winter weather? Probably not their favorite idea, although maybe they freightered a few in. Finding the Russian army units isn't going to be risk-free either. While their operational level SAMs may have been knocked down (although it wouldn't surprise me if they've stuffed an SA-10 in a warehouse somewhere for later), I fully expect there to be plenty of smaller tactical air defence systems covering their army assets.

**The Plan**

With no effective fighter cover or local airborne radar I won't be able to see threats coming or intercept them before they're on top of me. I will have to rely on stealth to avoid drawing fire.

TG Missouri will move ENE, trying to stay in water that is deep enough to form CZs and allow active sonar to work well against submarine threats. RPVs will scout the shoreline and inland, but I do not intend to close with the shoreline unless very important targets are spotted. The TG may have to move to cover attacks on Vestmannaejar. The TG will also pass through TG Shreveport's patrol zone to check for for submarines as it sails on.

TG Wisconsin will move NNW, staying clear of the southern headlands while heading to their station, and once again trying to stay in deeper water if possible. It is very tempting to move inshore and bombard Keflavik in passing, but this would bring the task group dangerously close to the shore, and I will need my ammunition to support the upcoming landings. I've also been asked to limit airport damage. There is to be no bombardment unless significant air activity is detected.

TG Shreveport will have to cruise in essentially a straight line towards the island airport, in order to get close enough for the slow moving LCMs and LCUs to make it to shore in time, before turning aside to their assigned station.

RHIBs, with their limited range, will be sent inland at cruise speed, saving flank speed for emergencies. They will then dash for the island to refuel before rejoining their groups, except for those from TG Wisconsin, which probably can't reach their group which is sailing away.

Helicopters will proceed to drop-off and ferry locations at very low altitude, radars off, in order to remain as covert as possible. Flightpaths will remain over the horizon out to sea, before coming in perpendicular to the coast in an attempt to limit possible detection time. I will stay east of the Eyjafjallajökull mountain group to terrain mask from Kef/Ryk during final approach, in case radars light up there. I may use one ASW helicopter as a high altitude radar search unit to check for hostile small craft, but this would be a very risky move given the proximity of the Russian fighters in Keflavik.

So we begin...

**Playthrough**

As the mission begins my first surprise is that ESM reports a large number of fishing boats at sea, detectable by their navigation radars, and some of them are in areas I need to operate in. I doubt the Icelandic fishermen will be cooperating with the Russians much, so I elect to let them be, but this neglects the obvious point (or what should have been an obvious point) that the boats may be commandeered or operating under duress. This begins to prey on my mind as the mission progresses, and I eventually realize that my ships have been under intermittent observation for most of the time. ESM also picks up a shore based jammer and an airborne jammer far off to the north.

Cargo helicopters launch to begin their cargo and special forces runs, RHIBs deploy from the BB groups, and my task group formations tighten up and get underway. The Russians don't just sit and wait while we travel, however, and the small radar we've got on the island airport detects helicopters lifting off just across the waters on the mainland, and heading for my airstrip. Fortunately my Harriers on the island are quick to shoot down the slow moving inbounds, and a couple of TLAMs into the Russian helipad produce a satisfying number of secondaries when they arrive a few minutes later.

Drones from the battleships spread out to do their scouting, and they soon pick up some Russian troops along the south shore, and as they proceed further they also spot some Russian ships (merchant, frigate, and a big icebreaker) to the NW of Reykjavik. Some of my Cobras lift off to start engaging the troop units, and that's when one of my drones gets spotted (I think), and a couple of enemy fighters lift off to investigate. My forces run as fast and low as they can, but as I had feared it's not fast enough to save them all, and the Russians make short work of a Cobra that was too close to Keflavik, and a couple of the drones that didn't have a hope of running. The only thing that saves me from a complete slaughter is the long range SAMs on my two cruisers, which manage to knock down the two fighters before they can completely eliminate my force.

With the skies momentarily clear the surviving drones continue to look around, and they spot the Russian mechanized force headed south. The two ground-attack Harriers launch to engage it, along with my second TOW-carrying Cobra, and they manage to give it a severe mauling. (Oddly, the best weapon system here is the 20mm cannon on the Cobras, which turns out to have death-star effectiveness against the lightly armoured AFVs.) Of course, my attackers can't stay hidden for ever while doing this, and soon another two Russian fighters are on their way to interfere, with the same results as last time. Run as I can, I lose another Cobra and drone before I can get back under cover of my SAMs.

Meanwhile, at sea, the Wisconsin group engages the Russian ships with long-range Harpoon shots. They're big, and take a battering, but are essentially defenceless and soon succumb. The Wisconsin also puts some TLAMs into the ground jammer up north, an artillery battery on the south shore, and some interesting Reykjavik warehouses with red stars freshly painted on the doors. In the south-east, one of my returning helicopters overflies a landing beach and spots a massive swarm of small civilian craft at Beach 6. A couple more TLAMs get rid of the docks in the area, and a drone from the passing Missouri spots the MANPADS unit defending the boats. The gunners gleefully open fire with the mighty 16" guns, only to find the dispersion is so atrocious (CEP 285m) that they can't hit a thing. The embarrassed gunners cease fire, and half a million dollars of cruise missile is used on the startled MANPADS squad instead. With the air defence gone the Cobras move in and sink the swarm with rockets and gunfire.

These combats aside, my delivery and pickup missions were going well. Helicopters are continuously shuttling back and forth to my island airport, RHIBs are dropping off teams at their beaches, and helicopters have snuck in to drop off their observer teams inland. SAR helicopters rescue the far flung aviators, and I even manage to pick up a load or two of wounded from the casualty collection point (although not enough to clear the backlog). The LCU and LCMs arrive very close to the end of my window and manage to unload successfully (although they don't have time for a second trip). There was a moment of excitement when a Spetznaz team was spotted on the island by an observant helicopter, and swiftly executed by the door gunner, but a search didn't turn up any others.

Russian air continued to make an effort. I had sent a Harrier sneaking along at nape of the earth altitude to (successfully) tackle the jamming planes up north, and as it returned the E-3 got a brief hit on an enemy plane taking off from nearby Ryk. I was certain I was about to get shot down, but the Harrier's night vision showed it was actually an Su-25 headed for my island airport, and there were more and more of them which the distant radar had not detected. By this point my task groups were too far away to engage, but between the returning Harrier and the one scrambled from the island I was able to stop most of the attack before it reached the island, and damage was minor. This was followed by a much more frightening visitor when a Mig-31 lifted off to join the fun. Everything I had ran for their lives, landing as quickly as possible or trying to put a ship between them and the Mig. The Mig quickly found the only remaining airborne unit, an SH-3 full of casualties running for TG Missouri, and headed for it at high speed. Fortunately the jammers on the Ticonderoga were able to prevent the Mig from locking on at long range, and a brace of SM-2s shot it down before it fired on the airborne ambulance.

TG Wisconsin reached its patrol zone shortly thereafter, slowing to creep speed and suddenly finding they were sharing the patrol zone with an enemy sub! Two rapid fire ASROCs sank it before the helicopter could get there, and the TG settled in to wait for morning. There was a little more excitement as a pair of Su-27s made an appearance from the east to have a go at my cargo helicopters. One was driven down to low altitude by SM-1s from the Perry, overflew my island at low altitude, and got blasted out of the sky by a salvo of eight Stingers, but the other stayed out of reach. Meantime the scenario ended with a long range Harpoon shot sinking the lone Pauk as the Missouri made it into its patrol zone with minutes to spare.