**Northern Fury – Wrestling an Octopus**

**Playtest Report by AndrewJ Feb 2017**

Before I started this one, I rearranged my defence slightly using the editor. I left the dug-in infantry where it was, but moved around some of the mobile units. Some of the changes were cosmetic (putting all the M48s in the rear, and all the Leopards up front - it seemed odd that the companies would be intermingled). Other changes were to improve the siting of the air defences and radars, taking advantage of hilltops, concentrating around my artillery and rear areas, and providing mutual support between gun systems and missiles. I also tightened up the armour, grouping the platoons in pairs to improve their local punch.

My starting plan was to send out many of my helicopters as quickly as possible, to try and get a grasp of the size and location of the enemy ground formations, while making a major effort to engage the divisional arty group with concentrated air strikes. I did not want the "Red God of War" left intact. This effort would be led by all my 'good' F-16s (toting AMRAAMs), in an effort to knock down enemy CAP and rapidly gain the upper hand in the air, and followed by most of my other strike aircraft. One Patriot (the most damaged, and thus most expendable one) would stay active to provide surveillance, while the others would stay covert for the moment.

The threat of SSM attacks on my helicopter base had me worried, so the very first thing to fly were my Apache, which I definitely wanted to get out of the area ASAP, followed by my scout helicopters. They all went scurrying down the valleys at nape of the earth level, scouting ahead to find the foe, confident that their stealthy terrain masking would keep them safe. What they actually found was that the fast-moving Russian fighters from nearby bases were all over them before the bulk of my fighters could arrive, and they could see my helicopters just fine. Fleeing at 140 kts does little to help when the enemy's closing at over 900... Three scout helicopters and a precious Apache were lost as a result of this debacle.

The Patriots did what they could to engage the fighters, but the main effect was to drive the nimble fighters down into the weeds where the Patriots couldn't see them any more, and my SAMs only got one kill. Shortly afterwards the Patriot radar started detecting incoming SSMs, and they actually managed to hit the first few. However, it soon became apparent that the SSMs were being directed towards my non-critical combat units, such as the dug-in infantry, where I had a reasonable amount of redundancy, and the hits weren't actually doing all that much damage. Accordingly, I stopped engaging the SSMs, and decided to preserve my missiles for more critical targets.

As my good fighters started arriving I was able to shoot down or drive off the Floggers and Fulcrums, before engaging the SAMs in the DAG area. I didn't have great luck with my HARMs, since there were only a limited number of them, and it was actually cluster bombing F-16s popping over the ridgelines at low altitude which did the trick, catching the SA-11s before they could react. With a pair of batteries destroyed on the SW side of the DAG, the A-10s were able to use Mavericks from above the effective ceiling of the SA-15s and destroy the SHORADS in that area. This left a clear gap for the strike aircraft to pour through, and soon there were rich pickings in that area as the strikers worked over the artillery. (And wow, the Soviets have a \*lot\* of arty. I would have been absolutely flattened if this had been able to engage.)

The strikes soon spread out, tracking back along the path of the division to the NW. There were clouds of Hinds in the air, presumably ready to pounce on any of my ground troops, but since there are none in the area they turn out to be little more than tasty snacks for passing fighters. I spot a couple of their FARPs and manage to bomb one while it's still got many of its units on the ground. It looks like there's a BTR-80 motor rifle regiment in the lead, and my strikers wreck it with repeated bombing and strafing runs. The tank battalion is tough, but the A-10s tear it up with cannon fire and Mavericks, and the Cobras do a good job with ATGMs. At one point there's a surprise when a flight of four Mig-27s bursts over a mountain ridge right into a flock of A-10s, who suddenly remember they have Sidewinders, and wheel about to put them to good use.

Progress continues up to the area where one of the SSMs was stationed, but then runs into a wall because there are another set of SA-11s and SHORADs on the high ground just to the NW of the Nordberg airstrip. I'm out of HARMs, and I can't get a good fix on the SAMs to engage with short range weapons. Fortunately, there is a deep valley leading up to the airfield, and I'm just able to sneak helicopters along it, where they report that the airfield's full of Su-25s! They engage a few with the last of their TOWs, before turning home on fumes and calling for air strikes. A pair of F-5s manage to make it down the valley, dumping sticks of 500 lb bombs on the crowded tarmac spaces, and causing a satisfying amount of carnage. Oh, and by the way, there's another battalion + coming down the valley. Two flights of A-10s are sent to deal with those (and with the SA-8 which pops up a few miles further along the valley), and they manage to survive by sticking to the valley floor with SA-11s hurtling overhead. Terrain masking is the only thing keeping them alive!

Still, even though the SA-8 is down, the pair of SA-11s and the SA-15 at the north end of the valley are holding everything at bay. Fortunately, there's one more valley, this one approaching from the west, and a scout helicopter reports it is empty and has a view of the SAMs. Another pair of Maverick toting A-10s are sent to attempt it. By the time they get there the empty valley is filled with yet another battalion, but they charge onwards nonetheless, and start salvoing missiles at the SAMs. One of them doesn't make it, but Mavericks are fire and forget and continue relentlessly to their targets, and both SA-11s are destroyed.

But by this point my strikers are almost all out of munitions, and they're already reloading or hurrying back to base, so I'm not able to follow up immediately. I leave a few aircraft behind to act as CAP, but most units return home. Of course, this is the point when the Soviet air force decides to intervene. At first there are a few flights of Mig-23s, which are not too hard to deal with, but then my forward airbase at Hamar (the empty fixed-wing FARP, not the helicopter base) reports that it is under attack. There's some damage, but nothing too bad, and I chase down and deal with those strikers. The strikes have me a little concerned, since I never saw the aircraft coming, so I spread out my modern F-16s and turn on their radars to act as 'mini-AWACs' along expected routes of enemy ingress. At first I see nothing, but then flight after flight of Su-25s start coming in from the north, and as I rush about from one to the next I realize I'm rapidly running out of aircraft to deal with them. They're too low for my Patriots to see and engage, so my long range air defence is essentially useless (although the Stinger attached to one Patriot manages a kill when an Su-25 comes right over the battery). Despite the fact that I start launching strikers as interceptors, just to make use of their defensive Sidewinders, I can't stop them all. There are swarms of the wretched things! My leading company positions in the NW get shot up, and the FARP takes another heavy strike which destroys the ammo revetment, rendering the facility useless. At least I got most of the SU-25s before they could make it home, so they shouldn't be able to do that twice. If they'd come en-masse things could have been quite nasty.

Hopefully things have calmed down for the moment. My flights are somewhat disorganized now, since many of my strikers were launched prematurely to fend off the swarm, but I'll execute quick-turnaround strike #2 as best I can, before standing down the strikers for the rest of the morning. (I had hoped to use the FARP to move up the F-5s after their initial pair of strikes, but that's off the table now. Fortunately, they weren't there when it got hit.) I'll mount CAP and see what happens until my strikers are ready again in the afternoon. Fortunately the incoming division's moving fairly slowly, so I think I should have some time. I've wrecked the leading BTR MRR, but that leaves the second MRR of the same type, along with the BMP MRR and the tank regiment. That's a lot of power left to come...