**Northern Fury – Anvil**

**Playtest Report by AndrewJ July 2017**

I finished up the 1.1 version today, so here's how it went.

**Pre-game prep**

Looking things over at the start of the scenario it seemed there was a mismatch between my tactical situation and goals and the aircraft loadouts, so I went through and made a number of changes in the editor. For example, I'm approaching a hostile shore with multiple enemy airbases that include enemy fighters with long-range missiles (Su-27, Mig-25, and the deadly Mig-31) all sheltering in a dense overlapping SAM belt, but large numbers of the Vinson's F-14s are set up with weaker AA loadouts, or air-to-ground or utility loadouts. I think in this situation establishing immediate air superiority would be the absolute priority. Therefore, with the exception of a couple TARPs birds, these are all switched over to air-to-air loadouts (about 50/50 Phoenix Heavy and Phoenix+ Light).

The loadouts I lost doing this don't seem to be particularly high value. By this point in the campaign TALDs are well known to be ineffective (due to the WP doctrine setting requiring an ID before shooting) so I doubt they'd be loaded. Similarly, the deadliness of the Pact's low-level air defences has been amply demonstrated by this time, so having half the very best interceptors (my F-14Ds) set up with iron bomb loadouts (most of which are too light to do any damage to my assigned targets) seems unproductive and invites the loss of these valuable aircraft to no effect. The same is true for lightweight LGB loadouts on some attack planes, which would require me to get too close to the air defences yet be unable to damage the targets if they survive long enough to attack. These are swapped out for 2000 lb BLU-109 warheads instead, for use only after the air defences are down.

I'm not sure if these loadouts were intended to represent a disorganized air wing emerging from a mixed mid-level conflict (in which case sorry for changing them). Looking at the position on the map it seemed that the carriers just came up from the security of English waters, so I figured they probably had time to have optimized their loadouts more for the task at hand, while standing down for rest in a less intense threat environment.

**The Plan**

I have two separate CVBGs at the moment, and I'm reasonably confident they can handle airborne missile threats, but it's ASW which has me concerned. Therefore, the two groups will sail together to tighten formation and merge behind a concentrated ASW screen, and head due East for the coast. The two long-range cruisers will dash ahead to act as a submarine lure and SAM trap in the event of strikes from the Bodo direction. Initial strikes will be carried out against Bodo, and subsequently against the Evenes/Andoya/Bardufoss area. I would really like to take out Bardufoss, with its more advanced aircraft, but I suspect I can't reach it effectively. After heading east for half a day the carriers will turn north and head for their objective area as strikes continue. Although not stated in the briefing, I am aware of the possibility of bomber attack hooking around and possibly coming in from the NW, so I make sure to keep one of my AEW far to the north to keep an eye in that direction. My subs will quietly stick up their ESM masts until enough aircraft are on station to fill the role, and then move to the carrier objective area to make sure it's clear of enemy threats.

**The Actual**

The merge of the two groups proceeds according to plan, and ESM and AEW planes spread out to their stations. Tankers lift off from England and head north, to support the initial strike, and I hoped for some initial calm while they did so. However, the Soviets are soon pressing outwards significant numbers of aircraft from the northern bases, and some of them are moving at high speed, presumably to tackle my surveillance aircraft. This prompts a reasonably strong response from me, which arrives to find most of the enemy aircraft retiring NW again. Puzzled, we engage in some skirmishing, but there is no decisive result yet, so the aircraft are sent down to Bodo instead. There the Phoenix range advantage is essential for taking down the more advanced enemy fighters, and reaching deep into the enemy SAM envelope to take down the Mainstays. In a few hours there are no further aircraft rising up from Bodo in response to my provocations.

My first strike at Bodo is heavy, taking virtually everything which can fly, leaving only a small air guard for the carriers. Nothing comes up from Bodo to challenge the strike, which proceeds according to plan. TLAMs (abut a quarter of my stock) arrive to target the runways, etc., sneaking up overland through valleys from the south, and then flying down the fjord to attack Bodo from the east. The army gets a few on the way in, and the remainder are mostly shot down by the Bodo defences (essentially acting like TALDs), but while they are being shot at the HARMs manage to take down many of the SAMs, and then I can try to use Mavericks and Skippers to eliminate damaged or reloading air-defence systems. This works reasonably well, although I learn that A-6s just don't have the agility for SAM dodging, and I lose several of them when they get too close to the northern SA-12. Nonetheless I do manage to shut down the local air defences, and then the F-18s with heavy LGBs move in to close the runways.

As the strike retired the fighters, which had been keeping a vigilant eye for any interference from Bardufoss' direction, were sent north with the tankers, and managed to do good work on the Mig-23 fleet up as far north as Andoya and Tromso. A few planes even managed to kill some of the jammers operating out of Banak before retiring in good order. During the reloading period I made several attempts to provoke a response from fighters in Bardufoss, expecting more Mig-31s to intercept me, but nothing happened. With the fighter situation reasonably benign the TARPs birds and ESM tried to localise the SAMs in the Evenes area, getting a good idea of a few of them by sneaking at low level through the fjords and island channels. The Boston contributed by using its TLAMs to 'proof' flight routes, while ESM listened for the radars of any SAMs trying to shoot them down. Eventually the last four of its TLAMs were sent by a torturous route through the islands, and then hooking around a mountain to strike the Archangel HQ from the east before SAMs could respond.

The next strike came shortly after dusk and concentrated on Andoya. I had wanted to get Evenes/Bardufoss more, but they were too densely guarded, and the Andoya SAMs limited my options in attacking them. Andoya itself was more isolated, so I elected to take it first. The attack pattern was similar to that at Bodo (being more careful to keep A-6s at a safe distance, and to use jammers for better effect), and the airfield was destroyed.

Once again, there had been no significant enemy fighter presence, so my fighters were sent up the coast en-masse. The remaining Tromso fighters were dealt with and the main force approached Banak and dealt with the Mig-23/25/31s there. (They may be older, but those very long-range IR AAMs on the Mig-25s can be a real problem. You can't rely on turning away the enemy fighter or killing it to save you from its missiles once they're launched.) As that was coming to a successful conclusion, and congratulations were being radioed around, a huge wave of Mach 2+ contacts was seen coming in from the Russian bases further east. Up to this point I'd been trying to husband my Phoenixes, but in this case it was shoot-shoot-shoot, to try and deal with these high-value high-speed targets. There was no attempt to wait and use Sparrows here! My wave met their wave, and in this case long range and active AAMs was everything. I could continuously fall back under the pressure, and was able to stay clear of almost all their shots while taking a heavy toll in return. A very profitable engagement! (While all this was going on a few more Mig-23s popped up out of Tromso, which I had mistakenly thought was empty now, right in the middle of the stream of aircraft going to and from the main engagement. Fortunately, some F-18s were able to pounce on them with AMRAAMs before they could do any damage.)

As the Andoya raid retired there were still some A-6s with Maverick left, and they were put to risky use. The location of the Evenes SA-12 had been identified by spotting SAM launches from it, and it turns out there is a deep fjord leading almost right to it. Almost within its minimum range, in fact. The A-6s went scooting along the fjord at extreme low altitude, before turning, pulling up the mountain and flashing into view. Mavericks away, then a sudden hard turn (as hard as an A-6 can) and a desperate dive down into the valley again because the SA-10 on the next mountain over had just lit up! The SAMs went roaring overhead while the damaged SA-12s burned cheerfully. It took a couple of Maverick strikes to finish the battery off, but the loss of that SA-12 was well worth it, because by this time I was starting to run low on HARMs.

The next strike, in the hours before dawn, tackled Evenes. With fewer HARMs available I was relying more on Mavericks and SLAMs for SAM suppression (Skippers having proven too difficult to use), along with intense terrain masking in the complicated terrain of the area. The last of the HARMs were able to deal with the SA-10 and one of the SA-11s, while SLAMs eventually got the other one, and Mavericks got the local Ganef. However, when the TLAMs arrived (flying down the fjord from the north) the SA-15s didn't expend all their missiles on them, which meant that my Maverick carrying A-6s, which were expecting defenceless vehicles with empty missile tubes, instead met determined and disciplined missile fire. Two more losses there... An F-18 might have terrain masked in time, but not an A-6. Still, in the end the missile systems and the base were destroyed.

As a footnote, after the heavy Phoenix fight up north, there weren't enough missiles to arm all my F-14s, so half the F-14Ds were armed with 2,000 lb bombs. In the light of dawn they went to Bodo again, and tried their hand at iron bombing now that there were no air defences there. They were able to damage parking spaces, but simply didn't have the accuracy to do anything meaningful to harder targets.

**Aftermath**

At the end of our assigned time the carrier group was safely inside its area of operations, accompanied by the two submarines. Thankfully, no enemy submarines had been found in the area.

Bodo, Evenes, and Andoya all had their runways and taxiways cratered, and all control towers and hangars destroyed. Some other infrastructure damage was also done (some HAS destroyed at Andoya, some revetments and parking spaces in other locations, some minor damage to other hardened targets). All SAMs in the immediate vicinity of those bases were destroyed, but Army SAMs and airbase SAMs further north were essentially intact.

My munitions inventory is depleted in some important respects. I have 1/3 of my TLAMS left, but I am completely out of HARMs on both carriers, and am down to ~ 12 loads of SLAMs and ~ 6 loads of Mavericks, and 6 of Skippers. I might be able to take down one more airbase if the TLAMs got through (most likely Tromso, which only has one runway), but I would not be able to take out the air defences as well, and would probably lose multiple aircraft if I tried.

The fighter situation is strongly in my favour. Although the Vinson only has 45 Phoenix left (mostly on fighters already) the Nimitz has 83, and there are plenty of AMRAAMs and Sparrows to go around. The enemy has suffered severe casualties and will essentially have to fly in fresh squadrons to replace their losses. My fighter losses were quite minor, and although my A-6s took more of a beating than I would like, my F-18s are essentially unharmed.

So another fine scenario to add to the list. I particularly enjoyed the attempts to dodge around in the fjords. Thanks for taking the time to write it up.