**Northern Fury #3 – Dagger to the Heart**

**AAR by fitzpatv, Apr 2021**

This scenario is also set on the first day of WW3. On a cold, murky February morning, the Soviets launch a spoiling attack on various targets around the American coast, with the action here focusing on events near New York. You can play either side, but it is much more of a challenge from the US point-of-view.

As the briefing makes clear, this is not a standard CMO scenario. It isn’t really possible to ‘win’, there are no victory levels and it is best viewed as part of an ongoing story, with lots of experimental rules to try-out. Some of these work better than others and the overall feel is a bit buggy, but it has its good points.

You are placed in the role of local US Coast Guard commander, though various naval assets will be made available during the 12-hour scenario. Initially, you have three Coast Guard cutters, one of which (Dallas) has some ASW capability, the others just light guns. The destroyer Mahan is inbound to the SSE of NYC and the SSN Alexandria is cruising offshore to the ENE, not that she’s useful for much. Gabreski Air Station hosts an assortment of choppers, plus some Hercules SAR/recon/tanker aircraft and even a few F-16s. Near Norfolk, Virginia is Oceana Station, where there are some Orions and more choppers. Only two of the Orions have an ASW loadout.

If you expand the map to view the whole of the USA, you will see a weird assortment of damage markers relating to the shipping around New York Harbor sitting off California (!!), along with the destroyer Spruance and a frigate, USS Sides. Some or all of this will teleport to the area of operations as the game progresses, depending on events!.

There’s lots of civilian shipping to protect, including the iconic liner QE2. A cloud of civilian aircraft will develop over the city’s many airports as the morning wears on.

Given the nature of the scenario, I chose not to check-out the Soviet forces on Browse Scenario Platforms. Not having read the book (though I plan to sometime) or read any AARs, I therefore left myself open to surprise. The briefing did tip me off about a Soviet spy ship near the Dallas and a Bulgarian-registered trawler leaving the port after ‘repairs’.

I expected a combination of subs, mines and Spetsnaz attacks in a large-scale version of Choking Halifax. Accordingly, I made sure my ships were moving slowly and warily and got ASW planes (such as I had) in the air early, along with available SAR assets. Most aircraft only become available gradually over the course of the game.

I wasn’t expecting a large-scale attack with cruise missiles. Very soon, a patrolling Sentry AWACS reported lots of incoming Shipwreck and Siren missiles, which could only have come from subs. My CAP did their best and managed to down a few of them and the Mahan successfully defended herself from those that came her way, but serious damage was inevitable. Numerous civilian ships were hit and sunk, as was the cutter Tahoma. A couple of missiles were wasted on small 100-200 ton fishing boats but, at the other end of the scale, the QE2 was hit twice and left in a sinking condition. Some of the victims fell to submarine torpedoes, which gave me a fix on the likely positions of the culprits. Ships lost cost from 5 to 200 VP and this put me in a serious deficit situation.

While this was going on, the Dallas intercepted the AGI Kursograf and, following instructions from the briefing, stopped her with 76mm shells. It was then possible to board the ship by moving the cutter nearby, but the Russians then scuttled her, killing some of the boarding party. Prisoners were nonetheless taken and a few VP were scored by having a Dolphin chopper take them to Oceana for questioning (you can use any Dolphin and it is just assumed that she called by at the Dallas on the way).

Similarly, the small cutter Adak overhauled the trawler Trog and stung her with 25mm gunfire. She pulled-over, but some hostiles tried to escape in a RHIB (rigid-hulled inflatable boat). Adak duly sank this and took prisoners. Unfortunately, the Trog had already dumped her load of mines in the Harbor entrance.

Gabreski had four Sea Dragon choppers with minesweeping gear and I created a suitable mission and got them on the case as quickly as I could. They actually swept six mines, but this didn’t help much. Despite shipping being restrained from leaving the port, incoming vessels just tried to barge through under AI control and two were sunk (though this actually scored us VP for the rescue of their survivors by the Harbor authorities, even without my intervention). The mines also remained a hazard for rescue craft trying to leave the RHIB rescue base (a converted Newport-class LST) and I lost one of these as well as a Staten Island ferry tasked to help. Couldn’t really have done more about it.

The rescue effort is the main part of the scenario. First, you have to fly Hercules aircraft over the distress beacons of the stricken ships to get intel and drop rafts and markers. This is easy enough and scores a whole VP per success. Choppers can then be sent to hover at minimum altitude for five minutes over a lifeboat to effect a rescue. This actually worked the first time I tried it and I was then able to fly the survivors to Winthrop Hospital and drop them there by hovering over it. Unfortunately, I was unable to repeat this success. The problem was that the lifeboats are moving targets and the chopper can’t hover over them without them sliding away from under it. After half-a-dozen unsuccessful attempts, I gave-up.

You can otherwise use RHIBs (and Staten Island ferries in the case of the QE2) to pick-up survivors by placing them over the distress beacons for ten minutes. This worked reasonably well, but most boats actually got to the evacuation stations under their own steam (which scores the same). Not all lifeboats are marked and I only found out that the tanker African Gem had been hit when her invisible boat reached safety!. Although the QE2 sinking costs you 200VP, you are compensated by a steady stream of 5VP awards for rescues if any RHIBS get to the area.

Another regular source of VP was a bogus rescue of the crew of the cutter Dallas. Though she was just fine, the messages were convinced she’d been sunk and her captain killed, urging me to send a couple of choppers. Even though I took no action, I kept getting 5VP every 15 minutes or so. Shrugs.

Meanwhile, there were numerous ‘terrorist’ attacks ashore. While this was mainly for scenario ‘feel’, some hostiles were detected along the waterfront. A roving unit of US mechanised infantry were used to sort-out one bunch and some suspicious trucks were shot-up successfully by low-flying fighters. None of this scored any points, but it was retaliation.

The enemy also seemed to have chartered five Cessna and Piper Cherokee light aircraft, whether for a preview of 9/11 or some other purpose I never found-out. Somehow, these were flagged-up as Unfriendly and I took a chance and engaged them with fighters and the Mahan’s SAMs. This paid-off in a small way and they scored 3VP each. Later-on, I was told to send F-16s to challenge civilian planes which were slow to obey a general grounding order. This involved making close passes and hoping for the best. One such ‘challenge’ earned a VP when the civvy admitted flying with his radar off and being in ignorance of the start of WW3, but I found no confirmed hostiles and held my fire. One plane landed at Trenton and later took-off again, flying in a circle and returning whence it had come, but I left it unharmed.

While distracted by all of this, I actually managed to find and kill two Soviet subs (a Charlie SSGN and an Akula SSN) with my two properly-equipped Orions. Spruance and Sides arrived off Norfolk partway through, but never got near the action. The Akula took three torpedo hits to sink and the Charlie two, but they scored 200 welcome VP. With the various rescue and miscellaneous awards, this lifted the final score to +43, but it was pretty meaningless really.

For the record, the US lost a cutter, 14 assorted civilian ships, a RHIB and two lifeboats. The Soviets lost two subs, five civilian aircraft, an AGI ship, a trawler, a RHIB, 11 irregular ground elements and six swept mines.

If this all sounds a bit anarchic, it’s because it was. As part of the Northern Fury storyline, it was atmospheric and interesting, but I’ll be glad to get back to some conventional action next time at Jan Mayen Island.