**Northern Fury #5 – Bardufoss Blues**

**AAR by fitzpatv, Apr 2021**

Following on from H Hour, this scenario assumes a worse outcome than the one I achieved. You can only play the NATO side. The Soviets have taken Banak and are rushing combat and transport aircraft there. NATO forces are depleted, weary and low on ammo and few reinforcements can be expected in the short-term. A Soviet amphibious force is on its way around your seaward flank to seize Trondheim, escorted by powerful elements of the Red Banner Northern Fleet and your prime objective is to stop it somehow.

At sea, you have the (re-born) frigates Bergen and Stavanger, plus 12 Norwegian missile boats, a coastguard cutter, two Norwegian diesel subs and two SSNs (the USS Annapolis and HMS Talent).

Between Trondheim and the Tromso area are an assortment of Norwegian, US and Dutch fighters, with only a minority having AMRAAM missiles with decent range. These are backed-up by some AWACS and EW aircraft, some Orions, a few choppers and some Hercules transports. The latter represent ground crews at the forward airbases of Bardufoss, Evenes and Andoya and you are given the choice of trying to evacuate these S, then winding-down operations, with the caveat that losing a C-130 will cost lots of points.

Ground forces are on the thin side, with just a few radars and a battery of NASAMS (land-based AMRAAMs) at Bodo airbase. Many of your aircraft are being readied over the first couple of hours and a few have Reserve loadouts. Weapons are in short supply, though this didn’t turn-out to be as much of a problem as I’d feared.

Against this, the Soviets have massive resources to call-upon. Two carrier task groups maraud offshore, escorted by numerous cruisers, destroyers and frigates including Udaloys and Sovremennys. The carriers have Su-33 Flanker fighters, which appropriately allow the enemy air force to get around your flank and strike deep into your rear. Several diesel subs are in-theatre. The Soviet air losses from H Hour have been replenished and they have brought-up numerous fresh units, including MiG-31 Foxhound fighters, which have 170nm air search radar, 90nm range Amos missiles and are some of the fastest aircraft ever built.

With AWACS planes starting aloft, I quickly detected a couple of Soviet surface action groups moving parallel to the coast and heavily screened by ASW choppers. Before long, the two carriers and their escorts appeared, further out to sea, with the convoy following on behind. The enemy were clearly using their warships as a dragnet to sweep-up any NATO naval forces in their path. I did what I could to put my ships in stealthy positions, with the rocky fjord coast for cover. As for the subs, Annapolis tried to work around the Soviets’ seaward flank, the Norwegian Utsira and Kinn kept close to shore while Talent steered down the centre, aiming for the mid-point between the enemy groups. Hopefully, at least one would slip through to the convoy...and its close escort.

Just as in H Hour, a Soviet Kilo sub ambushed the Bergen and Stavanger. She sank the former, but the frigate did at least get-off a Stingray torpedo in reply and took revenge. This netted me 50 VP, as Bergen scored nothing for the enemy.

I had decided straightaway to evacuate the forward airbases as quickly as I could and fight from Bodo and Orland (Trondheim). Ready times meant that not everything could leave immediately, but I sortied a Hercules from each base, sending one to Bodo and two to Orland. As many ‘Sidewinder-only’ F-16s and F-5s as possible went with them as close escort, while the AMRAAM F-16s and Eagles stayed behind to provide CAP.

Presently, a great swarm of Soviet aircraft began to arrive, led by MiG-23s and supported by Finnish Viggens and Drakens as that country was coerced into joining the Warsaw Pact. Initial clashes saw an Su-33 and 9 MiG-23s downed for the loss of an Eagle and two F-16s, with the evacuees getting clear. I used the same tactics as in H Hour and re-based planes S once out of AMRAAMs.

As the pressure grew, I launched more fighters as they became available but, with the enemy now all around the forward bases, there was little scope for manoeuvre in what became a close range dagger-fight. Losses were high, with 6 Eagles and 7 F-16s going down in this phase for 8 Russian and 10 Finnish fighters. With NATO losses scoring 2 VP to half that for Warsaw Pact, this was not sustainable. Worse, several second-line fighters and F-5s were lost trying to evacuate during a brief lull, only to be cut-off by encroaching carrier fighters near Bodo. The Soviets then began striking Bardufoss with MiG-27s, using Kedge missiles.

I’d been lulled into a false sense of security by the range problems the Russians had suffered during H Hour and was astonished when some land-based Su-27 Flankers pursued my withdrawing support aircraft all the way to Orland. With some pretty awful timing, these caught and destroyed two Hercules, two AWACS and a Falcon jammer just as they were coming-in to land at Trondheim. At least the lost C-130s cost ‘only’ 6 VP each, which was less than feared. I was suspicious of the Su-27s’ endurance, but some calculations proved that it was legitimate enough. I can only assume that they were restrained by some kind of Exclusion Zone at H Hour.

For a while, I tried sortying single Eagles from Bardufoss, hoping to destroy several enemy aircraft with volleys of AMRAAMs for each loss. This wasn’t as successful as I’d hoped. Some of this was bad luck – one Eagle fired six AMRAAMs, had three spoofed on 15% chances, hit two targets without shooting them down and managed just one kill before being overwhelmed. On another occasion, I had two AMRAAMs spoofed (same odds), then couldn’t fire any more despite the sky being full of targets. Zooming in, I found to my disbelief that the Eagle (Engaged Offensive and not on Auto-Evade) was flying the wrong way!. Though some planes did better than this, it wasn’t paying-off and I eventually decided that I was safer on the ground.

While this was going on, a request arrived from the Navy for help clearing enemy ASW choppers away from the convoy. Some hope!. I nevertheless tried to sortie some F-5s and a Sidewinder F-16 from Bodo, but they struggled to get close due to the presence of Su-33s on CAP, got fired-at by Gadfly SAMS (25 nm range) on escorting Sovremennys and botched their attack the one time they caught a Helix. I was lucky to lose just one plane before giving-up the attempt.

At this point, the Soviets detected the Annapolis, which was fortunate to evade two helicopter torpedoes and sheered-off NW at Flank, as deep as possible. The Norwegian Utsira was less lucky and was sunk without warning, costing 45 VP.

Lurking in the fjords, the Stavanger and two groups of missile boats came under sudden attack from some Helix B choppers using Spiral anti-tank missiles. While these did little damage, they did disproportionate harm to some boats’ systems, taking-out one craft’s propulsion. This was well worth the loss of three Helixes to Mistral SAMs from a Soviet point-of-view.

Escorted distantly by Foxhounds, a squadron of Fencer attack planes struck at Bodo, taking-out three Dutch F-16s and the previously-evacuated Hercules on the ground (the latter only cost 2 VP in this case). The NASAMS knocked-down four attackers, but was then disabled. A Sidewinder F-16 launched and bagged two lingering Fencers, but a third got on her tail and destroyed her with an Aphid missile. All-in-all, things were not going well and the score was in negative territory. All airbases, including Orland, were being locked-down by powerful swarms of blockading fighters and it was near-suicide just to take-off.

Meanwhile, HMS Talent had been stealthily slipping through the Russian naval dragnet at Creep speed, moving as deep as possible and aiming for the convoy. Around 19:00 on February 14th, she made her intercept. What followed was the most devastating submarine attack I’ve performed in Command – and it turned the game on its head.

Even at 944m depth, Trafalgar class SSNs have excellent sensors and these gave Talent the edge over an Udaloy and her fellow escorts. The Udaloy and a Sovremenny were between her and the transports and presented a grave threat, but she had surprise and disembowelled the pair of them with two Spearfish torpedoes each. A spread of torpedoes then wrought havoc amongst the amphibious ships, sinking no less than six Polnochnys and Ropuchas, which score 50 VP each. With the Russians still reeling, a Kashin destroyer and Krivak II frigate then presented themselves as targets and soon joined their consorts beneath the waves. Belatedly, Talent detected the main prize, the big amphibious dock Mitrofan Moskalenko (Igor Yegov class) and tried to intercept with her last Tigerfish torpedo, but there were more escorts and the Soviets were at last beginning to react. An Orlan torpedo appeared, but it had clearly been launched at optimistic range and a turn away at Flank took Talent well clear. Withdrawing to a safe distance, the sub rose briefly to periscope depth and loosed her four Harpoons at the now imprecise location of the Mitrofan, but the Russians parried the attack with SAMs. With a chopper and a May patrol plane too close for comfort, the SSN dove deep and sped away, successfully leaving the area of operations with Victoria Crosses in mind. The score was now +387.

The only downside was that no Soviet ships had been left damaged, so the Mitrofan and her two surviving companion transports could continue at 18 knots towards Trondheim. With air operations out of the question, I ordered Annapolis to turn and come-in from the NW, while also letting the Norwegian missile boats and Stavanger off the leash from the opposite direction. Some of the Norwegians were unable to participate due to damage from the chopper strike. I kept my radars dark and spread the boats out into a search fan (detaching them all from their pre-set groups), aiming to cut the convoy’s course while avoiding having all my eggs in one basket. By now, the advance Soviet SAGs had gone well past the Lofotens, so the risk from them was greatly reduced. I was well aware, though, that just one Sovremenny had the firepower to make a nasty mess of my flotilla.

Almost immediately, the Southern group of missile boats detected a Soviet submarine, probably a Foxtrot. Fortunately, they had a choice between going N of the Lofotens towards the sub or round the S side and took the latter. The Norwegian sub Kinn was nearby and I detailed her to search for the Foxtrot. Kinn was helped by two missile boats which couldn’t join the attack group (one was limping and the other had ludicrously begun the scenario on land (!) and couldn’t move (Arg and Odd both have this problem). They could nevertheless detect emissions from the Russian sub, which was foolishly sitting at periscope depth with radar on. Still more foolishly, she then tried to torpedo the two stranded boats, only to be thwarted by intervening rocks and shoals (I’d made a similar mistake during H Hour, to be fair). Out of torpedoes, she was then easy meat for Kinn and scored me another 25 VP.

After a tense wait, the strike force found the convoy, the three transports escorted by two Sovremennys, a Kresta II cruiser, and a Krivak II. The Storm-class Rokk made the initial contact and went on to earn Norway’s highest decoration for valour. Her four Penguins were swatted out of the air by enemy SAMs, but she steered ahead of the convoy and engaged the nearest Sovremenny with her 76mm gun. It was like a falcon attacking an eagle, but her shells raked the destroyer’s upper works and did extensive systems damage. Puzzlingly, the Russians did not fire back. Warming to the theme, Rokk tore on and did the same to the Kresta and Krivak. Brann then came-in from the NE and clobbered the second Sovremenny in similar fashion.

With the Soviets’ SAM radars compromised, my Penguins were then able to find targets at will. Their main problem was bad luck, with one boat seeing all FOUR of her missiles malfunction. Our solitary Snogg-class boat tried torpedoes but, even against motionless targets, chances to hit were just 40% (??) and two tinfish managed to miss. Nevertheless, it was now less of a battle than an execution and the entire Soviet force was annihilated without getting-off a shot in reply (initial SAMs apart). The Mitrofan scored a whopping 150 VP as a ‘capital ship’.

I remain mystified at the lack of retaliation from the Russians. It was an Arctic night in February and my boats were operating without radar (using infra-red TV for sighting) and were also fast, small and stealthy. Perhaps the Soviet missiles lacked precise targets and were then screwed by shells destroying their radars, but they still had guns (and even the transports carried rockets). I fully expected to lose most of my force, but ended-up not taking a scratch.

Anyway, after rescuing as many Russians as they could from the freezing waters, the victorious Norwegians headed-off in the general direction of Scotland. They were shadowed by Mays and Helixes, one of the latter getting too close and falling to a Mistral, but no attack materialised and they got clear. Annapolis also broke-off and disengaged.

Aside from repeated Fencer attacks on Bodo, which achieved little, not much else happened. The Soviet SAGs duly arrived off Trondheim, but their amphibious assault plans were left in ruins. The final score was +821, fed by numerous Soviet aircraft (including three Bison tankers) suffering ‘operational losses’, much as in H Hour. There are no official victory levels in this scenario, but it was a comprehensive NATO win.

NATO lost a frigate, sub, 36 fighters, 3 Hercules, 4 support aircraft and 25 ground elements. Soviet losses came to 9 transports, a cruiser, 5 destroyers and frigates, two subs, 49 fighters, 26 attack planes, 8 support aircraft and 10 choppers. It was hard not to feel some sympathy for the Finns, most of whom probably wanted no part of this, but their performance was abject, losing 20 fighters and only firing two Sidewinders all game.

This is a pretty tough scenario and it could easily have gone a lot worse, Talent’s intervention being absolutely crucial. On another day, she might have been intercepted and sunk before getting close.

The next part of the story, Trondheim Express, seems to be a re-run of this one, only with an even worse starting position. I have to say that I’m not that enthusiastic about fighting the same battle all over again and am tempted to skip it and move on to Part 7 at Keflavik (or even take a break and play something else first). We’ll see a) what Gunner98 says and b) how I’m feeling in a week’s time.