**Northern Fury #8 – Plug the Gap**

**AAR by fitzpatv, June 2021**

For the purposes of this scenario, the Soviets have made a partially-successful landing at Trondheim, Narvik has fallen and the Norwegians are falling back in that sector. Meanwhile, a British task group centred on the carrier Invincible is heading N from the Clyde to cover a paratroop reinforcement of the Shetland and Faroe Islands, as well as evacuations of civilians from both territories. Soviet intentions in the region are uncertain.

Note that there is a slight problem with the scenario in that a Soviet ASW Mission has had its area improperly-defined. It has little effect on play, but maybe gives your one sub an easier time than she should have.

Invincible starts SW of the Faroes, escorted by three destroyers and four frigates, which collectively provide a decent SAM defence. Offensive capability is modest, with a small number of Harpoons on two frigates and some aircraft with Sea Eagle missiles. The task group has eight Sea Harriers with AMRAAMs for CAP and plenty of ASW, AEW and SAR choppers.

To the SE of the Shetlands is a European SAG, with four frigates (two Dutch, one Danish and one German). They have Harpoons, but their air- and submarine-defence capabilities do not inspire confidence. There is also a weak Danish frigate, the Hvidbjornen (Polar Bear) off the Faroes.

HMS Turbulent, a Trafalgar-class SSN, is cruising to the N of the islands, acutely aware of being in harm’s way.

The Scottish airbases at Lossiemouth and Leuchars house a useful mix of aircraft. There are Buccaneer strike planes (mostly fitted with Sea Eagles), Nimrod patrol planes, Sentry AEW aircraft and VC-10 tankers at the former, as well as some Jaguar attack planes which only carry bombs and rockets and are best kept out of the way. At Leuchars, you have a squadron of 11 Tornadoes, which have Sky Flash SARH missiles – these slightly outrange the Russian Alamo but share its weakness of needing to watch the shot onto the target when you’d rather be getting clear. At least they start with Auto Evade off. There are also some older Phantoms, which carry a shorter-ranged version of the Sky Flash and are best employed against bombers and other weaker targets.

There isn’t much in the way of defences on land, beyond a few radars, so you are very dependent on a squadron of Hercules transports based at Brize Norton in Oxfordshire, which are due to convey paras to the islands under AI control at some point in the scenario. You need to ensure that this run is protected, as well as trying to cover four ferries and ten civilian aircraft which are engaged in evacuating those islanders who’ve opted to flee the war zone.

As is my usual approach, I deleted most of the pre-assigned missions, apart from the civilian evacuations and created my own ASW patrols over the two naval squadrons. I kept my ships’ radars dark and, given the range advantage enjoyed by my Tornadoes, opted for Active EMCON for the fighters. Turbulent was ordered to get away to the S, but slowly in view of the Soviet submarine threat. Similarly, I felt it best to limit all warships to Creep speed to limit the danger of ambushes.

I soon realised that there was an exclusion zone NW of the Faroes, no doubt intended to separate the AOE from that of the Keflavik Capers scenario. This hindered interception of some Soviet Badger recon planes, which hid behind it.

The Russians began by mounting airstrikes against radar installations, using Blinder and Backfire bombers from a distance. I managed to preserve the two foremost radars in the N of the island chains by the simple expedient of turning them off, so that the ARMs missed, but was less careful with some further S and lost them. CAP engaged the bombers it could reach and ongoing clashes saw 4 Blinders, 3 Backfires, a Bear recon and 4 Freestyles downed for the loss of a Harrier, with little attempt to intervene from the Su-33 Flankers flying CAP for their carriers. Enemy missiles destroyed a civilian plane on the ground which, like all other NATO air losses, cost me 5 VP (most Soviet planes score two, but bombers and recon types are worth seven apiece). Installations on the Shetlands were largely undamaged, but the runway at Vagar airport on the Faroes was effectively wrecked and two evacuation flights were unable to take-off for the rest of the game.

Meanwhile, an enemy sub torpedoed and sank the helpless ferry Hamnavoe W of the Shetlands, which cost a sharp 50 VP. I detailed a Nimrod to hunt for the culprit (a Foxtrot) and she eventually took some revenge for 15 VP.

Aware that I’d need to establish air superiority if the paradrop was to work, I took an aggressive approach to the Flanker threat and sent a pair of Tornadoes against the Russian CAP, splitting them up to reduce the risk while sowing Sky Flashes amongst the enemy. This yielded 3 Su-33s, a pair of Yak-38 Forgers and a Helix AEW chopper for the loss of one Tornado. The flight also discovered a Soviet naval squadron approaching from the NE. A second Tornado-Flanker duel cost each side a plane, which was less good. The second Tornado in this flight broke-off and accounted for an annoying Badger EW plane, reducing the amount of Soviet jamming.

By 1am, all civilian flights that could had left the islands and, like the other three ferries, all reached safety.

I’d been concerned for some time about four or five apparent ‘merchant vessels’ approaching the islands in advance of the Soviet fleet. Suspecting foul play, I scrambled four Buccaneers and had them on standby. When nothing happened and the planes’ endurance began to wane, I sent them against the Soviet fleet and they managed to sink a Krivak II ASW frigate for 15 VP.

My suspicions that something might be afoot were realised when enemy radio transmissions were intercepted indicating that the merchantmen might be carrying Pomornik hovercraft loaded with troops and amphibious tanks. Sure enough, four of the craft were then detected disembarking from two imposters, a pair heading for each island group. To be honest, it was a rather desperate ploy, especially given the lack of fighter escort provided. All four Pomorniks were summarily blown out of the water by Sea Eagles from Buccaneers and Invincible’s attack Harriers. This scored 100 VP and put me in a very strong position to win the game.

The Russian response was to send a squadron of Su-33s to blockade the Faroes and one of Forgers to close-down the Shetlands. Clearly, this couldn’t be tolerated and I was obliged to risk losses to break this attempted stranglehold. Over the Shetlands, my Phantoms proved more than a match for the Forgers (rightly described by Bart as a ‘wretched aircraft’) and cleared-away eight of them for one loss.

It was a predictably hard scrap over the Faroes, with the dozen Flankers a close match for my Harriers and Tornadoes. The latter’s small range advantage meant that, if they hit with the first shot, the answering Alamo would go blind and wide. This slight edge contributed to eight Su-33s being downed for two Tornadoes and three Harriers, at which point the surviving Russians went Shotgun and withdrew. It meant a net loss of 9 VP, but was worth it for the strategic gain.

Meanwhile, the paras were taking-off from Brize Norton. As they approached, air battles continued against some relief Flankers, which attrited another Tornado and Harrier for three of their number and cost me another 4 VP. The result was to clear the skies long enough for the Hercules to arrive and drop the reinforcements safely before withdrawing. To score points for this, both drops have to succeed, not just the easier one in the Shetlands and the whole thing scores only 15 VP, but it makes-up (just) for the air losses.

Reinforcing the Faroes triggers a request from the local Danish authorities for a naval liaison team to be sent to Vagar in a Lynx HAS.3 chopper, which must be maintained in the area for five minutes and outfitted in Ferry mode (any chopper of this type will suffice). Inevitably, this task coincided with a fresh Soviet air surge over the islands. Two Harriers and two Su-33s killed each other, four Freestyles were downed without loss by Tornadoes and I gained 2 VP.

While this was going on, an Akula SSN popped-up SE of the Invincible squadron and tried to attack with torpedoes at (considerable) kinematic range. Forewarned by sonobuoy contact, I was able to evade at Flank and a Nimrod then ensured that the sub had a very bad day (15 VP).

As the Lynx approached Vagar, the air battles continued. Five more Su-33s came-in and destroyed a Tornado, but lost three of their number, with the survivors breaking-off. Meanwhile, a Phantom picked-off an incautious Hormone chopper near the Shetlands for a handy 7 VP.

The liaison team duly arrived at Vagar, though it was necessary to position the chopper directly over the airfield and hover at minimum altitude before being awarded the modest 5 VP.

Things wound-down after this. I was concerned about a missile attack from the Soviet fleet and kept my distance, but only their heavier ships were ever likely to get into range and they lacked the inclination. There were a couple of false submarine contacts, which resulted in a shoal of tuna being torpedoed by a Sea King that was set to Weapons Tight (??), thankfully without costing me any points.

I ignored the few remaining Su-33s and picked-off any weaker aircraft that presented themselves, downing two Forgers, a Hormone and eight Helix ASW choppers without loss. Towards the end, I mounted a Buccaneer and Harrier strike at the Russian fleet, but was unable to get any missiles past the SAMs.

So it ended in a Triumph with a score of +232. NATO lost a ferry, 14 fighters and a civilian plane, plus 8 ground elements. Soviet losses came to two subs, a frigate, four hovercraft, 41 fighters and attack planes, 9 bomber and recon types and 11 choppers.

The Faroes and Shetlands had been saved, but the Soviet offensive further W was far from over and a major battle was now in prospect to the W of Iceland.