**Northern Fury #1 – H-Hour**

**AAR by fitzpatv, Mar 2021**

This is the first of an epic series of 58 (?) scenarios covering the North Atlantic Front of a global NATO-Warsaw Pact conflict starting in February 1994. It comes with a reputation for quality, challenge and complexity which is fully justified. If the rest of the series is half as good, I’m in for a treat!. Many thanks to Gunner98 for the hard work he put into this.

A word about performance. I have a fairly powerful laptop, but I still had a period during this playthrough where game time was running at one second to five seconds of real-world time at 2x speed. I turned-off the Terrain Layer, disabled all unnecessary messages (you NEED the Special ones) and exited all other programs, also saving, closing and re-starting the game. This helped and things improved later on.

In this alternative history, the Warsaw Pact did not collapse in the early 1990s and, instead, modernised its armed forces. Suitably prepared, it launches apocalypse on the eve of the 1994 Winter Olympics. In H Hour, you command the mainly Norwegian forces in the region from Finnmark to Trondheim as they face the ‘shock and awe’ of the initial onslaught. Cue “Russians” from Sting’s album “Dream of the Blue Turtles”.

You have several squadrons of F-16 Falcon fighters, which would be great were they not armed with 10nm range Sidewinders, facing Soviet Alamos with several times the reach!. Six, at Trondheim, have early-model AMRAAMs with a 40nm range. Many of them won’t be available for hours and they are strung-out from Banak in the far North to Trondheim in the South. Supporting these are some Sentry AWACS planes, two confusingly-named Norwegian Falcon EW aircraft, a few Orions and sundry choppers. There is also a squadron of antique F-5 Freedom Fighters at Trondheim, but the briefing sagely advises you to keep them out of the way.

Given time, more under-armed F-16s of the Royal Netherlands Air Force can be brought-up from Leeuwarden and, rather more encouragingly, 24 US F-15 Eagles with 40nm range AMRAAMs have been promised from Lakenheath in Suffolk.

There isn’t much of an air defence system – plenty of radars, but no SAMs apart from a few MANPADs. Norway has a battalion of troops deployed near the border, but they can only hope to delay the offensive. At least the winter conditions and terrain hinder overland movement, so the Soviets will have to rely heavily on amphibious and airmobile operations.

At sea, Norway has nine missile boats and two elderly frigates spread-out along the coast, plus a practically useless coastguard cutter and two small submarines, Ulstein and Kobben.

Coming at you is an awesome Soviet air armada featuring 22 different types. Most formidable are the Su-27 Flanker fighters, with 90nm radar and Alamo missiles, some models of which can strike targets 70nm away. These are supported by useful MiG-29s and the upgraded model of the older MiG-23 (which still outranges the Sidewinder 2:1 with its Apex missiles).

At sea, the enemy have 8 modern Nanuchka and Tarantul missile boats, which badly outrange your MTBs and have over-the-horizon radar, plus 6 older Osa craft and some diesel subs and gun-armed corvettes, escorting a variety of amphibious vessels. Essentially, it’s First Contact 1986 with planes and subs thrown-in.

Your staff suggest a choice of mounting a forward defence to protect civilians and the advance troops or a more cautious strategy of falling back on Bardufoss in the West and forcing the Russians to operate aircraft at the limit of their range. The presence of several civilian evacuation flights waiting to leave from airports near the border plays on the conscience, but conceding ground is the only sane choice. Taking the Red Air Force on with Sidewinder-equipped fighters would only result in being slaughtered – and the victory conditions mean your planes are worth more than theirs.

There are various pre-set Missions, which you can take or leave. Note that most are only ‘suitable’ for a forward defence strategy and I got rid of them all sooner rather than later.

Before starting, I set Doctrine for each of my squadrons. Staying hidden was clearly going to be vital, so departing from my usual style, I had all EMCON on Passive so that planes took-off with their radars ‘dark’. The plan was to stalk the Russians, using terrain where possible, switch sensors on long enough to fire, then scram on Afterburner. I also put all fighters on Winchester, rather than Shotgun Weapon State so that they didn’t break-off with weapons remaining. Similarly, my ships kept their radars off and, drawing on my experience of the First Contact scenarios, hugged the coast to confuse Soviet sensors.

This is how the action unfolded:

14:00 Local Time: Concentrations of Soviet shipping were reported off Batsfjord and the North Cape, with more out to sea to the North-East. My Easternmost pair of MTBs identified the closest Batsfjord group as six Osa boats and engaged. Invisible to enemy sensors against the rocky shore, they launched Penguin missiles and sank the lot in short order for a heartening little victory and 30VP. They then had the issue of what do do with minimal ammo and Soviet units all around. Launching their last missiles at a pair of big Pomornik hovercraft troop carriers, which stopped them with Gatling cannon, they tried to break-out to the West.

Soviet aircraft began swarming across the map, helped by Finland granting them overflight. You get regular updates on the global situation which add much atmosphere and context to the scenario. Artillery and Scud missiles pounded Norwegian forward installations, not very accurately. At least they wouldn’t have time to deploy further West and losing ground units costs no points.

Hopelessly outnumbered, the most exposed Norwegian aircraft sought to withdraw, though some couldn’t because they were grounded for readying. Two F-16s were lost over the central Banak airport, but they bought time at a cost of 4VP each (standard for NATO air losses).

The coastguard cutter Nordkapp was trying to escape from Lyngen Fjord to the open sea and using her Lynx chopper for recon. Unfortunately, the latter attracted two MiG-29s and was shot down. Worse, this enabled the enemy to detect three of our missile boats, the MiGs flying so close overhead that one was downed by a Mistral MANPAD. Rather harshly, the Lynx was worth twice as much as the fighter. Alerted, a squadron of Nanuchkas, which my boats had been trying to ambush, acted on the intel and destroyed the Norwegian squadron with Siren missiles, costing 30VP.

Things got worse as attack planes began to strike Banak and two F-16s, trying to cover our ships via the pre-set NavCAP Mission, were caught by MiGs while my attention was elsewhere. Both were lost, though they took one with them.

I had perhaps been a little too slow to order the pullback, as the relentless Russian fighters caught and destroyed the retreating AWACS and EW planes that had been on forward duty. The tide eventually stopped at the longitude of Bardufoss airbase and I was able to rally there, keeping all non-vital planes grounded.

Meanwhile, the sub Ulstein had been stalking the Nanuchkas, which were doing 36 knots and had no ASW defence. Pulling-off the ambush, she sank three of the dangerous craft with torpedoes (5VP each), but the other escaped. Unfortunately, this was just as they detected the two MTBs retreating West along the shoreline and sank them with Sirens. Worse still, the surviving Nanuchka was the one with missiles left. Too late, I realised that my Westernmost MTB group’s radars had come on without orders and they were being fired-on (this kind of thing happened a few times with my ships over the course of the game). Luckily, the Nanuchka missed and was then out of missiles.

Soviet troops began landing at Vardo, NW of the border. There was just one Norwegian platoon stationed there but, in a ridiculous introduction to the CMO land combat system, I was able to use them to wipe-out the entire enemy force, taking no fire at all in response. Not all Russian ground forces would prove such inept opponents.

At least the Soviets were respecting the civilian evacuation flights, which were proceeding unhindered to neutral Sweden. Another reason to pull back.

The battle was an hour old….

15:00 : A Soviet helicopter assault hit Banak, supported by fighters. I had two F-16s cut-off at the airfield and sortied them in desperation. Helped by MANPADs, they disposed of 11 choppers before being destroyed. The attack was broken-up.

The frigates Bergen and Stavanger were steaming up the West Coast at Cruise, distantly escorted by an Orion and the sub Kobben to compensate for their lack of ASW choppers. Disastrously, they were ambushed by a Kilo-class sub, which sank them both with torpedoes, costing 20VP and a serious loss of naval strength. My escorts began searching for the culprit, reinforced by a second Orion.

By now, some of the AMRAAM F-16s had arrived from Orland, Trondheim. As proof of concept, I sent a pair against the massive Soviet CAP screen E of Bardufoss. My planned tactics worked well and they bagged three MiG-29s before getting away.

Soviet paras then attacked Vadso (near but not to be confused with Vardo). The local platoon wiped them out, but was destroyed in turn by enemy ground attack planes, so Vadso fell.

The cutter Nordkapp was detected by a squadron of four Tarantul missile boats as she steamed up Lyngen Fjord and their Sunburn missiles made short work of her. Another 10 VP lost.

Two hovercraft pitched-up at Mehamn, East of the North Cape and disgorged troops. A Norwegian platoon mauled them, but ran out of ammo and was obliged to concede the harbour and pull back inland.

Some MiG-29s made for the Orions hunting the Kilo. I sacrificed an F-16 to distract them. Some AMRAAM Falcons took revenge on another MiG near Bardufoss.

Having survived the Nanuchka attack, my Western trio of missile boats caught-up with the de-fanged beast and sank her, though it cost two precious Penguins.

Aerial skirmishes continued. The loss of an Orion to a MiG while my attention was elsewhere convinced me to abandon maritime patrols off the North Cape. My Sidewinder F-16s were proving useful against attack planes which were making individual runs at the Tromso area, but the Russians had Aphid missiles for the unwary and I lost another fighter to one of these.

Kobben then found the Kilo. As luck would have it, Su-27s arrived at that very moment and went after my Orions. The latter were lost, but Kobben gambled with her only two ASW torpedoes and had the satisfaction of hearing the Kilo’s death on her hydrophones (10VP).

With the war two hours old, the Russians assaulted Kirkenes, on the border and a continuous stream of attack planes pounded the airport at Banak.

16:00 : A Sidewinder F-16 achieved the notable feat of bagging three MiG-23s as she chased a retiring group.

At Kirkenes, the attackers knew what they were doing, had helicopter support and quickly overwhelmed the defenders. Clearly, Russian ground troops could fight after all.

There was soon another example of this as an amphibious landing at Batsfjord quickly and efficiently eliminated the defending platoon, making good use of their superior numbers and firepower.

Numerous Fencer and Fitter aircraft struck at the Bardufoss area, but the Norwegian F-16s could cope with this kind of opposition and the Soviets paid for their over-confidence with eight losses for one defender.

Meanwhile, Ulstein ambushed the Tarantul squadron, sinking three to take her tally to six front-line missile boats. The fourth got past her to meet my Western MTB squadron, lying in wait behind an island with radars dark.

17:00 : Soviet ground forces assaulted Banak, but were utterly thrashed by Norwegian mobile artillery and TOW anti-tank weapons, the defenders hardly taking a scratch. The aerial bombardment resumed, but the planes wrong-headedly wasted their ammo on the airport facilities and left the troops alone.

By now, the Dutch F-16s and American Eagles were beginning to arrive at Evenes and Bodo airports, though they still wouldn’t be ready for ops for a few hours. Fortunately, the hard-pressed Norwegians were holding their own, with one pilot disposing of three MiG-27 raiders.

While I was watching this, a Foxtrot-class sub ambushed the heroic Ulstein. Mercifully, she managed to evade the torpedoes under AI control, got clear and turned to stalk her adversary. The Russian thought better of it and vanished, presumably cruising on West. I diverted shipping North later to avoid her, but never saw her again.

Word arrived that the enemy had hit Keflavik in Iceland with cruise missiles. On a more positive note, I was getting regular reports of Soviet aircraft being destroyed for no apparent cause – presumably the AI was messing-up fuel calculations. I was glad of the points.

18:00 : A pair of AMRAAM Falcons raided the Soviet CAP, downing two MiG-23s. It would have been more had the enemy not made THREE 15% spoof rolls…. A shortage of AMRAAMs was concerning and I would clearly have to conserve sorties.

Word arrived of a truck bomb attack on the Norwegian Parliament, amongst other Spetsnaz atrocities. Such outrages against a peaceful nation only stiffened the defenders’ resolve.

The Western Missile Group watched anxiously as the surviving Tarantul cruised obliviously into their ambush. With the trap sprung, Fate turned her back on Norway as both Penguin 2s were shot down by the enemy’s Gatling cannon on 29-30% chances.

19:00 : The Tarantul had vanished behind the island. Our missile boats had a tricky decision to make. Should they hide and try to slip past the Tarantul or continue to go after her?. I split the group, sending Storm around the East shore of the island and Rapp to the West, with Teme, out of missiles, in reserve. Fate relented and Storm rounded a corner to see the Russian in Penguin 1 range. Two missiles ripped her apart to great rejoicing amongst the crew. Naval superiority was ours!. The squadron headed out to sea to avoid the Foxtrot, steering for Vardo.

23:00 : Following a lull broken only by the raids on Banak, a series of lone Fencer strikes were mounted against an ammo bunker at Bardufoss, using Kazoo missiles. The first hit home, but did little damage. Forewarned, a Sidewinder F-16 intercepted the second Fencer, but she survived a hit, loosed and escaped. The F-16 evaded some MiG-23s, pursued the missiles and downed one, but the other did more damage to the bunker.

00:00 : A third Fencer tried its considerable luck, but was destroyed after three hits with Sidewinders and one from a cannon burst.

04:00 : Storm and Rapp arrived off Vardo, sinking a Petya-class corvette with Penguins.

05:00 : Storm followed-up with her 76mm gun to annihilate the Vardo invasion flotilla, sinking a landing ship, four landing craft and a patrol boat. The Polnochny landing ship was worth 15 VP.

06:00 : A fourth Fencer raided Bardufoss and escaped CAP, but her Kazoos did not.

07:00 : CAP at Tromso shot down a lone MiG-27 raider.

The MTBs arrived off Batsfjord, having trawled back West. Chronically, both the remaining Penguins, aimed at a pair of Mirka-class corvettes, malfunctioned.

Meanwhile, a trailing MTB, the Hauk, arrived off Mehamn and blasted one of the Pomornik hovercraft for 5 VP. As she had just two Penguins left, I sent her on to Batsfjord and assigned Ulstein to deal with the other hovercraft.

09:00 : Hauk attacked the Mirkas, but one Penguin malfunctioned and the other crippled, but failed to sink the target. She then tried to attack with her impressive 12nm ranged torpedoes, but hit a bug. Apparently, the targets were ‘out of the DLZ’, even though they couldn’t flee without running aground. Storm had some 76mm ammo left and attacked a Serna patrol boat near the mouth of the fjord, but didn’t quite manage to sink her before expending her shots.

10:00 : There was nothing for it, so I edged Hauk into the fjord, risking the undamaged Mirka’s 76mm guns. Miraculously, she got within the torpedo DLZ without taking fire...but the damned weapons malfunctioned!. I repeated the move with Teme, but she could do no more than damage the second Mirka and escape. As I withdrew in disgust, there was more ridiculousness. Up until now, the Red Air Force had ignored the naval side of things but now, two Frogfoot attack planes appeared. One got close enough at 200’ to be hit (but, par for the course, not destroyed) by a Mistral, but they ignored the juicy targets and instead proceeded with their mission to attack the SOSUS bunker at Vardo!!

12:00 : Ulstein arrived at Mehamn and completed her stellar performance by sinking the hovercraft.

Up to now, I’d kept the US Eagles back in case of a late Soviet mega-strike. Now, I let them off the leash. To the strains of “Hotel California”, they ripped into the massed Soviet CAP in ones and twos, using the rehearsed tactics. As chance would have it, they were initially opposed by a squadron of Su-27s and needed to do a lot of ducking and weaving to wear them out. The Russians were at the end of their tether and an Eagle has good endurance, so this was a success. With the Flankers gone, the Fulcrums and Floggers were much easier prey. This was quite simply the most exhilarating dogfight I’ve ever played in CMO. The Russians’ numbers were intimidating, but this only offered me plenty of targets for my AMRAAMs, while I only exposed one or two planes at a time. I had a radar edge and could zip away immediately after loosing, only for the next attack to hit from another direction. It was absolute carnage and I lost track of how many bandits I destroyed. Towards the end, another octet of Flankers pitched-in, but I wasn’t about to quit and clobbered the lot for the loss of two Eagles. Withdrew as yet more Soviets began to arrive and the game finished in a Major Victory, with a score of +174.

For the record, NATO lost two frigates, 5 missile boats, a coastguard cutter, a Sentry, an EW plane, two Eagles, 9 F-16s, three Orions, a chopper, 29 infantry, 5 40mm AA, 3 APCs, 12 installations and 13 radars.

The USSR lost 14 missile boats, a sub, a corvette, two hovercraft, a landing ship, 4 landing craft, a patrol boat, 52 fighters, 28 attack planes, 3 recon planes, a transport plane, 11 choppers, 18 BMPs, 21 BTRs, 55 infantry, 3 mortars and 9 MANPADs.

Looking forward to the (rather different) next scenario.