**Northern Fury 10, Eisenhower moves North**

**AAR By Joel Radunzel**

Post 1

As the *Enterprise* battle group is attempting to blunt the Soviet sure into the north Atlantic, the Eisenhower battle group, having done some hard fighting in the Med, has now passed Gibraltar and is making its way north to reinforce. The *Eisenhower* possesses a powerful group, but also some major disadvantages. First, due to the fighting in the Med, the group is scattered for replenishment. Currently, the *Eisenhower*, escorted only by the *Ticonderoga*-class cruiser USS *Vicksburg* and the frigate USS *Halyburton*, is the furthest north of the American ships, west of Cape Trafalgar. However, *Ike*’s escorts are down to about 50% ordinance in their magazines.

Map

Description automatically generated

Hurrying to catch up with the *Eisenhower* is the bulk of her group, escorting the replenishment ship USS *Detroit*. This group, besides the *Detroit*, consists of the nuclear-powered cruiser USS *Virginia*, the brand-new USS *Arleigh Burke*, the frigate USS *De Wert*, and the Spanish frigate *Numancia*. Even further back, having gone to Toulon to replenish magazines, is a second *Tico*, the USS *San Jacinto*, accompanied by the *Spruance*-class USS *David R. Ray*. These are still in the Med but approaching the straits of Gibraltar. Both groups will need to hurry to catch up with their carrier, since the *Eisenhower* must be on station west of Ireland in 48 hours to link up with the replenishment ship HMS *Fort George*, on her way from Portsmouth, and start launching strikes against Soviet-occupied Iceland. Once the *San Jacinto* rejoins *Ike*, the commander must detach *Vicksburg* to Brest so she can refill her VLS cells. What this means is that all American ships, including the two 688-class subs screening ahead, USS *Boston* and USS *Albuquerque*, will need to move much faster than the CVBG commander would like, given the submarine threat from the Soviets.

Not only is the naval force scattered, but so is *Ike*’s air group. Air ordnance stores onboard are also low, and the air group sustained losses in the Med. These losses will be made good by replacements from Norfolk flying in over the next two days, but for now the group is thin, particularly since two squadrons of F/A-18C Hornets are currently at Rota receiving emergency upgrades to allow them to use AIM-120 missiles. The CAG is ok with the arrangement for now since the air threat is currently low this far south. The sub threat is what is causing the TG commander heartburn, particularly since his ships need to move so fast.

NATO possesses resources to deal with this threat, however. Besides the organic S-3 Vikings and helicopters aboard the American ships, the Portuguese navy has provided a two-frigate task group, led by the *Vasco de Gama*, to clear ahead of *Ike*. Spanish and Portuguese P-3s will sanitize the area around the straits and northward, as will three submarines. A detachment of Amrican P-3s is also operating out of Rota in support. A French task group is moving into the Bay of Biscay from Brest. Farther north, the submarine HMS *Churchill* and British Nimrods will sanitize a path for the HMS *Fort George* and her escorts, the frigates HMS *Beaver* and HMS *Hermione*. Final, the brand-new Portuguese frigate *Corte Real* is to the west, hurrying forward with orders to join *Ike*’s screen.

So, the task for the *Ike*’s commander, RADM Grundal, is to move north with dispatch, reassemble his battle group and replenish his ships *en route*, and not lose any to the Soviet submarines lurking in his path. That, and be prepared to fend off a strike from Soviet bombers as he moves farther north. Easy, right? We’ll see.

Post 2

2300 19 February

Captain 2nd Rank Matros of the Soviet Navy stood in the control room of his submarine, creeping silently 30 meters beneath the waves 200 miles off the northwest coast of Spain, concentrating on his mission. He knew from his latest update from Red Banner Northern Fleet that several submarines had been lost in the past several days in the north Atlantic, more than one captained by a friend of his. He was determined not to let the same fate befall his ship and crew. He concentrated on the second part of the update, which had assigned him a very important mission. An American carrier was coming north from the Straits of Gibraltar with a light escort, and he was in an excellent position to intercept it. This might be the best chance yet to destroy one of the Americans’ vaunted carriers.

Captain Matros was in command of one of the most advanced submarines his country could produce. The submarine he commanded was the *Pskov*, one of what NATO had designated as the *Sierra-II* class of nuclear attack boats. Quiet and lethal, it was the perfect tool for penetrating the American ASW screens, he believed. But his boat was not the only resource at his disposal. His coordinating instructions had given him clear guidance about what to do if and when he detected the American flattop...

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2310 19 February

Aboard USS *Eisenhower*, RADM Grundal swore at the response he had received from fleet headquarters. His request for an extra 12 hours to get to his assembly area had been denied, again. He handed the message to his flag captain, who had come up to the flag bridge to receive instructions.

“What this means, Pete,” the Admiral said, “is that we’re going to have to haul ass all the way up to the north Atlantic. The escorts’ sensors won’t do us much good. Even worse, *Boston* and *Albuquerque* have to be even further north than us by the deadline. They’re going to need to go deep and do a long speed run just to make it in time. I don’t like the idea of them running across the sights of some lucky Russian just to meet a deadline. Even worse, the rest of the task force coming behind us is going to need to go to flank speed just to catch up with us! It’s some mess we’re in.”

The flag captain nodded, then tried to mollify his Admiral. “Sir, at least we have the Spanish clearing the way for us to the north.”

Grundal grimaced. “I don’t have a lot of confidence that those old Spanish frigates are going to do us much good. Besides, your patrol planes report a group of fishing vessels along our projected course. Any one of those could be a Russian spy. I want you to shift our course to the west slightly, further out to sea. Just enough to avoid those fishing boats.”

The CAG, who was also present, piped up, “I’ll get on adjusting our ASW patrols. Give me a course and I can have our S-3s sanitize a lane for us. I’ll get on the horn to Rota and see if those P-3s can’t give us some support.”

Grundal nodded, then turned to his N3 and said, “Get a message off to the subs: I want them following the same sanitized lane as us. If they have to do a speed run, best they do it where we can at least warn them if some Russian is up ahead. Set up a comms plan for them to come shallow at regular intervals.”

The N3 nodded.

“Any questions?” Grundal asked. “No? Then let’s stop burning daylight. Make it happen!”

“Aye, sir,” the flag captain said as he departed to give the necessary orders.

A couple of minutes later the Admiral felt the massive bulk of the carrier shift beneath his feet. He looked ahead out the flag bridge windows as the dark shadow of the carrier’s bow swung several points to port. Further ahead he could just make out the wakes of USS *Vicksburg* and *Halyburton* as they executed the same maneuver, maintaining their stations in line ahead of their charge. He could also make out the navigation lights of the ASW helicopters operating off the carrier and its escorts to the front of the formation. Just then an S-3 Viking patrol plain rocketed down one of Ike’s forward catapults and into the sky amid clouds of steam, headed north by northwest. Grundal would feel much more comfortable when he had his whole battle group back around him. For now, they were cutting things very close.

The CAG stuck his head back in the bridge. “Admiral, Rota just confirmed. They have three P-3s for us to use. The fourth is getting an engine replaced and won’t be available any time soon. But they can promise us continuous presence over the corridor. They just won’t have anything to flex to prosecute contacts elsewhere.”

“Understood,” said the Admiral. Then to his N3, “Get a message off to the *Detroit* and *San Jacinto* task groups. I want them following along in our wakes, along the same corridor. Once they get through the straits, they need to go to maximum speed to catch up, understood? We may well need their full magazines the further north we get.”

Post 3

0030 20 February

The commander of USS *San Jacinto*, Captain Coors, yawned and stretched his arms, leaning back in his command chair in the cruiser’s CIC. It had been a long, tense run from Toulon, and their time in port hadn’t been particularly restful either, what with having to deal with the French dockyard bureaucracy just to get his VLS cells filled with missiles. You would think they didn’t know there was a war on, he thought. He was beginning to allow himself to relax. One of his helicopters had just finished the hour-long process detecting, tracking, and finally localizing a submerged contact several miles to their south, which had turned out to be a large and wily school of Tuna fishes.

He smirked at the groans among his crew when the contact’s identity had been revealed. They had been all keyed up to drop a torp on the contact. Coors knew he couldn’t be so bold, not in these restricted waters. He almost wished the Spanish Navy would keep their submarines out of the straits he would need to transit in a couple of hours. Their presence complicated things for him, forcing his sonar techs to make doubly sure of their target before he could engage. On the other hand, those two subs were more sensor platforms for any Soviet sub to evade if they wanted to make trouble around here. Regardless, for now, the threat board was clear. The USS *David R. Ray*, a *Spruance*-class destroyer cruising several miles ahead, had primary responsibility for C2 of ASW ops for their little task group anyway. Perfect time to get some much-needed shut-eye.

“Officer of the deck,” Captain Coors announced, “I’m headed to bed. No need to wake me unless we detect a probable hostile.”

“Aye, sir,” the lieutenant acknowledged.

The captain walked the few yards to his cabin, entered, and threw himself on his bunk, pausing only to remove his shoes.

Captain Coors awoke with a start, confused.

“Sir?”

“Hmm?” the captain grunted.

“Sir?” the sailor repeated. “Sir, the officer of the deck sent me to get you. He says we have a probable contact.“

Coors blinked his eyes. “What time is it?” he asked groggily.

The seaman looked at his watch. “0230 sir.”

Two hours, thought the captain. He didn’t feel any better than when he had lay down. Worse, actually. “Ok, sailor. Tell the lieutenant I’m on my way, and there better be coffee waiting when I get to CIC.”

The sailor fled as Coors stood and splashed water on his face from the sink. Then he walked to CIC.

“What’s the situation?” the captain asked as he strode into ship’s command center, looking more awake than he felt.

“Sir,” reported the OOD, “a few minutes ago the *David R. Ray* reported picking up a submerged contact to our southwest. Directly west of us are two Spanish frigates heading our way, the *Descubierta* and the *Baleares*. The contact is nearer to them. We’ve contacted them and they have nothing on their scopes.”

“Another biologic?” asked the captain.

The lieutenant shook his head. “Unlikely, sir, this one’s moving at twenty knots or better. Looks like it’s trying to get in range of those two Spaniards.”

Coors pulse quickened. A seaman handed him a mug of coffee, but he didn’t need it. He was wide awake now. He couldn’t think of a reason why any of the Spanish diesel subs he knew were around would be cranking speed like that. But he had to be sure. “What is *Ray* doing?” he asked.

“Their helo is up and headed that way sir,” answered the lieutenant.

“Tell *Ray* to remind them that we need to be absolutely sure of the contact’s identity before dropping on it. Shouldn’t be too hard at that speed.”

“Aye, sir.”

Coors looked up one of the large computerized map displays showing the outlines of the Spanish and north African coastlines almost coming together to his ship’s front. The symbols for the two Spanish ships appeared on an eastward course several miles east of the strait. To their south and west, the symbol for the unknown submerged contact was shown with its vector pointed to the northeast, on an intercept course with the Spaniards. Between Coors’ ships and the contact was the symbol for *David R. Ray’*s helicopter, call sign Air Wolves One-Zero, speeding outward. The submerged contact was getting uncomfortably close to the frigates.

“OOD,” the captain said, “call *Baleares*. They should be able to hear that guy by now. Ask them if they suspect this to be one of their boats.”

The lieutenant complied, then reported, “Sir, they say they have negative contact with any submarine. Baleares reports they believe their submarine on this side of the straits is to the north, repeat, north of their location.”

Coors nodded and watched the symbol for Air Wolves One-Zero, an SH-60B Seahawk, slow and flare to a stop near the estimated location of the contact. Over the radio he heard, “This is Air Wolves One-Zero, lowering sonar now.” Then after a few moments the tinny voice said, “Contact, contact, definitely a diesel-electric boat, repeat, definitely an SSK. Raising the dome and moving north to triangulate, over.”

Silently Captain Coors wished the helo pilots to hurry. That sub, whoever he was, was quiet, even at the speed he was running, and he was getting uncomfortably close to the Spanish ships, who were still reporting that they couldn’t hear it. After a few seconds he heard, “Madman, madman, madman, dropping flares.” Several miles away the pilot of the SH-60B triggered red flares over the piece of ocean where his magnetic anomaly detector had just registered a large magnetic mass. Then the tinny voice said, “lowering dome...contact...Ray, we have a preliminary ID, over.”

“Go ahead, Air Wolves One-Zero,” came response from Ray’s CIC.

“Roger, my tech says is sounds like a Kilo making twenty knots...wait...transient, transient! Torpedoes in the water! He just launched torps. We make two fish, heading north-northwest, over!”

Coors blood ran cold. In a voice that was calmer than he felt he ordered, “Tell *Baleares* and *Descubierta* to evade north. They have got to be able to hear that!” The changing vectors on the symbols representing the two Spanish ships indicated that he was right. “Looks like that bastard launched at long range. Tell the helo to drop on that son of a bitch. Weapons free!”

Air Wolves One-Zero acknowledged. The sonar tech in the back raised the dipping sonar and the Seahawk banked right, guiding off of the flares that had dropped earlier to come in behind the Russian sub. After a few seconds Coors heard, “Fish away!”

Next the OOD reported, “Sir, Ray reports their towed array has our fish running hot straight, and normal...and theirs too.”

“If we can take out the Kilo then their fish won’t have the wires. The Spanish will have a much better shot at evading,” Coors said. to no one in particular, willing the Mk46 Lightweight Aerial Torpedo onward.

The crew of the Soviet sub, a *Kilo*-class boat with the less than exciting name of *B-401*, never had a chance. Air Wolves One-Zero had dropped within a quarter mile of the boat’s churning screw. The Soviet sonar operators didn’t even have time to shout a warning before the Mk46’s warhead detonated against the propeller, mangling it and causing flooding to the engine room. The shaft continued to turn, now making tortuous grinding noises for all to hear.

“*David R. Ray* reports a positive hit, sir,” reported the *San Jacinto*’s ASW officer.

“Did we kill it?” asked the captain.

The younger officer listened to his headset for a moment, then responded, ”Negative, *Ray* reports they can hear damage but the contact is still submerged and making headway...enemy torpedoes are still bearing on targets.”

Coors swore. “Tell the helo to re-engage!”

Air Wolves One-Zero was already banking for another pass with its second torpedo. The second attack was a repeat of the first. The weapon dropped into the water and immediately acquired its target, dove, and exploded against B-401’s already mangled screw. The explosion completely opened the rear compartments of the boat, slamming the Russian damage control parties forward in a cascade of water. The submarine lost all power, then began to slide backwards to the shallow seafloor below.

“*Ray* reports a good kill!” announced *San Jacinto*’s ASW officer. There was no cheering in CIC. Captain Coors ran too tight of a ship for that, but he did see a few of the sailors at their consoles in the blue-lit room pump their fists and mouth “Yes!” in silent triumph. Coors was still watching the tracks of the two Soviet torpedoes bearing on the Spanish frigates.

As he watched, he saw the two ships bear away to the north, coming onto a course that took them out of the way of the two fish, which had been launched at long range. The torpedoes, now lacking guidance from their mothership, reached the end of their vector and, failing to find anything with their onboard sensors, began searching in an S-patters for anything to attack. They found nothing, and eventually sank to the muddy seafloor below, joining the boat that had launched them.

“Sir,” the communication petty officer called across the CIC, “*Baleares* is on the line. He wants to extend a thanks and congratulations on the kill. He also reports that a Spanish P-3 from 221 Escadrille out of Moron airbase says they just sank a *Victor* on our line of advance.”

Coors smiled grimly, then said, “Good! I’m going back to bed.”

The captain was halfway out of the room when he heard a petty officer call, “Sir! Task *Group Vasco de Gama* is calling a mayday! They report the frigate *Afonso Cerqueia* just took a torpedo forty miles west of Lisbon and is sinking fast!”

Post 4

0330 20 February

Aboard USS *Eisenhower*, Rear Admiral Grundal slammed his fist into the bulkhead in frustration. Out the starboard window he could just make out the glow on the horizon that marked the graves of the two Portuguese frigates, *Vasco de Gama* and *Afonso Cerqueia*, that had been assigned to screen ahead of his carrier. The fact that he had ordered his depleted task group to the west, away from whatever Russian had torpedoed both ships, did not make him feel any better.

The admiral looked over at his flag lieutenant and said, “Ring up the CAG. I want CSAR birds over there to drop supplies to the survivors. We can’t alter course to pick them up. The Portuguese Navy is going to need to send a rescue boat. But we can go after the bastard that attacked them. Call up the on-station P-3 and tell them I want them to head over there and start looking for that sub. Better for now to hunt where we know the enemy is rather than where we think he may be. The S-3s can handle our corridor for now.”

“Aye, sir,” the flag lieutenant responded, before making the necessary call to the ASW screen commander.

Thirty miles ahead of the carrier, the pilot of Trident Three-One, the P-3C sweeping ahead of *Ike*, banked his four-engine aircraft to starboard, ascended, and pushed his throttles forward to their stops. He wanted to cover the forty miles between his bird and the sinking Portuguese ships in as little time as possible. The Russian was almost certain not to stick around after his victory. The sooner his aircraft arrived the better chance he had of bagging a sub.

As they flew the ASW screen commander updated the pilot and his crew on the attack. “The *Vasco de Gama*’s captain reported before they went off the net that the attack was from head on, that they never even heard the submarine that launched the fish. *Afonso Cerqeia* had been in the lead and took the first hit. Just as *de Gama* was maneuvering around the wreck the second one hit her. That’s when we lost contact. Given how little time the Portuguese had to track the fish, I would guess that the enemy is in very close.”

Trident Three-One’s commander agreed with that assessment. His MAD gear wouldn’t be much good so near the sinking frigates, but he still had plenty of sonobuoys aboard. He ordered the technicians in the back to begin plotting a pattern around the location of the attack. Fifteen minutes later his put his Orion nosed down and descended through the darkness. As they passed through scattered clouds the captain could see the yellow and red of two burning ships reflecting off the water all around. “Well, at least we’ll have pretty constant illum,” he commented to his copilot darkly.

They leveled off at a thousand feet and banked into their first sonobuoy run. The boys in back had selected a star pattern for their drops. Over the next few minutes the pilot flew back and forth, using the burning ships as his aim point each time. As the men in back dropped the sensors out of the aircraft’s launch tubes, the pilot called in to *Ike* what he saw of lifeboats in the water around the stricken frigates. Then, their buoy pattern complete, he banked his bird into a gentle circle around the sensors.

After several minutes, Trident Three-One’s lead sonarman called over the intercom, “Sir, I’ve got something on buoy one-three. It’s faint, but getting stronger, above the layer...getting stronger...sounds like an SSK...OK, now I’m picking him up on buoy one-two...definitely a contact sir.”

“How far from the wrecks?” the pilot asked. One of the pyres had by now disappeared beneath the waves, extinguishing one of his markers.

“Maybe one mile, south,” answered the sonarman, “definitely far enough for the MAD gear...signal strength on one-four decreasing...sounds like he’s going to pass right by one-three. If I had to guess I would say he passed right beneath and between the two wrecks, sir.”

“Ok,” said the pilot, “let’s give it a look-see.” He increased his bank and flew directly over the remains of the *Vasco de Gama*, which was just now joining her sister in slipping beneath the waves, on a direct course from there to the relevant buoys.

“Sir,” the sonarman called, “I’ve got an ID from buoy one-three. I’m calling it a *Kilo*, doing three knots. Real hard to hear...he’s got to be about right next to the buoy, sir.”

The pilot nodded as he leveled into his vector. A few seconds later he heard “Madman, madman! Flares away!” A line of red magnesium flares dropped from the P-3C, marking the location and projected course of their target. The pilot waited for several more seconds, then banked sharply to starboard. “No messing around,” he said, “lets line up this som’bitch and let him have it with both barrels. I want two torps on this guy.”

“Roger sir,” the copilot said.

The Orion came around and the pilot lined up his course with the line of flares now bobbing in the water. “Let’s put these right up his ass, Frank,” the pilot said to his copilot. The other man nodded grimly. When they were a quarter mile from the first flare he ordered, “Now, now, now!”

“Weapons away!” crackled the intercom. The four-engine plane lifted slightly as the two Mk-46s dropped out of the open bomb bay and splashed into the water.

Aboard the (also unimaginatively named) *K-439*, another *Kilo*-class diesel boat, the Soviet captain had just been congratulating his crew on a well-executed attack, ignorant of the aircraft above, when his sonarman screamed, “Captain! Two torpedoes, directly behind us!” Where had they come from?

“Range?” he demanded.

“Very close, captain!”

His blood ran cold. “Flank speed! Hard to port! Deploy countermea...” his order was cut short by two rapid-fire explosions that knocked him to the deck and caused the lights to go out. Emergency lights came back on a moment later, but he could already hear water rushing in the compartments aft.

“Sir!” his executive officer called from his station. “We have heavy flooding in the battery room! We won’t be able to control it. Engine room is not reporting.”

The captain’s survival instinct took hold. He knew what he needed to do. “Emergency blow! Get us to the surface!”

*K-439* broached the surface of the Atlantic in a froth of foam and bubbles. Moments later her hatches flew open and men began to tumble out onto the deck, some dragging survival rafts with them. These yanked the lanyards on the capsules and the rafts hissed into shape. Sailors clambered in as the small submarine began to sink back beneath the water.

The Soviet captain waited until he was the last man in the control room, but not a second more. The feet of his XO were in his face, even kicking him once, as he climbed the ladder through the boat's sail. Looking up he could see stars through the opening past his XO’s back. Then water began to spill down the shaft. He climbed faster and emerged into the open air just as the water pouring down became a cascade. He pushed up off of the last rung and felt his command sink away beneath him. Then he was swimming.

But not for long. Hands reached down and pulled him into a crowded raft. After gathering himself, the captain looked around. It appeared most of his crew had gotten out and were bobbing upon the waves in the crowded rafts around him. He ducked as a large four-engine plane roared over them out of the dark, then looked up again to see an odd sight to the north. Another flotilla of rafts, crowded with figures, was paddling towards them, shouting what sounded like insults. In Portuguese. They looked to be about half a mile away. The survivors from those frigates, he thought. This was going to be an interesting night.

Post 5

0400 20 February

“Sir,” Rear Admiral Grundal heard his flag lieutenant say, “ASW screen commander reports that Trident Three-One confirms a kill on a *Kilo*-class sub. He says they watched it surface and the crew evacuate.”

Grundal nodded. The loss of the Portuguese ships had been a blow, but otherwise things were going well. *San Jacinto* had called in a kill east of Gibraltar, the Spanish were claiming a *Victor* off Cape Trafalgar, and now they had bagged another, though at the cost of two valuable frigates. TG *Detroit* was making good speed from Cadiz to catch up with him, and TG *San Jacinto* was just now passing the Pillars of Hurcules. Once through, they would go to maximum speed to catch up as well.

Making him feel more confident was the dark knife-like shape of a warship joining his formation right now. The Portuguese frigate NPS *Corte Real*, a new and modern *Vasco de Gama*-class frigate, was pulling into line in *Ike*’s wake. The number of his escorts was up to three, and the screen commander was already at work overcoming the language barrier to work *Corte Real*’s two Lynx helicopters into his patrols. The line of four ships continued north at 15 knots.

Grundal was about to go to bed when another officer reported, “Sir, one of the Soviet RORSats will be passing overhead in just a few minutes.”

The admiral had forgotten about this. Norfolk had warned him that the Air Force had run out of ASAT missiles before the Soviets had run out of replacement satellites and boosters. There was nothing to be done. That bird was going to see his ships. “Roger. I’m turning in. Wake me in three hours.”

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Thirty minutes later, aboard *Pskov*, Captain 2nd Rank Matros was awaiting the report from his communications officer. The man hurried into the control room with the message and handed it over. Matros grabbed the printout and walked over to the plotting table, reading as he went.

Aha, he though, plotting the latest position of the American carrier group, so he is angling west. No matter, we can still intercept him easily. “Helmsman,” he called, “alter course to three-zero-zero.” That ought to do it.

More troubling to Matros was that the satellite report via fleet headquarters in Murmansk had shown a third escort with the carrier. The Americans were reassembling their battle group. He needed to get at that flattop before the screen got any stronger.

“Helm,” he said, “increase speed to ten knots.”

Post 6

0730 29 February

“Base, this is Perseus Five,” called the pilot of the 42 Squadron RAF Nimrod, patrolling 350 miles west of Brest, “that’s the last of our buoys, mate. We’re down to fifteen minutes until bingo fuel. Be heading ‘ome soon.”

“Roger, Perseus Five,” came the response. “Stay on station until Bingo. Your replacement is having engine difficulties at the moment.”

The crew of the Nimrod had been flying back and forth across this patch of ocean for half the night trying to sanitize a path for HMS *Forth George*, several hours out of Portsmouth, to eventually link-up with that Yank carrier. They were all ready to be out of their seats and in bed. All 120 of their passive sonobuoys were now in the water in a field that spanned dozens of miles in every direction. They were ready to hand the data links off to another crew and be done with it. Their fuel stare would dictate their departure soon regardless. So far, they had heard nothing but whales and fish.

Just then the pilot heard, “Sir, I’m picking up something on Jezebel Four-Four...getting stronger...it sounds like twin screws sir.”

“Should we head over and check it out?” asked the copilot.

“Not enough fuel,” said the captain, only half relieved. “We’ll stay here as long as we can and monitor the signal, but with no replacement we’ll have to abandon it eventually.

Five minutes later the sonarman in back was ready to give his judgment. “Sir, it’s an *Echo II*. He’s passing right next to the buoy, heading is northwest to southeast. Making about five knots.”

“Get a contact report off,” ordered the captain. “And find out when our relief is expected. We’re going to lose him if we wait too long.

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Aboard *Eisenhower*, Admiral Grundal was up, groggy, and trying to sip down a steaming cup of coffee as fast as he could while his flag lieutenant updated him on the situation that had developed over the past three hours.

“...and sir, that’s about it. The convoy system is in full swing. We have our first one exiting the Med this morning, another is two hours our of Brest, and you know about the situation on the north Atlantic. We have a few hangers on who are refusing to wait for the convoys, and it’s costing us. About an hour ago we got a call from the Irish coast guard. A container ship trying to make its own way, the SS *Wild Rose*, was just torpedoed ninety miles of the southwest coast of Ireland.”

“Anything we can do to help them?” asked Grundal, still trying to wake himself up.

“No sir,” answered the lieutenant. “Not to be harsh, but they took their chances when they sailed without escort. The Irish say they are trying to get someone out there, but honestly there’s no one nearby, except whoever sank them.”

The admiral nodded, then said, “Well, *Wild Rose* did us one service, at least.”

“What’s that, sir?” asked the aide.

“Now we know there’s at least one Russki up there waiting for us.”

The lieutenant nodded as a petty officer came in and handed him a message. The lieutenant read it and said, “Make that two Russkis, sir. The Brits are reporting that they had solid contact with an *Echo II* about thirty minutes ago at the south end of our assembly area, but weren’t able to prosecute. They have a bird *en route* to try to reacquire, but they lost him for now.”

“How did they manage to lose an old rust bucket like that?” asked Grundal in frustration. The *Echo II*s were old, but depending on the model one could be carrying eight SS-N-12 missiles, and those could be nuclear.

“The Nimrod ran out of fuel and had to head home,” explained the aide, “and its replacement had mechanical difficulties.”

The admiral grumbled but knew it was inevitable. Everyone had been running on all cylinders for nearly a week now. Both machines and men were starting to break down. “Anything we can do?”

“Sir, we could send our on-station P-3 up there, but he wouldn’t be able to stay long. And it’s really too far for our S-3s.”

Grundal swore under his breath, then said, “Well, we’ll just have to hope the Brits can reacquire him, and find whoever torpedoed *Wild Rose*, hopefully before we get up there.”

Post 7

0830 20 February

Commander Pimms, the captain of HMS *Churchill*, the old Royal Navy submarine patrolling the *Eisenhower*’s assembly area, munched on a breakfast of fried bread and bacon as he sat in his command chair. *Chruchill* was about a hundred miles of the southwest tip of Ireland, her crew trying to ensure no one was around to disturb the Americans’ arrival or their replenishment operations.

Right now, that task appeared to be easier said than done. Pimms’ crew had been tracking a faint ambiguous contact to the southeast when they had heard the death of SS *Wild Rose* to the north. The commander had made the decision to turn that way and investigate, but over the past several hours he had detected nothing. Now the contact to his south was back again.

“Richard,” the captain said to his XO, “let’s go to communication depth and see if we can’t ring up some support, shall we?”

A few minutes later the radio transmission burst into the ether with the message that HMS *Churchill* was in the vicinity of at least one and possibly two enemy submarines.

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Perseus Two, the Nimrod patrol aircraft that had belatedly replaced Perseus Five in the hunt for the *Echo II* along *Eisenhower*’s projected course, circled the location of the last beacon to have heard the Russian. The enemy’s last heading had been estimated as to the east, and the captain decided to search in this direction, dropping another line of buoys as he went. These failed to detect anything, even after the aircraft had traveled a much farther distance than the *Echo* possibly could have covered in the time since they had lost contact. That was not good.

Just then over the radio he heard, “Perseus Two, be advised, HMS *Churchill* to your north reports two possible contacts in their vicinity. They give their locations as...” the voice gave the coordinates. “We leave it up to you as to which threat to prosecute first. They will all need to be dealt with before *Fort George* and the Americans arrive tomorrow.”

The pilot considered, then answered, “We’ll stay here for now. The missiles on this *Echo* are the greater long-range threat, and the longer we let him go the harder he will be to find.”

“Understood Perseus. St. Mawgan Base out.”

The pilot turned the Nimrod south and started laying another pattern, trying to cover the likely course towards the American carrier, though the flattop was still hundreds of miles away. After nearly an hour of searching, they still had nothing. The pilot was growing frustrated. Soon he would be running out of fuel as well, without even getting a sniff of the solid contact Perseus Five had made, nor giving HMS *Churchill* any of the support her captain had requested.

“Ok,” the pilot decided, “let’s go north to *Churchill*. We’ll lay a line of buoys along the way so that if the *Echo* went north as well, we can at least track him if he moves back west.”

The Nimrod banked and settled onto a northerly course, dropping SSQ-905 Jezebel buoys at regular intervals along the way. After about ten minutes the chief sonar tech in back called, “Sir, I’ve got him! We just dropped one right on top of him. It’s definitely him sir. He went north, not south”!

Immediately the pilot banked his aircraft around to conduct a MAD pass. The sensor fixed the enemy sub on the first flyover, and from there it was only a matter of time. Two MK46s sent the aging Soviet cruise-missile submarine to the bottom without further drama.

“Call up St. Mawgan,” said the pilot, “inform them that there is one less Russian to contest the Americans’ advance. We are proceeding north to assist *Churchill*.” The copilot called in the report as the patrol plane continued to fly north. They arrived over *Churchill*’s patrol area thirty minutes later and began laying another pattern of buoys.

After the initial patterns was in the water, the petty officer in the back called on the intercom, “Sir, I am reading something off two of our southernmost buoys, numbers ninety and ninety-two.”

“Could that be *Churchill*?” asked the copilot.

“Most likely not,” answered the commander. “Too far south and outside of his assigned patrol boundaries. Let’s lay a closer pattern and take a look.”

Before long the very capably Jezebel buoys had allowed the Nimrod’s crew to identify the contact first as a Russian SSN, then as a *Victor III*.

“That’s probably the bloke that god *Wild Rose*,” said the copilot angrily.

“Let’s go get him,” agreed the captain.

They fixed the Russian’s location with their MAD gear and then came back around, dropping a single MK46. It took the aircraft commander only a few seconds to ascertain that he had misjudged the drop.

“Sir,” the petty officer called over the intercom, “the contact has gone to flank speed and is maneuvering...it sounds like the weapon his heading in the wrong direction...yes, tracks diverging...a miss sir.”

The pilot swore, then brought his aircraft back around. He had plenty of torpedoes, and each one he dropped meant a few more minutes he could stay on station.

“We’ll do two MAD passes, then drop two torpedoes,” announced the pilot.

“Roger,” acknowledged the copilot.

This time their aim was true. The captain of the *Victor*, warned by the first torpedo that he was under attack, maneuvered desperately to shake the weapons chasing him, but in the end, he only ensured that both impacted into the boat’s flank, instantly killing every man in the control room and causing the sub to roll completely onto its side as it sank into the depths.

The crew of Perseus Two celebrated their second victory of the patrol. They were low on fuel now and the pilot set a course for St. Mawgan and home. When they were about halfway there St. Mawgan base called.

“Perseus, do you happen to have any fuel to spare?” the controller asked.

“About ten percent,” responded the pilot. “Why do you ask?”

“The screen commander for the *Fort George* group just called. They’ve detected an old *Romeo* boat just south of Plymouth. None of their helicopters are ready at the moment and they are asking if you could possibly give them some assistance?” The request was very polite, in a British sort of way.

“Yes,” said the captain, “if they had a good vector, I think we should be able to some good.”

So they did. Perseus Two’s pilot adjusted his course to the south, entering the skies of the western end of the English Channel. Once in the reported vicinity of the aging Soviet diesel boat they began dropping a short line of buoys. Before long they had the hapless Russian pegged. “I wonder how he got all the way down here undetected?” wondered the copilot as they banked into their attack run.

“It’s a large ocean,” shrugged the pilot.

Killing the *Romeo* felt a little like clubbing seals after their earlier victories. Two Mk46s dispatched the Russian boat almost before its crew knew they were under attack. With a thanks from *Fort George*, Perseus Two turned north for home, its crew ecstatic at what had been a patrol for the record books. Seven of their nine torpedoes expended to destroy an *Echo-II*, a *Victor*, and the old *Romeo*. The pilot decided that the squadron commander would be buying him and his crew drinks at the pub whenever they could get some down time.

Post 8

The remainder of the day passed relatively uneventfully in the eastern Atlantic. Admiral Grundal continued to anxiously track the painstaking progress of his scattered task force. By nightfall the *Detroit* group was only forty miles astern, almost within support range, but not quite. After a long day, the Admiral was almost ready to turn in early when he heard, “Sir, *Vicksburg* reports a faint sonar contact to starboard. Too faint to identify or give range.”

“This isn’t another pod of whales, is it?” muttered Grundal. One of the S-3s had earlier in the day expended a load of sonobuoys localizing and almost attacking a family of the mammals before breaking off, embarrassed.

“Too early to tell, sir,” the staff officer answered.”

The admiral sat back down, peeved that his trip to his bunk had been delayed, yet again. He let out a long yawn.

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Aboard to *Pskov*, Captain Matros was ecstatic. He had timed his intercept of the American carrier group perfectly. There ahead of him, seen through his periscope which was extended just above the water so that waves lapped into the field of view, was the unmistakable shape of an American carrier. Of course, it was still far too distant to engage, but he was here with the perfect weapon to do the job, and the Americans’ escort did not appear to have been reinforced. He noted the bearing and range once again, then slapped down the periscope’s handles and ordered, “Helm, take us down ten meters and continue with this course and speed. I will inform Murmansk and then we will dive into the layer to begin our attack run.”

Matros had a healthy respect for the Americans’ ASW capabilities. Which was why he was thankful that he would not be attacking the American task group alone.

Minutes later a burst transmission from *Pskov*’s radio antenna shot up to one of the surviving Soviet communication satellites, and from thence the information traveled back to earth where it was received at Red Banner Northern Fleet headquarters. In minutes another message was on its way back by a very nearly reciprocal route.

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Aboard the *Oscar-II* class missile submarine *Voronezh*, barely making steerage way at communication depth 325 miles west of the northwest tip of Spain, a communications ensign ran breathlessly into the control room and handed a message printout to the captain, who sat smoking a cigarette in his command chair. The captain took the piece of paper with measured calm, read it, and handed it back with nonchalance. Then, in a quiet voice he ordered, “Executive officer, battle stations missile. Prepare to launch all of our weapons. Target azimuth will be zero-four-zero. I wish for all of our missiles to be in the air in the minimum amount of time, just as we have practiced.”

The control room sprang into action, with officers and sailors pushing buttons, turning keys, entering information into fire control computers. The captain watched with pride. His was one of the elite boats of the Soviet Navy. He had been drilling these men hard both before and after the start of the war. He knew his weapons had been held in readiness for a special opportunity by his fleet headquarters. Now that opportunity was at hand.

In minutes his weapons officer spoke. “All missiles are in readiness *tovarich* Captain!”

The captain nodded, stubbed out his cigarette, then said, “Very well, we will fire from front to rear. All missiles release.”

Seconds later the first two of *Voronezh*’s twenty four big P-700 *Granit* sea-skimming anti-ship missiles exploded out of their forward canted tubes on either side of the sub’s hull, heading east.

Post 9

Aboard *Eisenhower*, Admiral Grundal was listening in on the ASW net as the screen commander was just starting to vector an S-3 and a helo onto the faint contact to starboard when he heard klaxons go off throughout the ship. Then the intercom blared “Vampire vampire vampire. Battle station missile, I repeat, battle stations missile. Set condition one throughout the ship.” The admiral quickly looked down at his tactical display. There, on the screen, the red chevron symbols of incoming missiles blinked at him. There appeared to be a stream of them, coming from the west southwest.

“Well, I guess they found us,” muttered the admiral.

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The lead pilot of the two-ship flight of F-14s that had just been relieved on CAP duty was just turning into his final approach to land on *Ike* when the controller on the E-2C orbiting to the northwest came on his net, tension causing the man’s voice to break.

“Swordsman Three, this is Seahawk Three-Three, we have multiple vampires inbound from the southwest. Count is one-eight and climbing. Break off your landing pattern and come to vector two-five-zero. You are free to engage once you are in range, over.”

The pilot acknowledged, then checked his fuel gage as he banked left. In his helmet he could hear Seahawk Three-Three giving similar instructions to the two-ship flight that had just taken up CAP station to the north of *Ike*. His fuel indicator showed his bird was low. He didn’t want to have to ditch his multi-million-dollar fighter in the sea because he ran out of gas. On the other hand, his did want somewhere to land that was preferably not on fire or sinking, or both.

In the back, the RIO was powering up the powerful AN/AWG-9 radar which they had kept off throughout their entire patrol up to this point. Their wingmen aboard the F-14 to their starboard, Swordsman Four, were doing the same. To the northwest, Swordsman Five and Six were just punching their afterburners and settling into an unfavorably oblique intercept course with the incoming weapons.

“All Swordman flights, this is Seahawk Three-Three,” crackled the E-2 crewman, “incoming count is now two-four vampires. I repeat, two-four. Get as many as you can, then break north and south to clear the sky for *Vicksburg* to do her work, over.”

Swordsman Three’s pilot acknowledged. He knew from his mission brief that the Aegis cruiser’s missile tubes were only half-full after their battles in the Med. They desperately needed to thin the herd.

Swordsman Three and Four each carried four AIM-54C Phoenix missiles, along with two AIM-7s and two AIM-9s. They could potentially do a lot of thinning. However, the pilot knew from their threat briefs that the Soviet missiles they were likely engaging now possessed their own jammers and ECM and would be streaking forward at wave top level. Certainly not ideal conditions for long-range missile fire. Swordsman Five and Six were in an even more unfavorable position, coming at the enemy weapons from the north so that the missiles were crossing their front from right to left. But they had no choice. They needed to engage as quickly as possible and then get out of Vicksburg’s way.

“All right,” Swordsman Three’s RIO, “I’m getting some good returns off the vampires...getting some interference from the jamming...I’ve got lock, we’re good to launch!”

The pilot mashed his trigger and said, “This is Swordsman Three, Fox Three!” Then he called to his back seater, "give me another one, let’s get the Phoenix’s away fast.”

They repeated the sequence three more times until their big, fire-and-forget radar-guided missiles were all gone. Out of the right of his canopy the pilot could see his wingman doing the same, trails of fire streaking into the night sky and lofting towards the fading pink horizon.

Of the eight AIM-54’s launched by the flight, five connected with an incoming missile, smashing them into the waves only meters below in flashes that were visibly even from two dozen miles away. Nineteen still inbound. The missiles from the northern pair of fighters did not perform as well. With the oblique angle of attack, only three of the missiles connected, and these two F-14s would not be able to make another intercept with their Sparrows. Sixteen.

As the *Granit*s passed within thirty miles of the F-14 flight, the pilot launched the first of his two Sparrows with a “Fox One!” His wingman did the same. Only one of the AIM-7s connected, and now the F-14 jocks were in Sidewinder range. Fifteen.

Both pilots dove towards the oncoming P-700s, giving their AIM-9s’ seekers the best possible opportunity to lock onto the hot missiles against the background of the cool ocean. The pilot targeted one of the lead missiles, squeezed his trigger, and called “Fox Two!” He then did the same for one of the trailing enemy weapons. And then he was beyond them, banking south.

“Good job, Swordsmen,” called the E-2’s controller. “We still have twelve inbound. Now get out of the way and let *Vicksburg* do her thing.” The pilots needed no encouragement.

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Admiral Grundal watched from the forward-looking windows of the flag bridge as the dark shape of USS Vicksburg lit up with fiery tails streaking upward, then nosing over to the left. Missile after missile departed the cruiser in rapid succession, leaving a cloud of smoke to waft behind her and float over Ike’s flight deck.

On the tactical display screen the Admiral could track the progress of the battle as *Vicksburg*’s SM-2 missiles flew on an intercept arc with the oncoming P-700s. There was an *Oscar* out there with empty missile tubes, he knew. Grundal had every intention of hunting that sub down...if his carrier survived this attack.

Two SM-2s targeted each oncoming Soviet missile. Some missed, but most did not. The admiral watched with satisfaction as one enemy missile symbol after another disappeared from the screen. Then his satisfaction turned to concern as he saw that two of the sea skimmers had leaked through and were on an intercept course for the carrier. The admiral was about to open his mouth and say something about the threat when he jumped at a flash and a tearing roar, seemingly just outside the flag bridge. Confused for a moment, the admiral gathered himself and then looked out the port window to see the last of four Sea Sparrow missiles leave Eisenhower’s launcher. These four closed the deal, knocking down the last Soviet missile six miles from Ike.

Grundal let out a breath. He’d been sleepy before the attack. He was wide awake now. He turned to a staff officer and said, "that was closer than I would have liked. Call *Vicksburg*. I want a report on her missile stocks.”

Moments later the staff officer came back and said, “Sir, *Vicksburg* reports her magazines are at one quarter capacity. Her skipper says it will be close if we have to fight off another one like that.”

Grundal nodded. *Vicksburg* had fired off more than half of her remaining SAMs. They had been fortunate that four F-14s had been airborne at the time of the attack, two in their landing pattern. Had that not been the case things might have been even more hairy.

Then the admiral remembered something else. “What’s the status on that sonar contact to starboard?”

“We lost it, sir,” his ASW officer reported. “The aircraft had to wave off to clear the airspace for the missile fire. They’re heading back now to recommence the search.”

Post 10

Aboard the *Sierra-II* class submarine *Pskov*, Captain Matros had listened to the updates from his sonar operators as they reported the sound of missiles launching on bearings to the NATO escort ships. His hopes had soared momentarily when the chief sonarman had reported four rapid-fire explosions from the carrier’s bearing, but they had quickly realized that these must have been outbound defensive missiles rather than missile impacts. Matros had waited pensively a few minutes more, hoping to hear the impact of one of *Voronezh*’s missiles, but in the end there had been silent.

Disappointed but not deterred, Matros had gone back to directing his approach towards the enemy ships. At the very least he was counting on the missile attack to have diverted the American defenses long enough for him to get close enough for his own attack on the carrier. *Pskov* quietly glided west, using the thermocline layer to mask her sounds.

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“Well,” Admiral Grundal said testily to the ASW commander over the ship-to-ship radio, “I don’t care if you never identified it. That lost contact to our east was too close for comfort. You need to re-establish contact and either confirm or deny that it is a threat.”

“Roger, sir,” responded the captain over the net, “all I’m saying is that we never got a good fix on it before the missile attack. We had a decent bearing but no range. The area we have to search is much larger than id’s like, in addition to being too close to *Ike*.”

“What assets do you have assigned to the mission?” asked the admiral.

“Right now, sir, I have two helos and an S-3 combing the area. The *Detroit* group is close enough now, it would be helpful if we could pull one of their birds onto this as well.”

The admiral considered, then said, “Done. I’ll also call the P-3 down from up north to assist you. That *Oscar* that attacked us had help, and my gut says there’s a Russian attack sub out there that was providing it. Stay on it! Grundal out.”

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Several dozen miles north of Ike, the crew of the P-3 with call sign Tridents Four-One received their orders to suspend the sweep north along the course of the advancing carrier and take up station to the flattop’s east. The pilot immediately banked and settled onto a southeasterly course.

Already performing a complicated dance in the anticipated area of the lost contact, one US and one Portuguese helicopter were taking turns dipping their sonar into the water, listening, and then moving to a different spot to repeat the process. Further out, the crew of the S-3, Checkmates Three, was dropping some of its limited supply of buoys. Their pattern of operation was intended to start on the outside limit of where the contact could be and then work inwards.

Checkmates Three was just banking after having dropped a buoys when the tech in the back called over the intercom, “Hey captain, I just had something peg the needle on the MAD gear. Wasn’t very strong and I almost missed it. Can you come back around over the same spot.”

“Sure thing,” the pilot responded, continuing his turn until it was a complete circle.

A moment later he heard, “Madman, madman! Positive contact!” over the intercom. Instinctively he released smoke and banked to come around again. It was certainly unusual to get a MAD contact hearing it. He checked his position, and his jaw clamped.

“Ok,” said the pilot. “Listen up. Whoever this is, they’re barely thirteen miles from Ike. That’s too damn close. I’m bringing us back around. I want two buoys, a passive one first and then an active one. We’ll try to straddle the contact. If we can identify we’ll come back around and drop on the next pass.”

Checkmates Three circled again and the pilot lined up with the smoke he had dropped moments before. As he overflew it he called, “Drop now! Now!”

Two cylinders fell from the S-3s belly and splashed down into the water. The first one descended to its assigned depth and began listening. The second one sank as well, but its function was different...

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“Captain!” called the lead sonarman aboard Pskov, “High pitch pinging to our front! It sounds like an aerial buoy!”

Matros’ jaw clenched. An active buoy meant they had found him somehow. He needed to close the range with the carrier quickly now. His torpedoes could cover twelve miles at fifty knots, but launching at extreme range would allow the American warship to outrun the fish. “Helm, turn twenty degrees right and increase speed to ten knots!”

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“I have a definite contact on Active One,” called the S-3 crewman. “Appears to be on a northwesterly course...Passive Four coming online...I have screw noises...definite SSN...you’re sure it’s not one of ours, sir? This guy is quiet.”

“*Boston* and *Albuquerque* are supposed to be far to our north. No other NATO SSN’s are supposed to be operating in this area. We’ll come back around and drop two more passive buoys to try to get an ID.”

“Aye, sir,” acknowledged the tech.

The pilot checked his chart. Twelve miles to *Ike*. Too close. If that was a Russian and he had missiles...

Two minutes later two more buoys were in the water, and the two helos were standing by to assist but staying out of the way of the faster S-3. “Ok, sir,” said the tech, “I can confirm he’s not one of our boats. If I had to guess, I’d say he’s a *Sierra*.”

“You guess or are you sure?” asked the pilot, an edge creeping into his voice.

“Sure enough, sir,” the man said coolly. The pilot nodded.

“Ok, we drop on him on the next pass.”

Checkmates Three came around again. This time when the Viking settled into its course a Mk46 torpedo dropped from the aircraft and into the water, directly behind the contact.

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“Captain!” Matros heard. He already knew what was coming next. “Torpedo in the water! directly astern! Range is very close!”

The captain slammed a fist into the navigation chart. He had been so close! Just a few minutes more and he could have launched a devastating spread of torpedoes. Could he still get there?

“Helm,” Matros ordered, “all ahead flank!”

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“He just hit the gas, sir,” came the report from Checkmate Three’s back seater. “Torp is closing...he just launched countermeasures...and impact!”

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The last thought Captain Matros had as the wall of cold water swept into the control room was “so close!”

Post 11

Admiral Grundal breathed a sigh of relief as the replenishment ship USS *Detroit* pulled alongside *Mighty Ike*. The run-in with the *Sierra* and that *Oscar* had been too close for comfort. *Vicksburg*’s magazines had been nearly empty and he had not been confident about his ability to repel even one more missile attack. Now, in the gray light of dawn, he could look out over the top of Detroit and see the comforting knifelike shape of USS *Arleigh Burke* surging forward to take *Vicksburg*’s place as primary air defense ship. The new destroyer’s magazines were not as deep as the *Ticos*, but at this moment they were full, and full missile tubes trumped empty ones any day of the week.

Also with *Detroit* and *Arleigh Burke* had come the older nuclear-powered cruiser USS *Virginia*, the *Perry*-class frigate *de Wert*, and the Spanish frigate *Numancia*. This is starting to look like a real battle group again, thought the admiral. The formation was in the process of transitioning from a column formation to a more traditional circular one with the carrier at the center.

Grundal looked down to see fuel hoses being passed over the short void separating *Detroit* from *Ike*. The aviation fuel from the replenishment ship was welcome. Even more so were the air-to-air weapons being ferried over in sling loads by *Detroit*’s two UH-46D Sea Knight helicopters. *Eisenhower*’s air-to-air magazines had been almost as low as *Vicksburg*’s SAM inventory. Big Phoenixes, little Sidewinders, brand new AMRAAMs, all made the trip over in their packaging crates slung under the twin rotor choppers.

The admiral knew he couldn’t relax yet. Replenishment was a period of vulnerability for the carrier as his flight operations were curtailed to speed the resupply. But if he could just hang on for the few hours it would take to top off his stores, then his other *Tico*, USS *San Jacinto* would have caught up, and he could send *Vicksburg* to Brest to refill her VLS tubes. Even better, he would get his squadron of F/A-18s back from Rota, where they were even now finishing their upgrades to be able to fire the wonderful new AMRAAMs that everyone up north was raving about. Even better, another squadron of Hornets was even now inbound from Norfolk, getting ready to tank over the central Atlantic. If they could hold on for just a few more hours the admiral knew he would have a fully assembled carrier battle group with which to go after Iceland. Based on the reports coming from *Enterprise*, he was going to need it.