**Northern Fury #11 – Changing of the Guard**

**AAR by fitzpatv, Aug 2021**

Following the events in Hold the Line, NATO seeks to withdraw the Enterprise carrier task force (CVBG) for replenishment, replacing it to the S of Iceland with the Carl Vinson CVBG. The Soviets try to sink one or both US carriers. It happens in the same timeframe as Eisenhower Moves North.  
  
Note that this playthrough used a recent update to the scenario, which Bart has posted elsewhere on this Forum, instead of the one in the current Community Pack 43 – this fixes a problem with Soviet bomber strikes and makes things harder for the NATO player. You can play as either side but, as usual, I stuck with NATO for consistency.  
  
Enterprise is escorted, as before, by two cruisers, two destroyers and a frigate. Her stocks of SAMs and air-to-air missiles are low, due to earlier fighting, leaving her somewhat vulnerable. She needs to reach a position WNW of the Azores to meet a replenishment convoy, then head on to Norfolk, Virginia.  
  
Heading NE to relieve her is Carl Vinson, accompanied by three cruisers, two destroyers, two frigates and an oiler. She is expected to cover Enterprise’s retreat.  
  
The replenishment group consists of a destroyer, three frigates and five auxiliaries, with the flag in the oiler Monongahela. They need to sail E and rendezvous with Enterprise in the pre-defined Replenishment Area (RA).  
  
Heading W towards St John’s, Newfoundland is the auxiliary Seattle, escorted by the frigate Curtis. Low on stocks, her objective is to re-load and support Vinson later. There is a Canadian ASW squadron (destroyer Algonquin and two frigates) off Newfoundland, but they face a long wait before they can offer Seattle any practical support and could be put to other use if you wish.  
  
The SSN Pittsburgh is available to support Enterprise, while the Newport News and Alexandria are placed to run interference for Carl Vinson and the Bluefish has the perilous assignment of ‘sanitising’ the RZ before Enterprise arrives. Finally, the Canadian diesel sub Onondaga is off Greenland for little apparent purpose – I assume that this is linked to a later scenario.  
  
Land-based aircraft at Gander, Newfoundland and Goose Bay, Labrador are on-hand to lend ASW, tanker and AEW support. The Sentries at Goose Bay are a welcome supplement to the low-endurance Hawkeyes on the carriers.  
  
The Russian threat comes from large numbers of aircraft based in Iceland and Andoya, Norway as well as a number of SSNs. There are no Soviet surface ships or SSGNs - the latter was an unexpected comfort!  
  
To begin-with, I retained the pre-set Bluefish PZ and Mid-Atlantic Tanker missions and deleted or re-defined all the others. I made sure that unsuitable aircraft were forbidden to use tankers after too many hared-off to do so in the last two scenarios. Reassuringly, all task groups looked capable of reaching their objectives without breaking their necks, so I altered some of the initial courses to throw-off ambushes and make them more direct, ensured ships’ radars were off and moved everything at Creep speed for the first half-hour.  
  
An immediate concern was that a Russian airstrike might already be incoming before I could organise a defence, as Enterprise (unreasonably) had no planes aloft at the start. Scrambling AEW aircraft was therefore a priority!. Here’s how it played-out...  
  
19th Feb, 08:00Z : Quickly detected some Badger recon planes to the NE of Enterprise, well-placed to support a strike from Andoya. I couldn’t spare any fighters to attempt a cull due to the missile shortage. This decision was reinforced by a message informing me that ships were only authorised to fire at missiles or aircraft that came very close, though I was at liberty to overide this manually if I chose.  
  
A phone conference of task group commanders with Admiral Falkner told me nothing I didn’t know already. I was, however, amused to put-in a personal cameo as C/O of HMS Invincible, though her callsign was probably ‘Vince’ long before Bart knew I existed. Maybe I’ll get into the books in this role?.  
  
I increased Vinson’s speed to 20 knots and sent a few Tomcats to the mid-Atlantic tanker station in the hope that they could succour Enterprise, but the distance between the CVBGs was too great for much support to be practical for now.  
  
Four Foxhounds appeared and made a run at the fleet, seeking to destroy support aircraft. They managed to down a Viking and Seahawk before I could get them out of the way and I then had to use five precious SAMs to take them out. NATO aircraft score 3 VP each, Soviets two.  
  
09:00 : Intercepted messages warned that a major strike was coming in. It certainly was and, for the next couple of hours, Enterprise was left fighting for her life. A great swarm of Foxhounds and Flankers came-in, along with numerous recon and EW planes and followed by 20 Backfires, which launched twice that number of Kitchen missiles. Every available fighter scrambled and concentrated on the Kitchens, stopping the lot with the aid of SAMs before any got close enough to cause panic. Three aggressive Foxhounds were also destroyed in this phase. Most of the Russian fighters seemed nervous of the SAMs and kept their distance, but some closed-in to attack our CAP as they were landing on the carrier. They destroyed nine defending fighters in all, but lost eight Flankers in return. During a lull, the Soviets exposed their support aircraft and CAP took advantage, disposing of six Fencers and four Blinders for a narrow overall gain. Some Tomcats from Vinson managed to intervene, but had to be re-based to Enterprise to stop them returning to the tankers to refuel at the crucial moment. The Enterprise CVBG survived, but the Russians maintained an intimidating cloud of fighters 150nm or so to the N.  
  
11:00 : An Orion from Gander found and sank a Victor III SSN in the RZ for 75 VP.  
  
12:00 : As Enterprise fell back SW, shadowed by Russian planes, she predictably ran into a wolfpack of Soviet SSNs lying in wait. A second Victor III appeared to the SW and fired at the destroyer Thorne at kinematic range (27nm). The escort’s Seahawk promptly sank the sub, but the torpedoes careered through the formation, causing ships to evade at Flank and leaving me with the job of re-organising the task force, which took several hours to resolve. A Sierra II then came-in from much the same quarter and fell victim to USS O’Bannon’s chopper. A Victor I was then detected further S. This vessel proved elusive, but was eventually hunted-down by a Viking and three helicopters.  
  
13:00 : With no more strikes in evidence and the Russian CAP seemingly limited to some 450nm from Keflavik, I tried to switch my radars off for stealth, but this proved impossible for some reason (the problem did not recur with the Vinson CVBG later). Shrugged my shoulders and got on with it, praying that the Backfires had a long turnround time and were based in Norway, not Iceland.  
  
15:00 : A lone Fencer made a sneak attack on USS Thorne (lagging behind due to the torpedo attack from the Victor III), using Krypton ARMs. Thankfully, the destroyer was able to defend herself. Alerted, CAP subsequently disposed of a second such attacker and also shot-down a couple of Fencer F ELINT planes.  
  
Meanwhile, an Orion got rid of a Victor II, which was lurking in the RZ.  
  
19:00 : More bad news for the Soviet submarine fleet, as a third Victor III fell victim to a Canadian Aurora/Orion that was escorting the Seattle. The policy of attaching patrol planes to task groups instead of static patrol zones (which I adopted during Hold the Line) was working very well.  
  
20th Feb, 04:00 : Vinson passed to the N of Enterprise (and got her two Tomcats back).  
  
05:00 : I was ordered (surprise, surprise) to do something about the alarming numbers of Soviet aircraft based on Iceland, with the proposed strikes on Icelandic ground targets postponed in what was still a highly-optimistic timescale. This activity could, in theory, wait until Scenario 14 (Here Comes the Cavalry), though the reality would be a little different…  
  
08:00 : The Algonquin group rendezvoused with the Seattle and proceeded in lockstep with them towards St John’s, with choppers and patrol planes overhead.  
  
09:00 : As Vinson entered the danger zone, I decided to do something about the cloud of Soviet fighters hovering near the Assembly Area. Reserving my AMRAAM-armed Hornets and SAMs to deal with any Backfire or Fencer strike, I scrambled the Tomcats, loaded with Heavy MiGCAP long-ranged Phoenixes. Though designed as bomber-killers, I find these most useful against Russian fighters, as they give the Tomcat a range advantage sufficient for it to watch their (SARH) shots onto the target and still have time to escape afterwards. The difficulty is making sure they don’t veer away and lose their aim. The outcome was a massacre, with a Foxhound and 21 Flankers downed without loss – only for more Soviet fighters to percolate in.  
  
10:00 : The Soviets pursued, so I sent-in my Light MigCAP Tomcats, which splashed another 4 Foxhounds and 3 Flankers without loss. Soviet CAP, though, proved inexhaustible, though they did back-off a little towards Iceland…  
  
Meanwhile, an Orion sank another Victor II lurking in the path of the Monongahela group.  
  
15:00 : Ongoing aerial skirmishes continued to erode Soviet fighter strength despite some pretty poor luck. I then faced another enemy surge, consisting of fighters and Fencer Fs. The Tomcats made another big effort and did great execution, driving the Soviets most of the way back to Iceland and destroying another 27 fighters, a Fencer and a Badger. We did, however, lose a couple of planes and the Tomcats’ ability to sustain this level of performance was falling foul of the missile supply issue.  
  
21:00 : Things having quietened-down, I received 100 VP for the Vinson CVBG reaching the Assembly Area. Not long afterwards, Enterprise reached the RZ for a similar award.  
  
22:00 : Six stupidly-aggressive Foxhounds made a run at the fleet. A Hornet, returning from Badger-stalking, managed to down one and escape, but the others raced on and had to be exterminated with SAMs to conserve fighters. They did no damage.  
  
23:00 : Sentries detected a big strike coming-in. Scrambled the reserved force of heavily-armed Hornets to intercept. Somewhat to my surprise, the attackers were not Backfires, but Fencers and I was, therefore, able to reach them before they could loose their Kazoos and Kryptons. The resultant ‘Fencer party’ saw about 25 of the bandits destroyed and the others sent packing. We now faced an anxious few hours while the Hornets returned and re-armed. There were some Hornets armed with Harpoons and Mavericks that had auxiliary AMRAAMs and, for this period, I was reliant on these to supplement the SAM batteries should the Backfires arrive. Happily, they didn’t, possibly because I had radars off most of the time...or was the bug only fixed for the first strike?.  
  
Not much else happened. I duly received another 200 VP for the Seattle and Monongahela groups reaching their objectives (the latter doesn’t actually have to get close to Enterprise, but I did so anyway). So it ended with a score of +1,134 and, although the scenario has no victory thresholds set, it was a NATO victory by any standards.  
  
All objectives were achieved, no NATO ship took a scratch and air losses came to 12 fighters, 2 Vikings (one to fuel issues) and a Seahawk. Soviet losses came to 7 SSNs, 77 fighters, 38 assorted Fencers and 12 Badgers and Blinders.  
  
As matters stand, it seems highly-unlikely that two US CVBGs could break-down the Soviet defences around Iceland unless, as a minimum, the missile re-supply problem is resolved and the accumulated Russian losses in the war to-date start to count for something. Our Sentries got close enough to see just how many Soviet aircraft were still swarming around Reykjavik at the end, despite the battering they had taken, while Vinson was left in a similarly ammo-depleted state to Enterprise’s at the start, at least where her fighters were concerned. That’s not to say that this scenario wouldn’t be a real challenge as the Soviets, as a US carrier is an extremely difficult target to sink when even moderately protected.