**Northern Fury 11, Changing of the Guard**

**AAR By Joel Radunzel**

First Post

It's the sixth day of the war and Northern Norway and Iceland have fallen to the Soviet onslaught. For the past two days the *Enterprise* battle group has been holding the line south of Iceland, shielding the SLOCs and ALOCs from Soviet southward thrusts, as well as fending off attacks by Soviet submarines and naval aviation on the carrier itself. Very heavy Soviet fighter and fighter bomber forces have been operating from captured airfields on Iceland, complicating matters further for NATO. So far, the lonely battle group has parried everything that has been thrown at it, but now the *Enterprise* and her consorts may be in serious trouble.

Diagram

Description automatically generated with medium confidence

Two days of hard fighting left the *Enterprise*'s magazines seriously low on air-to-air munitions, and the air group is exhausted after forty-eight hours of surge operations. The deck crews for the aircraft are exhausted as well, and this is beginning to show in the growing number of air frames down with maintenance faults. Perhaps even more troubling, the SAM magazines of the battle group's escorting warships are also seriously low, especially the magazines of the task group's two Aegis cruisers. Taken all together, these facts have left the task force's commander with serious doubts about his command's ability to withstand another concerted Soviet strike.

But not all is so bleak. The carrier USS *Carl Vinson*, which was in Norfolk refitting at the outbreak of hostilities, is now at sea with her battle group and steaming northeast past Newfoundland at high speed to relieve *Enterprise*, while the *Eisenhower* battle group is steaming north after leaving the Med. If *Enterprise* can survive one more day, the crisis will pass.

The trick will be keeping the carrier alive while at the same time not leaving the central Atlantic uncovered to Soviet attacks. *Enterprise* cannot depart to join up with the USS *Monongahela* replenishment group until *Vinson* is within realistic supporting range.

Other NATO assets include tankers and E-3 AWACS operating out of Goose Bay in Canada, P-3 maritime patrol aircraft flying from Gander, Newfoundland, a small Canadian ASW task force centered on the frigate *Algonquin*, and the USS *Seattle* replenishment task force returning to North America from Europe, well south of the action.

Will *Enterprise* survive to fight another day? Will the *Vinson* and her fresh air group arrive in time to tilt the scales in NATO's favor? Or will the Soviet onslaught succeed in dealing a stunning blow to NATO naval strength in the North Atlantic? Read on to find out!

Second Post

“Sir,” called the technician aboard the ES-3A Shadow ELINT aircraft flying lazy circles south of the *Enterprise* battle group, “I’ve got another one. This one looks like a Badger L, coming southwest from the direction of Iceland. His radar’s on, sir.”

“Will he pass within detection range of *Big E*?” asked the ELINT officer next to him in the cramped aircraft, a modified version of the S-3 Viking sub hunter. They had been airborne for two hours already, and this was the third Soviet snooper they had detected since launching from *Enterprise*’s deck.

“If he keeps his current track...it will be close, sir, responded the technician.”

The office swore under his breath. The battle group’s best chance of survival at this point was to evade detection. If the Soviets couldn’t find them, then they couldn’t hit them. Unfortunately, the Russians seemed to have a nearly inexhaustible supply of patrol aircraft to cast over the icy waters of the North Atlantic, their radars reaching our like floodlights into the chill morning.

“Ok,” the officer said after a moment, “I’ll call the CAG.”

After a short conversation with the air group commander, who was back aboard *Big E*, the officer turned to the tech again and asked, “What’s the status on those Mig-31s we’ve been picking up?”

“Still faint, sir,” responded the tech, “coming in and out. They’re probably circling. Can't give you a range."

The ELINT sensors aboard the Shadow had been picking up the signatures of several of the dangerous Soviet Mig-31 interceptors patrolling due south of Iceland, their powerful radars switched on to compensate for their lack of control from a friendly AWACS. It was helpful that the Americans could pick up that they were there, but frustrating as well, as the air group aboard the carrier wouldn’t be able to mount an effective challenge to the Foxhounds, armed with their long AA-6 missiles, for several hours yet.

“Ok,” the officer said again, “The CAG says we can’t risk the carrier being seen. He’s launching the ready birds and sending the airborne CAP to pick off the snooper to our northwest. We’ll see what those Migs do.

Just then the tech said, “Sir, you’re not going to like this...I’m just picking up another Badger to our northeast...and there may be a patrol version Su-24 with him as well.”

Damn, though the officer. He called the CAG again to report the bad news, then said to his tech, “The CAG says the CAP is just going to need to leave the task force uncovered for a while. He’s sending the ready fighters east to deal with this new one."

The pilots of the two F/A-18s that had been Enterprise’s CAP were even now turning northwest and pushing their throttles to military power, plotting an intercept course for the first snooper. The pilots of the two F-14s who had just launched and were climbing to altitude kept the noses of their jets pointed east, plotting a similar course for the other pair of Soviet recon birds more than two-hundred miles away.

Both pairs of American pilots kept their radars powered down, accepting direction instead from the crew aboard the ES-3A, who were tracking the fighter jocks’ targets by the Russians own emissions. Unfortunately, the Shadow’s sensors could only give a bearing and an approximation of range from their own location, not a precise fix on the Tu-16L’s location. As a consequence, the pilots of the two Hornets were forced to energize their radars twenty minutes later when they arrived in the area where their prey should have been.

Banking their fighters in a broad, searching turn, the Hornet pilots searched the sky for the spy plane that was trying to pinpoint their floating home. After about a quarter turn of the compass, the flight lead called, “This is Thunderbolt Three, I’ve got him at my eleven o’clock, range twenty five miles. Engaging.” To his wingman he radioed, “follow me.”

“Thunderbolt flight, this is Shadow,” called the ELINT crew, “be advised it looks like those Mig-31s have turned your way. Hurry, over.”

The pilot nodded. This shouldn’t take long. The converted Russian bomber was approaching him obliquely. He pushed his throttles forward to the stops to close the range, and at about seventeen miles locked one of his AIM-7 Sparrow missiles onto the enemy jet. Squeezing the trigger he called, “Fox One!” as the missile shot forward off its rail and arced upwards, keeping the radar beam cast by the Hornet’s fire control system in its sight the whole way.

The Soviet pilots of the patrol craft, belatedly aware of their danger when their RWR began chirping, threw their large aircraft into a sharp turn, trying to chart a perpendicular course to the incoming weapon. As the Sparrow approached, the Russian pilot turned sharply again, bringing the nose of the Badger around so that it was on as near a reciprocal heading to the AIM-7 as he could manage in the short seconds he had. At the same time, the copilot punched packets of chaff out the back of their aircraft.

It worked. The Russians felt their aircraft buffet as the Sparrow exploded into a chaff cloud several hundred meters to their rear.

The Hornet pilot swore into his oxygen mask. These damned Sparrows sometimes seemed more trouble than they were worth. What he wouldn’t give for a full load of the new AMRAAMs! Unfortunately, AIM-7s were what he had to work with, for the moment, so he locked a second weapon onto the Soviet bomber and fired. This time the engagement was more favorable, since the crew of the Badger had needed to fly towards the American jets in their evasion of the previous missile.

The second AIM-7 flew true, or nearly so. Chaff from the Tu-16 almost threw off the missile’s lock, but it was close enough when its warhead detonated for shrapnel to riddle the aircraft’s vertical stabilizer. For a moment, the Soviet pilot though he might be all right as he wrestled with the suddenly sluggish controls of his aircraft. But then the stabilizer folded in half in the slipstream and the Badger began to tumble wing over wing as it descended towards the vast ocean below.

“Scratch one!” called the American fighter pilot tiredly. It was hard to get overly excited about shooting down a slow-moving recon bird when he knew enemy fighters were inbound. “Shadow, what’s the status on those Mig-31s, over?”

“Approaching from your east,” was the reply.

“Thunderbolt, this is Hawkeye,” called the controller on the E-2C that was orbiting southwest of Enterprise, “we just picked those Migs up on our scope here...they're moving your way fast, full afterburner, going at least thirteen-hundred knots. Enemy count is eight, I say again eight birds. Recommend you come to heading two seven zero and punch it to try to get away, over.”

The pilots of Thunderbolt flight needed no encouragement. They had no desire to try four-to-one odds under these circumstances. The streaking Foxhounds would be able to overtake them anyway, since they had a four-hundred knot advantage in speed. The American pilots just hoped to lead the Russians on long enough that they would have to turn back for lack of fuel. It was going to be close.

Third Post

Thunderbolt 3 and 4 pushed their Hornets as hard as they could, flying west away from the squadron of Mig-31s that were in pursuit. It was a losing race, and the pilots knew it. Before long they each heard the familiar alarm of their respective radar warning receivers as the Soviet pilots lit them up with their powerful fire control radars. The Americans knew from the past two days experience that a pair of AA-6 Acrid missiles wouldn’t be far behind. Both men began twisting their heads around in their canopies, trying to catch a glimpse of the incoming weapons.

The Americans were now faced with an impossible choice. They could continue on their course, westward on afterburner, giving the missiles an easier target, or they could turn to try to evade the incoming AA-6s. In the second case they stood a good chance of doing evading the first volley, but doing so would allow the Soviet interceptors to close for a better shot. Both pilots opted for a compromise between the two options, flying S-turns on afterburner to try to throw off the missiles’ tracking while at the same time launching chaff.

The tactic worked for the first volley of missiles. The AA-6s were enormous missiles, the biggest air-to-air weapon ever put into serial production, and though they flew at Mach 5, they were also ungainly. What they lacked in maneuverability, however, they made up for in the size of their powerful warhead. Both US fighter jocks felt their jets buffet as the missiles exploded into chaff clouds in their wakes.

The reprieve was a temporary one, however. More AA-6s were on their way, and this time from a closer range, as the Foxhound pilots had used the time of the first missiles’ flight and the Americans’ evasive maneuvers to lose the range. Two more missiles dove on the two F/A-18s from behind. This time luck ran out for the flight leader. The huge Soviet missile dove onto the American fighter and exploded into the jet’s back, riddling the entire air frame and its pilot with shrapnel. The broken Hornet fell from the sky, while Thunderbolt 4 continued west, having evaded his missile.

Thunderbolt 4 was starting to despair for his own life when his RWR suddenly went silent. “What’s going on, Hawkeye?” he called the E-2 to the south.

“Bogeys have turned back, Thunderbolt,” came the reply. “Action to the east. Maintain westerly heading, then come on back to the barn. Any chute from your lead?”

“None,” was the forlorn reply.

Thunderbolt 3’s sacrifice had not been in vain, however. While the Soviet Migs had been pursuing the Hornets, the two Tomcats from Enterprise had ambushed and shot down the eastern Soviet recon Tu-16 and chased off the Su-24. Unfortunately, the Badger had approached close enough to have possibly detected the northeast corner of the battle group’s formation, over which the projected arc of the Soviet snooper’s radar had passed briefly. Shadow had detected a burst of radio transmissions from the doomed aircraft before it died.

Back on *Enterprise* the CAG was saying, “I’d put odds at better than even they found us. Batten down the hatches boys, this one’s going to be a wild ride.”

Fourth Post

The destruction of the two Soviet maritime patrol aircraft had been a victory, though tempered by the loss of one of *Enterprise*'s F/A-18s, but now the battle group's crews were in a race to clear the area where they had been detected by the eastern Tu-16 before the Soviets could launch an effective attack against the carrier. They were hampered in this endeavor, however, by the need to proceed cautiously for fear of Soviet submarines. Still, *Enterprise* and her consorts made the best speed they could on an easterly course, the Admiral planning to turn south and then west eventually.

Now the signs began to turn ominous. The crewman aboard the ES-3A called the flagship, saying, “We’re getting a lot of radio chatter coming from the direction of Iceland, I mean a LOT. Same signature as the before the strikes we’ve seen the past couple of days, sir.”

The CAG considered this. He would need to launch every serviceable aircraft before the strike came in, but launch too early and he could get caught with pilots running out of fuel just as the attack was coming in, which would be almost as bad as having them on the deck. The air group commander considered his options.

“All right,” he said after a moment, “let’s start launching aircraft. My gut says the Russians are coming. High endurance airframes first.”

On deck the *Big E*’s crew began launching the carrier’s support aircraft. The two ready EA-6B electronic warfare jets took off first, followed by the other ready E-2C, and a pair of A-6s configured as tankers. Then the fighters began to launch, and the CAG felt increasingly uneasy about how few warplanes he could actually put in the air. More than that, *Enterprise*’s magazines were so low that many of the aircraft he could launch would only be able to rearm once more.

The first pair of F-14s thundered down the deck, pushed by their steam catapults and then rising awkwardly into the air on their extended swing wings. As the next pair were spotting for their takeoff, the monitors on the Shadow ELINT bird called again to report, “Picking up fighter radars from the north...multiple sources, no good count yet. These aren’t the Mig-31s from earlier...computer says the radars are Su-27s.”

“ETA?” asked the CAG over the radio.

“None yet sir, but their coming on a pretty broad front, like a sweep.”

That was bad news, the CAG knew. He needed his own fighters engaging bombers and missiles, not enemy interceptors. Two more Tomcats roared off the deck, while a pair of AMRAAM armed Hornets spotted on the number three and four catapults. There were precious few of these wonderful missiles left. They would need to use them wisely. Moreover, only a few Phoenix missiles remained as well, meaning that the Americans would often be out-ranged by Soviet AA-10s in any coming engagement with the dangerous Flankers Shadow was reporting.

The American fighters began to congregate in holding patterns north of the carrier as the Shadow continued to report. Then the Russian aircraft began to enter the radar coverage of the E-2Cs, who could provide range to the bogeys, and numbers.

“Fifteen...eighteen...looks like more than two dozen inbound contacts and climbing,” called the controller on the AWACS bird.

The CAG let out a low whistle. More than two dozen Flankers inbound? This was bad news. He couldn’t afford more heavy losses to his air group. This was going to take some smart fighting for his pilots to survive. Fortunately, they had worked out a plan in the lull of the previous night. It wasn’t perfect, but maybe it would keep the Russian horde at bay...

“All flights,” the CAG called, “we’ll be executing plan Bravo, over.”

As the somewhat ragtag bank of American fighters shook themselves out into a prearranged formation and the support E-2s, S-3s, and EA-6s turned south, nearly three dozen Su-27 interceptors approached from the north, spread out on a nearly two-hundred-mile front.

Fifth Post

As the regiment of Soviet Sukhoi interceptors came on, the American naval aviators split their diverse aircraft, which carried an even more diverse array of weapons, into two mixed groups. The support aircraft, E-2Cs, ES-3As, S-3Bs, and tanker-configured A-6s, all turned south to clear the anticipated area of aerial combat. The pilots of the two groups of fighters turned east and west respectively, moving to place themselves on the flanks of the hundred-mile-wide Soviet sweep. As the two groups separated, they also spread themselves out into deep formations according to the weapons carried by each airframe.

The crews aboard the two airborne Hawkeyes, one controlling each fighter group, tracked the approaching massed Soviet formation. After two days of hard fighting, the *Enterprise* air group could put up barely twenty fighters to face nearly twice as many of the potent Flankers. Moreover, the air group's stocks to long-range Phoenixes and fire-and-forget AMRAAMs were dangerously low, as were the numbers of aircraft that could carry them. Much of the airborne American force would be fighting this engagement with older and far less capable AIM-7 Sparrow missiles.

The line of Soviet fighters was now within a hundred and fifty miles and closing. The lead Russian pilots were beginning to pick up their American adversaries on radar. They adjusted their courses accordingly, some of the Soviets veering east and others west. Unfortunately, a third group continued on dues south, straight towards Enterprise and her escorts. The range between the opposing warplanes was now a hundred miles, and the Soviet pilots pushed they throttles forward to close this last dangerous stretch of air as quickly as possible.

Now the Americans sprang into action. Each of the two formations, southwest and southeast of the oncoming Russians, contained a pair of AIM-54 toting F-14s in their lead. The crews of these interceptors now began to volley off their load of big missiles, the RIOs in the back seat selecting targets, while the pilots fired as quickly as they could, accompanying their attacks with calls of "Fox Three!" Over the radio net. Phoenixes leapt of their rails and accelerated into a Mach 5 flight path, arcing ballistically towards the approaching Sukhois.

The Russian pilots continued on towards their American assailants, accelerating again as they kicked in their afterburners. The Tomcat drivers were already turning away to flee from the more numerous Russians as the Phoenixes tipped over and dove into the flocks of Flankers. The active-homing seekers of the big AIM-54s sought out and locked onto individual targets, flashing downward at five times the speed of sound. The Soviet pilots unlucky enough to receive attention from the missiles' electronic brains twisted and turned their maneuverable fighters upon hearing the warbling of their RWRs, to good effect.

Missiles began to explode in ugly puffs of fire, smoke and shrapnel among the Russian jets. Given fair warning of the attack, most of the pilots were able to evade the incoming weapons through a combination of hard maneuvering and chaff decoys. But not all. Five Soviet jets sustained hits, the powerful warheads of the AIM-54s shattering the jets and sending them spinning downwards towards the North Atlantic.

The enraged survivors in the Soviet formations continued on towards the less numerous Americans. The range closed to fifty miles, then twenty five. At twenty miles the next layer of the American formation began to engage. The pilots of the F/A-18Cs carrying AIM-120 AMRAAMs began to volley off their dangerous missiles as fast as they could select targets. At the same time, the Russians also began to launch, though their weapons of choice were the semi-active homing AA-10s, which required guidance from the launching aircraft. Once the Americans' rails were empty, they turned away and punched their afterburners, while the Soviet pilots had to keep their radars pointed at their targets for the entire length of their missiles' flight.

This unequal engagement produced predictable results. The Russian pilots faced a pair of bad options. They could maintain their course to guide their own missiles to the target, which left them vulnerable to the incoming AMRAAMs, or they could turn to evade, in which case their missiles would lose lock. Most decided to grimly press ahead with the first option. American missiles began to blot away more Su-27s, causing the AA-10s attached to these fighters' radars to lose lock and continue blindly until they ran out of propellant. The toll on the Soviet fighters now stood at eleven.

For the rest of the Soviet missiles targeted at the retreating Hornets, the result was no better. The Americans' turn to the south had thrown off the geometry of the Soviets' engagement windows, meaning that the Russian missiles did not possess the range to hunt down the retreating Hornets, and one AA-10 after another lost power and fell towards the sea. But before this happened American Sparrow missiles from the third layer of the US formation were already flashing into the depleted Soviet formation.

Taking advantage of the Soviets' preoccupation with the AMRAAM toting Hornets, the American pilots of the remaining Sparrow-armed F-14s and F/A-18s took advantage of the extended range of their AIM-7s to engage the Soviets, who continued to bore onwards on their broad front sweep. The Americans had learned over the past week of conflict that the winner in a battle of semi-active radar homing missiles was usually the one who fired first. The Americans had engineered a situation to guarantee that they would be the first to engage. The Sparrows arced towards the survivors in the two groups of engaged Flankers, and now the Soviets engaged as well. The Russians faced the same dilemma as against the AMRAAM-armed Hornets, except this time Americans could not turn away after launching their own missiles.

The AIM-7s lanced into the Russian fighters, exploding in dirty puffs the smashed four more Sukhois from the sky. As their missiles reached targets, the Americans of the third wave turned to evade. More Russian missiles, deprived of their guiding aircraft, lost their lock, but some continued on, guided by the grimly determined survivors, eager to begin to exact some revenge. Now the Americans activated the fourth and final layer of their plan.

Behind each mixed group of American fighters flew an EA-6B Prowler, which airframes housed a powerful suite of electronic jammers. The crews of these aircraft had kept their electronic countermeasure quiet until this moment. Now they activated their equipment, sending powerful beams of electronic noise past the retreating American jets and into the seekers of the AA-10 missiles. Most of the remaining Russian missiles lost their lock, their seekers overwhelmed by the jamming being emitted by the Prowlers. But not all. Two AA-10s now found their mark, blotting an F-14 from the western group and an F/A-18 from the one to the east. Already, however, the first group of American Tomcat jocks had turned and were boring in to launch their Sparrows after having expended their Phoenixes earlier.

The Americans had done much to even the odds, downing fifteen of thirty-six Soviet jets. But now the Russians held the advantage. Though they now only slightly outnumbered their American adversaries, the Su-27s each carried nearly a full load of missiles, while the Americans had all but expended their long-range ordnance. The easy time for the US Navy aviators was now over. The Russian survivors, seeing red for the loss of so many of their comrades, bored in for revenge.

Sixth Post

Now the American fighter pilots ran from the oncoming Russians. The Soviet pilots bored in, their radars burning through the jamming from the EA-6Bs and allowing their AA-10s to begin scoring kills. Two more Hornets fell to the Soviet weapons before the Tomcats that had initiated the engagement with their Phoenixes turned to cover the withdrawal of the other jets with their remaining Sparrow missiles. In the ensuing exchange the sides exchanged a Tomcat for a Flanker, but bought time for the remainder of the American jets to break contact south.

The Flanker drivers pursued until…until their look-down radars began to reveal the blips representing the ships of the Enterprise battle group. A ring of dots materialized on their screens surrounding one large blip. The American planes continued south, passing on either side of their home carrier. A minute later, the Soviet jets swept overhead, slowing and beginning to circle when their reached the airspace over the American ships.

Below on *Enterprise*, the task force commander, Admiral D’Amada, sent out a message to his captains, “Do not engage! Save your missiles. Those fighters can’t hurt us.”

Now a bizarre situation developed. The savaged formation of Soviet fighters held sway over the airspace above an American aircraft carrier, whose escorts still possessed the missiles to shoot them down. However, the general shortage of missiles kept the ships from engaging. The Soviet pilots, realizing this and also lacking any anti-ship munitions, remained at high altitude where the ships’ guns could not disturb them. Thus, an uneasy calm existed, the Soviets at high altitude, the Americans on the surface, with their own warplanes circling to the south.

The Soviet fighter jocks did possess one weapon they could use, however: their radios. The call went out to the Russian control aircraft circling far to the north, just south of Iceland, who repeated the message to the bombers, lurking nearby, and to the captured airfield at Keflavik.

Aboard Enterprise, Admiral D’Amada heard the report called from the ES-3A, “Surface-search radars approaching from the northwest…”

The Soviet long-range maritime strike regiment had departed the Kola hours before and passed through the Denmark strait, west of Iceland. The Russians had anticipated that the Enterprise would move west during the night, not east as the carrier group had actually done, and now the Backfires and Blinders were out of position, though not irretrievably so. Upon receiving the report of the carrier’s true position, the commander of the regiment ordered a course change, and the twenty-four big jets turned had turned southeast.

Sixth Post

The crew aboard the ES-3A were the first to detect the oncoming Russian heavies. Four old Tu-22 Blinder bombers (confusingly similar terminology as the larger and more capable Tu-22M3 Backfires) spread out in a line abreast, radars and powerful jammers on and radiating, and streaked southeast to get their own fix on the American carrier’s position.

Aboard Enterprise, the CAG, in the uncomfortable position of giving orders to his airborne fighters to the south while being beneath Soviet fighter cover over the fleet, considered his options. He only had a few surviving planes in the air carrying the long range Sparrow missiles. The rest were down to just Sidewinders. The Sparrows would have to do. He ordered a quartet of F-14s with six AIM-7s between them to head northwest on an intercept course.

Minutes passed as the Blinders and Tomcats closed with each other. Behind the Tu-22s the western E-2C was starting to pick up through the electronic haze the formation of a full regiment of Backfire bombers. When in range, the Tomcat RIOs switched on their powerful radars and began locking their radar-homing missiles onto the oncoming screen of Blinders. Missiles leapt of the F-14s’ rails, but even as they engaged flights of Su-27s were turning west to pursue the impetuous Americans.

The first AIM-7 completed its flight to the Blinders...and missed in the confusion of jamming and chaff. The American pilot immediately reengaged with his last remaining Sparrow. The next two missiles connected, causing the Tu-22s to fly through deadly clouds of shrapnel which shredded their cockpits and engines, sending the big aircraft tumbling towards the vast ocean below. The third Sparrow also missed, but the last Blinder fell to the last AIM-7 carried by the airborne portion of Enterprise’s air group.

Now the controllers on the E-2 called to F-14 jocks, “Come southwest and kick it! You’ve got Flankers inbound at three o’clock!”

The half dozen dangerous Soviets interceptors came on, the Russian pilots launching AA-10s as soon as they were within range of the fleeing Americans. The effect, even if their missiles did not connect, was to force the Americans away from the oncoming flock of Backfires. Of the first volley of Russian air-to-air missiles, all missed. However, the Russians were able to close the range as the American fighters maneuvered to evade.

The Soviet pilots were just locking their radars onto the now closer American jets to fire a second, more effective volley of AA-10s, when the American aviators heard over their radio nets, "This is Red Rippers lead, I have the bogeys on my scope. Tallyho! Fox Three!"

Four F-14Ds, which had taken off from the USS *Carl Vinson* eight hundred miles to the southwest, formed the lead flight of the entire inbound Red Rippers squadron. They had launched from the other carrier upon the first signs of a coordinate Russian strike upon *Enterprise*, refueled halfway from Air Force tankers out of Goose Bay, and now were joining the fray with full loads of Phoenix missiles and Sparrows.

AIM-54s ripped into the Russian formation. Those Soviet pilots who did not die in the initial onslaught turned tail and ran as the fresh American fighters pressed.

The timely arrival of the *Vinson*'s air group was enough to save Enterprise's embattled air cover, but what about the carrier itself? To the northwest, the first Tu-22M3s had reached launch range for their AS-4 Kitchen anti-ship missiles. The Russians had been sweeping southwest and been forced to reorient to the southeast to attack the American battle group, meaning that the Backfires came on in a stream rather than a line. In pairs, one after another, the Soviet bombers launched their massive missiles and then turned northeast for home. *Vinson*'s fighters had arrived too late to interfere, and forty missiles now streaked towards the American carrier.

Seventh Post

The quartet of F-14s from the *Vinson* now, at the direction of the crew aboard the western E-2C, broke off their pursuit of the surviving Flankers and instead started targeting the stream of AS-4s burning towards the Enterprise group at almost Mach 5. More Phoenixes leapt of the rails of the big Tomcats, arcing northeast into the flank of the missile stream. The acute angle of the attack degraded the effectiveness of the American weapons, and the AIM-54s knocked down only a handful of the AS-4s, called Kh-22s (X-22 in Cyrillic) by the Russians.

The American pilots closed to engage with their Sparrows, but now the surviving Su-27 pilots turned and made another run at their antagonists. AA-10s and AIM-7s crisscrossed the sky with contrails in the air above the big anti-ship missiles as the Soviet and American fliers battled each other. Two more Sukhois fell at the cost of one F-14 before the rest of *Enterprise*’s air group joined the fray, finally driving the few surviving Russians north for good. The brief Soviet dominance of the sky over an American carrier was over, with over ninety percent of the advanced interceptors that had participated in the attack destroyed. Even so, they had accomplished their mission. Other than the initial Phoenixes fired by the oncoming Tomcat-drivers from *Vinson*, the American fliers had been completely unable to interfere with either the Backfire bombers to the northwest or the missiles they had launched. It would be up to the carrier group’s depleted defenses to protect *Enterprise* from the remaining thirty-six incoming weapons.

As the E-2C controllers reported the lead Soviet missiles entering the engagement envelope of the carrier’s consorts, the crews of the Aegis cruisers USS *Cowpens* and USS *Anzio* energized their powerful SPY-1 radars. They quickly detected the missiles approaching from the northwest, and SM-2 missiles began exploding out of the VLS cells on both ships. SAMs and anti-ship missiles closed with each other at incredible speed, and then the American missiles began to explode, filling the air in front of the AS-4s with expanding clouds of shrapnel.

The accuracy of the American missiles was good, but not perfect. Several of the Soviet missiles required re-engagement, which took attention away from the more distant Russian weapons in the stream. More importantly, the misses taxed the rapidly diminishing supply of SAMs among the escorts. *Cowpens* was the first to empty her diminished magazines, followed soon after by *Anzio*, and still several of the big Russian missiles remained, coming on relentlessly.

Now the Sea Sparrows aboard *Enterprise* and the escorting Spruance-class destroyers joined in, but Cowpens, closest to the incoming missiles, was too distant to benefit completely from their protection. Two missiles headed for the cruiser. One fell to a Sea Sparrow from Enterprise, but the second bored in. Now the cruiser’s Phalanx CIWS went into automatic mode to defend the ship. The twenty-millimeter rotary Vulcan cannon rotated and tracked on the incoming target. When the targeting computer judged that the weapon was oriented correctly, the barrels began to rotate a moment before an intense BRRRRRRRRT announced six thousand rounds per minute tearing downrange.

The short burst by the cannon sent several hundred rounds arcing towards a calculated intercept point with the missile. Of these, two connected, the second of which detonated the AS-4s warhead while it was still half a kilometer away from the ship. *Cowpens* was safe, but several missiles still headed for other ships in the formation, three of them targeting the carrier. *Enterprise*’s Sea Sparrow launcher emptied, and these shorter-ranged missiles ended the threat to the flagship. Crews aboard the *Big E* now worked to reload the awkward launchers as fast as possible. The last incoming missile headed toward the old cruiser *Yarnel*, whose crew shot it down with one of their SM-1ER missiles. And then the sky was empty of incoming threats, the few surviving Sukhois fleeing north, and the remnants of *Enterprise*’s air group, joined by growing numbers of reinforcements from *Vinson*, returning to the sky above the carrier to reestablish control over their floating airfield.

Admiral D’Amada took stock of his task force’s situation. As reports began to come in from the other ships of the force, he heaved a sigh of relief. Not a single Russian missile had struck an American ship, despite a couple of close calls. Then his mood darkened as the ships’ captains began to call in their supply status. The only ready SAMs left in the fleet were seven SM-1s aboard the ancient *Yarnell*, and a few Sea Sparrows on the *Spruance*-class destroyers *Thorne* and *O’Bannon*. *Enterprise*’s crew would be able to reload her launchers, eventually, but this did not affect the calculus markedly; the battle group would not be able to survive another such attack.

Eighth Post

With the air and missile engagement over, for now, and with his battle group’s stocks of SAMs almost completely depleted, Admiral D’Amada decided that it was time for the better part of valor. “Message to all ships,” he dictated, “increase speed to full and make our course one-eight-zero. We need to clear the area as quickly as possible and open the distance between us and Iceland.” The ring of ships with the massive carrier in the middle turned south as they propellers churned the water behind.

To the west and southwest, two Soviet submarines had been working eastward over the past several hours, guided be reports from maritime patrol aircraft and other sensors around the north Atlantic. The northern of the two, a *Sierra II*, was the more dangerous, but the southern one, a *Victor III*, had the better angle. The battle group’s turn gave the crews of both nuc boats the opportunity to close with the American ships, which had up to that point been steaming directly away. But with proximity to the American carrier came danger for the Soviet boats as well.

The air battle had briefly forced the crews of the ASW helicopters of the American screen to cease operations and return to their ships or flee south to escape the Flankers that had briefly roamed freely above Enterprise, but now they returned to their duties with determination. The crew of an SH-60, patrolling along the western flank of the task force, was the first to get a hit on the quiet *Sierra*, using its dipping sonar. They were soon joined by one of *Big E*’s S-3 Vikings, whose crew proceeded to drop a pattern of sonobuoys to try to localize the target. Also joining the hunt was a P-3C Orion out of Gander. Altogether the crews manning the three aircraft flooded a relatively small area with enough sensors to achieve a rapid fix on the stealthy Soviet boat, whose captain to this point was unaware of the danger which his command was in.

His ignorance was rectified a few minutes later when the crew of the P-3, after making one pass to achieve a MAD fix, circled back and dropped a Mk46 torpedo directly into the *Sierra*’s wake. The Soviet crew never had a chance. In seconds the lightweight torpedo slammed into the sub’s spinning screw and exploded, rupturing the casing of the propeller shaft and flooding the engine compartment in seconds, which in turn dragged the rest of the boat into the depths of the Atlantic.

Farther south, the *Victor* stalking the formation did no better. The crew aboard the American *Spruance*-class destroyer USS *O’Bannon*, now refocused on their primary ASW role after the drama of the air battle, detected the Soviet submarine on the destroyer’s towed sonar array. Soon the hull sonar had a fix as well and a pair of helicopters were converging on the area roughly triangulated by the two sensors. The addition of the helicopters’ dipping sonars quickly localized the contact, and a pair of MK46s dispatched a second Soviet submarine in the span of thirty minutes.

The threat to *Enterprise* was not yet over, however. In the carrier’s flag bridge, Admiral D’Amada heard his N2 report, “Sir, the Shadows are picking up a lot of chatter coming from the direction of Keflavik. They say it sounds like another strike coming in.”

The admiral swore. Didn’t these Soviets ever run out of airplanes? The bulk of a squadron of *Vinson*’s Tomcats were now circling just west of *Enterprise*, and the lull had allowed the carrier’s deck crews to recover the survivors from the air battle and launch some replacements, but even so another determined push by the Russians might be enough to overwhelm the task force. His ships certainly did not possess enough munitions to repel another missile strike. It was absolutely imperative that any striking aircraft be destroyed or turned back before they launched.

As the minutes ticked by more reports from the ES-3A crew confirmed that another large strike was indeed airborne and approaching from due north, the direction of Iceland. With little choice, *Enterprise*’s CAG ordered every available aircraft with an air-to-air missile north into the teeth of the Soviets’ own CAP to meet the threat as far from the flat top as possible.

Ninth Post

As the American fighters flew north and the Russians south, the situation south of Iceland began to crystallize on the screens of the controllers aboard the E-2Cs. Only a few Su-27s remained for the Americans to deal with, but a CAP of dangerous Mig-31s still remained to support them. These turned south to engage as the Soviets’ own EW aircraft crews detected the approaching radars emitting from the oncoming Tomcats and Hornets. The Americans were advancing with the jets from the two carriers abreast, *Vinson*’s birds on the left and *Enterprise*’s on the right.

Behind the Soviet fighters, a regiment of twenty Su-24 Fencers had formed up over Iceland’s southeast peninsula and were now coming south, each carrying a pair of either AS-17 Krypton anti-radiation or AS-18 Kazoo anti-ship missiles. Their forty missiles was far more than enough to overwhelm the depleted defenses of the carrier group, and while the smaller missiles may not have the same massive punch as the big AS-4s, they were nonetheless dangerous.

The first of the opposing aircraft to make contact and engage were the fresh flights of *Enterprise* F-14s and Soviet Mig-31 CAP out of Reykjavik with their big, long-ranged Phoenix and AA-6 missiles, respectively. Both sides were supported by jammer aircraft, which decreased the accuracy of the missiles as they arced past each other going north and south. Those aircraft targeted on both sides twisted and turned to avoid the incoming weapons. Most survived, but three Mig-31s and one F-14 were smashed by shrapnel from the exploding warheads, sending planes and crew tumbling toward the dark ocean below. By then the Enterprise’s AMRAAM-armed F/A-18s had closed to within range of the Soviet interceptors, neutralizing the bigger Soviet jets’ advantage in range. AIM-120s flew off the rails of the nimble American fighters and shot forward towards the five remaining Foxhounds at the same time as a second volley of AA-6s separated from the Soviet aircraft.

While the Enterprise pilots tangled with the Soviet CAP, the regiment of Fencers continued relentlessly south, closing the distance with the maximum range release point for their missiles. Just a few minutes more and they would be able to launch and turn back for the safety of the Iceland defenses.

But it was not to be for the Russian pilots. While *Enterprise*’s battered air group completed the destruction of the Russian CAP, losing another F/A-18 in the process, the eight F-14s from *Vinson* swept in from the southwest, the Tomcats’ pilots and RIOs launching their full loads of AIM-54s as quickly as they could lock onto the Soviet attack jets. In seconds dozens of American missiles were in the air and the first were just nosing down into the formation of Su-24s. The Soviet pilots screamed to each other over the radio net, trying to determine where this devastating attack was coming from. While the Phoenixes were still dropping into the Soviet formation, the American pilots, who had now closed to Sparrow range, began loosing their medium range weapons at yet more of the Fencers.

By now the Russian formation was in tatters as those jets that had so far survived the American missiles jinked and dove to evade yet more. The AIM-7s now arrived, tearing even more holes in the Soviet ranks, and then the Tomcats were in among the Fencers, contrails from AIM-9 Sidewinders crisscrossing the sky as the line of American jets passed through flock of Soviet jets from west to east. The Soviet pilots, though, were not completely defenseless. One of the Soviet pilots managed to lock a short-ranged air-to-air missile onto the hot tailpipes of a Tomcat and shatter the American jet with a snapshot.

But this was a solitary victory in the unfolding disaster. After the line of Tomcats swept through, the rest of the *Enterprise*’s group of fighters, fresh from dispatching the last of the Mig-31s, swept in from the south, AMRAAMs, Sparrows, and Sidewinders smashing Sukhoi after Sukhoi. A pair of surviving Flankers tried to intervene and managed to down another Hornet, but then fell themselves to missiles from multiple American aircraft in a twisting dogfight. Both groups of American jets pulled sharp turns and swept back into the surviving attack jets, some of the American pilots now down to the ammunition in their Vulcan cannons. One more pass by the Americans and the sky was empty of Soviet jets.

As the last broken Fencer splashed into the icy waters of the north Atlantic below, the American fighters turned back south for the skies of the carrier they had just fought, and sacrificed some of their comrades, to save.

Tenth Post

The aerial and submarine threat to *Enterprise* had been defeated, but the threat to the *Vinson* group, steaming at full speed west of Labrador to relieve *Big E*, was just beginning. Throughout the night the Vinson group continued on its northeasterly course as the *Enterprise* steamed south and then southwest, away from the Soviet threat on Iceland and towards the *Monongahela* replenishment group. *Vinson* fighters continued to augment the CAP over *Enterprise*, which had expended the last of its AIM-54s and AIM-120s in the final defeat of the Fencer strike hours before.

To the north, the Russian air group was licking its wounds. An entire regiment of Su-24s and most of a regiment of Su-27s had been lost trying to overcome the Enterprise’s defenses. They had come within a hair’s breadth of succeeding, though the surviving Soviets didn’t know how close, other than that the intervention of the other American carrier’s air group had come at a bad time. Spirits were low among the pilots at the rapidly expanding bases at Reykjavik and Keflavik.

But directly in the path of the oncoming USS *Carl Vinson*, the crew of the *Sierra II*-class submarine *Mars* were buoyant. Their captain had managed to position his boat directly astride the American carrier’s course. Now the *Mars* was lurking to the southwest at a quiet five knots, and the American screen was approaching at twenty.

“Captain,” the lead Soviet sonar officer reported, “an American frigate, directly ahead. Reciprocal bearing to us. Range eight thousand meters.”

This was the moment the Soviet captain had been waiting for. Reports from other theater were indicating that attempts to penetrate the American ASW screens around their carriers were not successful. He would try a new strategy: attacking the screen itself. He was confident in the ability of his boat to remain hidden in the confusion of sinking and burning enemy surface ships.

“Prepare a firing solution,” the captain ordered, “two torpedoes against the contact.”

Aboard the American *Perry*-Class frigate USS *Kauffman*, the sonar crew was having trouble hearing anything through the cavitation noises of their own screws as the warship plowed through the choppy North Atlantic at high speed. The captain didn’t like the situation his command was in, leading with their face, so to speak, but *Enterprise* needed help and that meant a speed run for the *Vinson* group. The American officer was just frowning over his vulnerabilities for the hundredth time when his worst fears were confirmed.

“Captain!” called the sonar room. “Torpedoes in the water! High speed screws, one-o’clock, constant bearing. I estimate range as five thousand yards!”

“Hard right rudder!” the captain ordered, then, “stream the Nixie!”

The Nixie torpedo decoy unreeled behind the American warship, emitting sounds designed to entice the seekers aboard the Soviet weapons to attack it, rather than the ship. It worked. The first torpedo lunged at the towed decoy, crossing behind the tail of the American frigate and plowing harmlessly onward. The second torpedo, however, ran true. The big weapon closed with the *Kauffman* before running under the ship’s keel and exploding. The resulting cavity beneath the frigate broke the ship’s back. It broke in half and sank in minutes, taking most of the American crew into the dark depths of the oceans.

The reaction of the American screen was swift, far more so than the *Mars*’s captain had anticipated. Before the two halves of *Kauffman* had even slipped beneath the waves, the airborne S-3 from *Vinson* along with two ASW helos were already combing bearing from which the enemy weapons had come. Before long a thick pattern of sonobuoys both above and below the layer began to return the sounds of a modern nuclear submarine closing with the oncoming carrier. A few minutes more, and the S-3 crew achieved a MAD contact on the Russian boat. Within less than half an hour, two Mk46 air-dropped torpedoes had ended the most serious threat to *Carl Vinson*’s progress, at the cost of one of the carrier’s escorts.

The next twenty-four hours were uneventful in the North Atlantic. The Soviets retained an uncommitted regiment of Su-24s postured to strike an American carrier, but the Soviet commander on Iceland decided on the better half of valor rather than flinging them against a fully equipped American carrier group. He would bide his time for a better opportunity.

The *Enterprise* group, having survived by the skin of its collective teeth, rendezvoused with the *Monongahela* long enough to take on vital stores, then continued on at high speed to Norfolk where a comprehensive replenishment would take place. With the changing of the guard in the north Atlantic complete, the Americans began to look forward to their own offensive plans: retaking Iceland.