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

**AAR by Primarchx, Apr 2017**

The game is still in progress but here's how it's going so far...

The scenario starts with the depleted Enterprise CVBG close to 500nm south of Iceland and steaming east. Her CAG is low on ready aircraft and A2A stores. To the west the Vinson CVBG, fresh and ready for action, is steaming hard to relieve the Big E on station to shield the SLOCs from Soviet bombers. Enterprise has been ordered to meet with an UNREP group, now coming in from the US coast, south of Newfoundland.

I maintain most of the preset missions, particularly the ASW, tanking and AWACS ones. It becomes very apparent that the Sovs have a very strong fighter screen ranging far off the southern coast of Iceland, nearly on Enterprise's doorstep. There are also many enemy jamming and recce aircraft aloft, all bracketing the carrier's position. The groups air defense ships, the Aegis cruisers Anzio and Cowpens along with the quad-firing Leahy-class cruiser Harry S. Yarnell with long ranged SM-2ER missiles, are all low on SAMs.

Looking the situation over I determine that it is very unlikely that I can prevent the Sovs from detecting the Enterprise group without starting a fight that will undeniably cost me several more airframes. It is possible to vector Tomcats north from the Vinson to assist in defending, but Vinson will have problems of her own and expending AAMs at this point means she'll be weaker once she reaches station. With orders to remain on the defensive I decide to only put a small number of aircraft up over Enterprise: a pair of Tomcats, an ASW screen, an E-2 and a EA-6B.

Once set I watch the northern sky intently. Dozens of spikes from Flanker and Foxhound radars encroach but do not seem to move less than ~100nm from the Enterprise. For now. An uneasy stillness holds for a short while my Hawkeye reveals a large group of unidentified bogeys beginning to gather in the northwest. Has to be bombers. I quickly rearrange my air defense ships into a tighter formation around the Enterprise - Cowpens to the northwest, Anzio just southeast, Yarnell to the east and a Perry-class frigate close in to the northwest on the hope that it could decoy any ASMs that get through the SAM screen. Given the number of suspected-bomber contacts I decide that we can probably weather their attack using SAMs alone and save my fighters for any follow-up strikes.

Soon afterwards 'Vampire!' calls go out as the contacts confirm their bomber identities and waves of AS-4 Kitchen heavyweight, supersonic antiship missiles begin beelining for ships of the Enterprise group. The attack seems uncoordinated, though, as only groups of 4-6 missiles appear to be launched in any given salvo. My plan is to begin engaging with Yarnell's SM-2ERs at extreme range, go after any misses with Cowpens' slightly older-model SM-2s and clean up any close-in leakers with Anzio + the SM-1s off the point-defense frigate.

I am very conservative with SAM usage - only 1 SAM per inbound ASM for the outer two defense layers and one each from the inner ring. Hit percentages hover between 40%-50% for most engagements. However only a handful get close enough to trigger close-in defenses and those are on the forward Spruance destroyers with poor intercept geometry for my Standards at closer range. In those cases two-shot salvos of SeaSparrows settle the issue. When the dust settles Cowpens has a dozen SM-2s left, Anzio 24, Yarnell 1 and the Perry around a dozen. The plan worked! I've preserved my fighters and their anti-air stores for follow-up attacks and still have a modicum of SAM coverage. All ships shut down their radars and go black.

Soon afterwards the E-2 reports that Sov fighter coverage in the north is withdrawing to Iceland, leaving several jammer aircraft behind, undefended. The CAP Tomcats and a pair of Hornets zoom up to splash them with Sidewinders then scoot back home before any Sov fighters can pursue. Though the fighter screen to the north is soon replenished it is being left astern at a fast rate as Enterprise finally turns south and an uneasy peace unfolds.

The next several hours see little air action. Twice I scramble Hornets to splash any far-south encroaching Sov Tu-16 recon craft but by and large it appears that the Big E is evading detection. With her airwing as ready as it's going to be she settles in for a high speed transit on a dogleg course to rendevous with the UNREP group. I place a long-ranged MPA ASW screen, Orions out of Newfoundland, far in front of her to drop sonobuoys and persecute any nearby contacts. The same is done for the Vinson group. The UNREP RV already has MPA coverage along with a Sturgeon SSN gatekeeper.

A Torpedo alert goes up from the Vinson group as the group's sole Burke-class DDG zeroes on a Soviet Sierra II attack boat firing a pair of SET-80 torpedoes at it from close range! Quickly reversing course the destroyer fires off a VL ASROC in retaliation and goes to flank speed. The first VLA misses but a second hits the revealed SSN, sinking it. But now the race is on. A nearby Viking, launched to assist in the kill if needed, drops sonobuoys behind the destroyer to track the inbound torps. It's a close race but the Burke can't outrun the torps and they attack. One is lured by her Nixie towed decoy while the other, apparently thrown off by the preceding explosion, misses a high percentage chance to hit. Threat eliminated, the destroyer rejoins the carrier screen.

Things are not so good for the Sturgeon-class SSN patrolling the UNREP rendezvous. A nearby P-3 Orion spots a missile burst from the waves as a sub-launched standoff ASW rocket lances out toward the American SSN. It is apparent that the Sturgeon, moving at a lively 15kts, must of been detected in a Soviet sub sonar's convergence zone. The datum is strong as the ASW rocket drops a torpedo practically on top of it. Within seconds the USN sub is fatally struck and spirals to the deep.

However the Orion that spotted the launch localizes and prosecutes the Soviet sub within minutes. Soon a solid sonobuoy fix is made and it drops a series of lightweight torpedoes that hit then destroy a Soviet Navy Victor III SSN. Later another slow-moving Victor II SSN is detected transiting an area still seeded with active sonobuoys from that engagement and a separate Orion heading on-station is able destroy it.

Another SSN is picked up with a faint CZ contact including a speed and eastern bearing of travel to the north of the Vinson CVBG. A Canadian CP-140 Aurora MPA with only minutes left on-station lays a line of sonobuoys along the eastern edge of the now-expired detection zone along the narrow limits of the detecting frigate's first CZ. NATO's luck holds as contact is quickly established with a fast moving Victor III SSN making 13 kts on an apparent intercept for the carrier group. With only ten minutes of endurance remaining the Aurora drops a brace of torps that runs the Soviet sub down and sinks it.

In the space of just a handful of hours four dangerous enemy subs have been dispatched to the loss of just one US sub. It's apparent that other subs lay ahead, though, as a pair of Soviet Be-12 ASW aircraft appear on a course leading toward one of the Vinson's scouting Los Angeles class subs. Although they turn back, either due to lost contact or fuel requirements, Tomcats from the Vinson splash them both.

To Be Continued...

Enterprise is now 800nm from Keflavik and made the turn for her SW run to the UNREP. She did little more than defend herself and send out a handful of spoiling raids. I thought about using her a/c more aggressively but when I saw that the Soviet fighters weren't moving to overfly her I kept them on the deck for defending her later. In fine naval tradition she would run to fight another day rather than risk 'losing the war in an afternoon'.

By 0000Z 20Feb the commander of the Vinson strike group was firming up plans for the first fighter sweep against the Soviet BARCAP that was enduring south of Iceland. ELINT was showing a persistent group of around a dozen Flankers and perhaps 4-6 Foxhounds maintaining station near the Vinson's prescribed destination along with a smattering of EW and Recon aircraft. Another ES-3A flight was launched to come up past Iceland to the west to see what aircraft lay closer to the airfields there and to find any radiating ships, helos or ground-based EW radars that could be detected.

The plan is to launch both squadrons of the Vinson's F-14Ds at around a 500nm range from the Soviet CAP, refuel them from USAF tankers, and move forward with Prowlers for jamming and an Air Force E-3A for AWACS support. The AWACS will provide overall fighter control and the Tomcats will attack from 60-80nm (1/2 - 2/3s AAM range) with their AIM-54Cs before fading back. The plan is tentatively scheduled to kick off at 0500Z.

ELINT shows two Mainstays and more Flanker, Fulcrum and Flogger CAP on Iceland. No sign of Soviet surface activity in the Denmark Strait, however. I think we can discount any significant warship threats for now.

As 0500 comes up not as many fighters are being seen at the far CAP location. Are they swapping out and new fighters just aren't on station? I may amend the plan and send out the Tomcat squadrons staggered by 20 minutes. Just got the Warning Order for 9.5 detailing the plans for aggressive OCA just as the last Tomcat of the lead squadron takes off on their sweep!

First squadron, VF-11 Red Rippers, refuels about 150nm south of the outermost Soviet fighter group. Tankers pull away and head south to refuel the follow-on squadron, the Tomcatters of VF-31. Immediately afterwards the AWACS trailing the fighters by a scant 15nm, energizes it's APY-2 radar and reveals about 13 confirmed Flankers within ~220nm and a further 8 unidentified bogies. The Red Rippers move forward, noses cold, with a trailing Prowler of VAQ-139 piping in music.

Moving in undetected to 60nm from the outermost Sukhoi, the nearest Tomcat fired off a Phoenix missile at 0606Z. The first missile was spoofed but a follow-up shot connected, downing the first Iceland-based Sov fighter of the day. Just about that time no less than 20 Soviet Su-27s begin to realize an attack is approaching and sprint southwest to engage. Eighteen Tomcats, each with 4 AIM-54Cs and 2 AIM-7Ps await them and open fire at optimal range. The Prowler evades back to the south and the AWACS takes a position close enough to provide fighter control but far enough to stay out of immediate harm.

Missiles were rippled off in both directions. The Russians fearlessly guided their AA-10s in without flinching but took staggering losses against the inbound waves of Phoenix missiles. As the Red Rippers pulled away they had lost only one of their number to around 15 in return! Decoys and the onboard ASPJ defensive suite of the F-14D saved more than one pilot from a swim in the North Atlantic. I found that AIM-54Cs were averaging 80% pk when fired at 60nm against the Flanker, if they got past jammers and chaff.

Accelerating back toward the carrier at high speed VF-11 meets the still-fresh VF-31 Tomcats boring in to blunt pursuit. A smattering of about ten remaining Su-27s were moving southwards in small packets of two or three. At least three of them launched missiles well outside of 80nm and homing off to the east, perhaps fooled by Prowler jamming. Even within 60nm, where the Tomcats began firing at them, the inbound Sukhois continued to fire wildly, off track of the inbound US fighters. Only one seemed to track true and it's guiding a/c was shot down well before the SARH AA-10s could strike. Off to the east ELINT picked out MiG-31 radars but none of them seemed interested in this battle.

The last pair of pursuing Flankers RTB after a brief supersonic pursuit. Looking over the Losses and Expenditures tally I see I launched 55 Phoenix and a few AIM-7P and 31 Su-27S and a Su-24E had been lost. I think a few of those Flanker losses were in place before this mission (lost due to fuel loss or something?) but I think at least 25 were downed during the sweep. In return a single F-14D was shot down.

Tankers and AWACS are sent back to Goose Bay and all fighters other than a couple of back-stop pairs of Hornets are recovered by 0743Z, 20Feb. Plans for another sweep when the carrier approaches 300nm from her patrol area, perhaps 10 to 12 hours from now, are made.