**Northern Fury #12 – Command at Sea**

**AAR by fitzpatv, Sept 2021**

This smallish and not very Northern scenario shares the same timeframe as Eisenhower Moves North and Changing of the Guard. Admiral Falkner, the commander of the US 2nd Fleet (CINCLANT) is aboard USS Mount Whitney, en route for a holding area just W of the Azores. This is partly in the interests of ‘dispersal’, should the conflict go nuclear. Mount Whitney is an advanced comms ship and a high-value asset in her own right. The Soviets get wind of this and send subs to intercept. You can play either side.  
  
Approaching the Azores from the W, Mount Whitney may be sophisticated, but she’s essentially a floating target. Sailing in close escort are the destroyer Dewey and the frigate Elrod. These provide a good SAM umbrella, but the whole task group has just two ASW choppers – short-ranged Seasprites at that. Away to the SE is the older frigate Reasoner, which has another Seasprite, but no SAMs, while the Portuguese frigate Alvares Cabral is to the E, with two Lynx choppers and reasonable all-round capability. The aged SSN Sturgeon is in the holding area and there are three Orions based at the central Azorean island of Lajes. Overall, there aren’t enough ASW assets to provide continuous cover and these resources have to be used sparingly.  
  
The Russians have an Echo-class SSGN with eight long-range Sandbox missiles, plus a Victor III and Sierra II and certain other assets, which are revealed as the game progresses.  
  
19/2/94 13:00Z: I began by creating new ASW patrol zones for each ship or TF, assigning an Orion to escort Mount Whitney instead of checking-out the holding area (leaving the latter task to the Sturgeon). Decided to launch two Seasprites and a Lynx at the outset to give each element some initial sonobuoy cover, though this proved unnecessary. I also switched my third Orion, still readying, from maritime surveillance to ASW and ensured that all units and missions were on Weapons Tight to avoid shooting at neutrals or biologics. Kept radars dark to limit enemy detection.  
  
Presently, a mysterious Mi-14 Haze chopper appeared near the Western Azorean islands of Flores and Corvo. Quite how this had got there was baffling, but it seemed unlikely to be a threat to Sturgeon on range grounds and was probably there for recon purposes. Without any fighters, there was little I could do about it for now.  
  
Mount Whitney was lagging behind her escorts and I had to do some messing around to re-position her more securely between them. As so often, it was necessary to untick the ‘Group Lead can Slow Down’ box to avoid chaos.  
  
15:00 : Having scouted the vicinity, the choppers went off-mission and were henceforward held in readiness to conserve sorties. I was concerned about detecting any incoming Sandboxes with radars off and could only hope that the missiles’ own sensors would give them away in time.  
  
17:00 : A Soviet sub got the drop on Sturgeon and sank her with one of their deadly 22nm range Starfish torpedo-carrying missiles for a loss of 50VP. As Victors have even longer-ranged Stallions, chances are that the Sierra was responsible. Living in Scotland as I do, I couldn’t resist a smile… An Orion was sent to scour the area, but the sub was long gone by the time it arrived – the search continued. With hindsight, Sturgeon should perhaps have high-tailed it out of the patrol zone earlier.  
  
Shortly afterwards, the trigger-happy Echo wasted two Sandboxes sinking a Portuguese trawler, the Vista Alegre. This suggested that she lurked away to the SE, perhaps not too far away from Reasoner. One to watch if you play the Russians (put her on Weapons Tight).  
  
18:30 : Reports arrived that ‘Spanish-speaking contractors’ had seized control of the remote village of Caldeirao on the small island of Corvo, killing several local folk. The Portuguese authorities requested our assistance, but there wasn’t much we could do for the moment.  
  
23:00 : US SEALs on the Mount Whitney and Portuguese special forces at Lajes were detailed to investigate the Corvo situation. An old Aviocar transport needed to be flown from Lajes with the latter squad and could deliver them by overflying the S half of the island at 1,000’. Mount Whitney’s HH-60 SAR Seahawk would be ready in an hour to transport the SEALs. I was advised that her TV sensors might prove useful and that naval gunfire would be necessary to finish the job, so I routed Cabral to the island.  
  
20/2/94 00:00 : ASW patrols finally bore fruit, with an Orion finding and sinking a Victor III in the holding area for 50VP.  
  
01:00 : The Aviocar smoothly inserted the Portuguese special forces on Corvo, but they could not initially see anything. I had them climb to the island’s highest point, but this made no difference.  
  
02:00 : An Orion found and sank the Sierra in the holding area. After the game, I read the Russian briefing and found that this was actually a Sierra III and their navy’s best SSN. As there is little data on a class that was never built, Bart represented it as a Sierra II with an Ace crew, which was why it scored 100VP.  
  
06:00 : Approaching the holding area, Mount Whitney came within detection range of the Haze. I should have put my radars on straightaway, but didn’t and was caught a little flat-footed by the Echo’s prompt response, much as the AI often is when its task groups have radars off. I was lucky that the SSGN had to loose its six remaining Sandboxes in widely-spaced pairs and that the first of these targetted Elrod, the weaker of the two escorts. Unable to react quickly enough, the frigate was sunk, but this cost only 25VP. With radars now on, USS Dewey was able to dispose of the remaining four missiles. Unfortunately, both Seasprites had been aboard Elrod, which cost no points, but left Mount Whitney dependent on Dewey’s sonar and ASROC system should the Echo close to its admittedly short torpedo range, as it was no doubt hastening to do. On the positive side, we now had a good idea where it was and two Orions winged to the hunt. Reasoner moved in at Creep with her chopper in readiness.  
  
07:00 : The HH-60 reached Corvo and promptly located the enemy, who proved to consist of a squad of Cuban irregulars, a remarkably sturdy Soviet Kolchuga ELINT vehicle (75DP!) and a helipad base for the Haze, which was still on patrol. A shambles ensued as, despite dropping to minimum altitude and hover speed over the island, the Seahawk failed miserably to land the SEALs!. Instead, I attacked the Cuban troops with the Portuguese. This did for most of them but, despite taking no return fire, the Portuguese soon ran out of ammo and had to pull back. In disgust, I had the chopper take-off, re-based her to the ‘neutral’ Corvo airfield to avoid RTB problems and finished the Cubans off by hosing them down with her machine-gun (had to do this manually due to otherwise insuperable doctrine issues). I then solved the problem with the SEALs by the desperate guess of moving the chopper to Corvo airfield and descending/hovering there. All of this could have been made clearer in the briefings.  
  
08:00 : The Haze finally returned from patrol and was shot down by Cabral’s SAMs, not that this scored any points. The frigate bombarded the helipad, but didn’t do much damage before running out of shells.  
  
09:00 : The search of the Echo’s likely location paid-off and she was sunk by an Orion for 75VP. You do learn to love these elderly but so reliable patrol planes – at least when they’re on your side!  
  
Meanwhile, the SEALs did a good impression of the Keystone Cops, attacking the helipad with four charges of high explosive and failing to do any damage!!. They then crossed the island and didn’t quite manage to kill the ELINT vehicle with their remaining charge. SEALs play a major role in the next scenario and this did not exactly fill me with confidence…  
  
12:00 : Scored 100VP for Mount Whitney reaching the approximate centre of the holding area – it wasn’t at all clear what the trigger for this was.  
  
20:00 : Reasoner arrived off Corvo, destroyed the Kolchuga for 10VP, then heavily damaged the helipad before running out of ammo. Sent her to join Mount Whitney.  
  
21/2/94 01:00 : Sent Dewey to finish the job at the helipad, but she failed to do so.  
  
I then re-assembled all ships in the middle of the holding area and ran down the clock for a Major Victory, with a score of +265. Could probably have got a Triumph by keeping Sturgeon alive or destroying the helipad and not losing Elrod. Regardless, three more Soviet subs had been eliminated for one of ours and a frigate and the enemy’s plans to sink Mount Whitney and establish a base on Corvo had been thwarted.  
  
Next time, NATO goes on the offensive at long last...