**Northern Fury #2 – X-Ray Station**

**AAR by fitzpatv, Mar 2021**

The second Northern Fury scenario is set on the same day as the first. Five SSNs (four American and one British) are on patrol at X-Ray Station in the Barents Sea when the Soviet Red Banner Northern Fleet sallies-forth to embark on a new Battle of the Atlantic. You can play either side, but I stuck with NATO for consistency.

Your brief is to track any Soviet SSBNs and report major surface units while remaining undetected, though you are authorised to take opportunities to sink or damage high-value targets. As it happens, there are actually no SSBNs in the scenario, presumably because the Soviets sortied them earlier under cover of peace. You are told that the subs Philadelphia and Churchill are off-station tracking two of them.

Potentially, you can meet 24 different classes or sub-classes of Soviet ships, five of subs and a dozen aircraft models during the day’s scenario duration. Hazards include patrol planes and choppers sowing sonobuoys far-and-wide, 30nm range Silex ASW guided weapons on many of the warships and SSNs with 54nm range Stallion sub-killing missiles.

As the default score of zero is a Minor Defeat, just running away isn’t an option. The five NATO subs can put-up a continuous sonar field across the likely approaches to the GIUK exit to the Atlantic. As Soviet ships’ sonar can extend up to 40nm and the NATO subs can manage 70-100nm, I felt that maintaining a distance of over 40nm, falling back before the Russian advance and moving onto the flanks would give me the best chance of staying undetected while gleaning intel. USS Connecticut, near the approaches to Murmansk, was clearly the boat in the greatest danger and most in need of monitoring. I opted to move at Creep speed by default, while keeping all vessels below the layer for maximum stealth. There were pre-set patrol missions for each sub, but I didn’t want them moving around randomly and obeying mission parameters, so unassigned them all and moved them manually.

Here’s how it went:

16:26 Local Time: USS Boise detected a Krivak IV frigate NE of Finnmark, Norway, supported by a Krivak I and Krivak II. Clearly, the Soviets were already at sea and maybe beyond my patrol line – so much for my cunning plan!. Moved Boise NE, out of the way.

18:00: HMS Trafalgar, patrolling W of Novaya Zemlya, found some destroyers and frigates escorting what looked like an amphibious force. Possibly, these were heading for Spitzbergen or even Iceland. As this did not constitute a high-value target, I left them alone.

18:55: A dangerous Udaloy II destroyer suddenly cut ahead of Boise at 20 knots without much warning. Reversed course at Creep and managed to avoid her, then had to tack again to dodge a Kresta-class cruiser. Staying deep has the drawback of reducing your sensors’ effectiveness, but it seemed the lesser of two evils.

19:00: Connecticut detected the battlecruiser Kalinin, with escorts, to her SE, scoring 15VP.

19:46: Double-trouble as a Sovremenny destroyer and a Kresta got close to USS Baltimore in the North Central sector and a Krivak IV popped-up too close to Connecticut’s South. Again, I was able to alter course and avoided these threats.

21:00: Connecticut encountered a destroyer to the ESE and a cruiser to the SSE. Altered course W at Creep speed, but my luck ran-out. Silex torpedoes began to appear and, with hiding no longer an option, I tried to clear the area at Flank. Managed to outrun or spoof four torpedoes, but the fifth scored a crippling hit and the sixth sank me. Not sure what I could have done about it, as I was moving as stealthily as possible and making sensible course changes. Thankfully, although this kind of thing can always happen to subs in CMO, you have five in this scenario and can’t lose on a single stroke of misfortune. Still, it cost me 50VP and put me in Minor Defeat territory. Unwilling to risk further losses, I ordered all boats to pull back, steering Boise and New York City for Trondheim and Baltimore and Trafalgar for the Polar Ice Cap. I did, however, keep them at Creep in the hope that I could pick-up some intel on the way.

00:42: Had a message that the Kiev carrier group had exited the area. This strongly suggested that they had somehow been past my patrol line at the outset. The only possible explanation for this was that they had slipped through when Churchill and Philadelphia had detached to stalk their SSBNs. At least it cost no points.

01:41: Trying to reach the Norwegian coast, Boise detected an Udaloy to the SSW. It seemed a better bet to head for the Pole instead.

02:11: USS New York City, now off Finnmark, started to pick-up numerous contacts to the E, including the Kirov and Kalinin battlecruiser groups, the cruiser Admiral Lobov and the new carrier Varyag, which was not thought to be in service until now. This scored a handy 50 VP. Thinking that this force was likely to steer out to sea and make for Iceland, I kept to my course near the coast while tracking remotely.

03:16: I was wrong!. A Sovremenny popped-up just 6nm from New York City. Helpfully, she was doing 30 knots and I was able to steer out of her path. Not long afterwards, I was awarded 25 VP for still having subs on-station. Encouraged, I kept Trafalgar inside the NE Patrol Sector in case of further bonuses like this.

03:27: The Kirov materialised too close to New York City, followed by the Varyag and flanked by escorts. I didn’t fancy my chances of remaining undetected and, in any case, this was far too good an opportunity to turn-down. The SSN fired 10 tinfish at the carrier, scoring multiple hits. Rivalling the WW2 Japanese Shinano for ‘shortest maiden voyage’, the flat-top rolled-over and sank, taking 40 aircraft with her and scoring me 100 VP. As retribution descended, New York City turned and put three torpedoes into the Kirov, slowing her to 8 knots with flooding. Shortly afterwards, she was struck by a Silex, but managed to surface in time to save some of her crew, though not quite quickly enough to engage with her remaining TASM Tomahawks. I still finished 50 VP ahead, so well worth it.

The rest of the playthrough passed relatively quietly. Boise detected the Spitzbergen (?) amphibious group and tried to give chase, but lost contact. Various messages arrived, telling me that Soviet task forces had exited the map, along with the decisive news that the Kirov had died of her wounds. The resultant 100 VP and another 25-point award for remaining on-station took the score to +215 and a Minor Victory, which I was happy to take.

As regular readers of these AARs will know, I’m not a great fan of ‘submarines-only’ scenarios, given that ASW detection and prosecution in CMO is so (realistically??) efficient. Nevertheless, this one worked better than most, as all your eggs are not in one basket and the victory point schedule gives you a decent chance. There is also some spare ocean that isn’t crawling with escorts, so you get some breathing space. Playing as the Russians might be interesting, as you would have to avoid damage, get ships off-map and sink the NATO subs to a tight timescale in order to win. That will have to wait, however, as I’d rather move-on to the next episode.