**Northern Fury 2 AAR**

**By Joel Radunzel**

**First Post**

Here’s the start of my AAR for the second scenario in the excellent Northern Fury series created by Gunner98 over at Matrix forums. This one takes place simultaneously to the events in Northern Fury 1: H-Hour, but a little further east in the Barents Sea. I’m playing the part of the captain of the Seawolf-class USS Connecticut (SSN-22), the senior NATO captain on X-Ray Station. What is X-Ray station, you ask? Here’s from the scenario description:

*“X-Ray Station was a long standing patrol area for NATO submarines whose job it was to keep tabs on the Soviet Red Banner Northern Fleet, in particular the major surface units and the SSBNs. Several US and often UK submarines were on this station for almost 30 years.”*

The X-Ray station patrol area covers the Arctic Ocean north of the Kola Peninsula and the exits to the White Sea, and West of the island of Novaya Zemlya (“New World” in Russian). Currently there are five NATO submarines on station. My own boat, being the quietest and newest, is covering the patrol sector furthest south, at the exits of the White Sea. Any Soviet fleet units will have to transit this area to gain access to open water. However, the strait is covered by a bottom listening array, so I cannot approach too close. The other four submarines on station form a southwest-northeast arc consisting of (in counter-clockwise order) USS New York City (SSN696), USS Boise (SSN764), USS Baltimore (SSN704), and HMS Trafalgar (S107). Two other submarines, USS Philadelphia and HMS Churchill, are off tracking Russian SSBNs and will not take part in this scenario.

Our orders are primarily to sniff for Russian boomers and track them, but also to report detection of major surface units of the Red Banner Northern fleet. In the event of war we are to remain on station and report as the ears of the fleet, and only to take a shot if we can engage a major Soviet unit under favorable conditions, not likely to happen up here. These orders and our standard operating procedures on station were all laid out at a captains' meeting back in Scotland before departing. It’s now 1300 on 13 February, 1994, and USS Connecticut just conducted our weekly comms check. It was a bit of a shock, as I was informed that we are at DEFCON 4, without much explanation.

This would seem a good time for me to explain some “house rules” I've set for myself in this scenario. I know from the last Northern Fury Scenario that the war starts at 1300, or right now, but as a submarine out of communication for long periods of time I wouldn't have any way of knowing this, and neither would any of the other subs. Furthermore, the subs can’t communicate with each other. This precludes any sort of coordinated action, so if I do launch attacks, I will do so with one boat at a time. As such, I’m also leaving each submarine (except USS Connecticut) on its pre-plotted course until it detects a target, at which point I can assume the role of that sub’s captain and respond to what the boat’s sensors are hearing. Furthermore, none of the submarines will act offensively until they are either attacked, or detect a major Soviet unit and go shallow to report, at which point I assume they receive a message that hostilities have commenced.

Ok, so much for the set-up...

The scenario begins. USS Boise (the only improved 688 boat on station), creeping southeast at 5 kts, picks up two groups of Russia surface contacts. One appears to be composed of a destroyer and a frigate heading west at high speed, about 15 miles west of Boise. Boise’s sonar operators can’t determine types, since the targets (all other ships are target to submariners, right?) are too far off, but they inform the captain (we’ll call him Commander Morgan) that they think they can hear more screws beyond these two. The other group, about 15 miles northeast of Boise, appears to be composed of two destroyers, but a third contact of undetermined type is also there. The sonar technicians estimate they are also making turns for high speed, probably 30kts, also headed west. This is unusual activity for the Russians. Morgan thinks about the situation and reasons that he can turn west, go deep, and conduct a high-speed sprint to close the range with the western group of Russians and determine their composition. This will leave his boat is good position to then turn north and cut across the course of the northeastern group.

He orders, “Helm, make your depth 750 feet, course 170, speed 32 knots.”

Boise turns, accelerating as she descends.

Unknown to Commander Morgan and the crew of Boise, to their north USS Baltimore, captained by Commander Daniels, has also detected the northeaster group of Russian surface ships (though these are southeast relative to Baltimore). Daniels alters Baltimore’s course to the south, maintaining a speed of 5 kts, to close the distance between his boat and the patch of water that the speeding Russians will pass over in about 90 minutes if they maintain course and speed.

Far to the northeast, west of Novaya Zemlya, Commander de Bicardi of HMS Trafalgar is informed by his sonar operators that they hear what sounds like two destroyers far to their north heading west at about 20 kts. De Bicardi orders Trafalgar deep and onto a northwesterly intercept course at high speed.

It is now 1305. Three of the five subs have contacts that they are investigating. USS New York City (Commander Beam), and myself on Connecticut currently have clear sonar scopes. New York City continues creeping south at 5 kts while I order Connecticut to change course to the northeast to open up some range between myself and the Russian listening arrays.

**Second Post**

“Maintain course and speed for two hours,” orders Commander Morgan, “I’ll be in my state room. Send someone to wake me at 1500 hours.” With that hw walked the few steps to his quarters, rolled into his bunk, and promptly fell asleep as USS Boise sped west at top speed and as deep as the ocean bottom would allow, in chase of the surface targets Morgan hoped would be there.

Sixty miles to the north, Commander Daniels in Baltimore was coming to the conclusion that his boat, even at maximum depth, would not be able to safely close with the Russian surface targets hurtling west at 30 kts. “Helm, take us shallow, course 125, speed five knots. Let’s report in.”

Daniels walks the few steps to from the CIC to the comms room and dictates, “When we get shallow, send the following message:”

PRIORITY

From: CDR, USS Baltimore, To: COMSUBLANT

Report multiple REDFLT surface contacts location N 73 1’47”, E 36 48’41”, heading 289, speed approximately 30 kts. Composition 2 DDGs, 1 CG, one other unit. Assessment, REDFLT surface action group moving at high speed into north Atlantic. Am proceeding to station.

“Let me know if there is any mail from fleet,” he said as he turned and walked back to his captain’s chair.

Just as he was settling in the seaman in the communications closet called, “Skipper, you need to see this!” The tone of his voice quickened Daniels’ step as he moved back to the comms room and grabbed the Emergency Action Message from the technician, and read:

FLASH FLASH FLASH

From: COMSUBLANT, To: All units, X-Ray Station

At 1313001994 WP forces initiated hostilities against US and NATO forces around the globe. We are at war, repeat, we are at war. Take all measures commensurate with the safety of your vessel. Remain on station and report any REDFLT movements. You are authorized to take offensive action against any Soviet or WP units you encounter, provided this does not compromise your primary mission of reconnaissance. More instructions will follow as situation develops. Maintain current reporting schedule. End.

Daniels felt a thrill run up his spine and the blood in his veins turn icy cold all at the same time. Here was what he had been training for, planning for, waiting for his entire career, to be in the Russians’ back yard when the Cold War went hot. Now that he was actually here, he wasn’t sure whether to feel excited or frightened. The he remembered it wasn’t his job to feel anything. He walked back to his chair, grabbed the mic from above his head and said, “Now hear this, we are at war. That’s all the information I have. I don’t know why, or how, or anything else, but an hour ago those commie Russians decided that we’re going to have it out old-fashioned like. Our mission hasn’t changed. We’re still the best boat in the fleet, and we’re still good at doing our impression of a hole in the water. We just tracked a Russian SAG heading west at high speed, and our report is going to let our brothers further west get a warm reception ready for them. Just keep doing your jobs, and one day you’ll have a sea story that you can bore your grandkids with. That is all.” He replaced the mic.

Daniels turned, “Helm, maintain course and speed, make your depth 800 feet.” As the helmsman acknowledged and complied, Daniels turned to the XO and muttered, “there’s going to be subs behind those surface ships. Wait and see. The whole Northern fleet is going to thundering this way. We may even be able to pick one off.”

“Yes sir,” responded the XO, as the deck canted downward as Baltimore descended into the icy Barents Sea.

**Third Post:**

Far to the northeast, Commander de Bicardi in HMS Trafalgar was sipping at a mug of tea and glancing at his watch in his boat’s CIC. As the arms on his watch ticked past 1430 (Zulu time) he looked up and in his clipped, aristocratic accent said, “Very well, I think that’s quite enough. Slow to five knots and bring us up to a depth of 30 meters, if you please. Let’s see if we can reestablish contact with old Ivan.”

Trafalgar came up slowly, passing through the thermal layer and into the roiled waters just below the surface, gently rocking the boat. “Sounds like rain on the surface, sir, and a bit of a blow,” called the lead sonarman.

“Any sound of the Sovs?” de Bicardi asked, annoyed.

“Not yet, sir,” came the cockney reply.

“Well, keep at it.”

Trafalgar continued on a northwesterly course for several minutes, then, “Sir, I’m picking up screws, directly ahead. Not the same boats we heard earlier, no sign of that one, but this one’s right where they should be, approximately 15 miles ahead.”

“Well then,” de Bicardi mused, “that makes at least three Ivans. Can you make out course and speed.”

“Give it some time, sir.”

Over the next quarter hour Trafalgar’s sonarmen worked to make out the sound of the Soviet ships in the less than ideal surface conditions. Then the head sonar tech reported, “sir, she’s a Kashin-class destroyer, almost certain. She sounds to making turns for 25 knots or so. Those other two we heard two hours ago, those sounded like another cruiser and destroyer to me. This is where they should be, but I just can’t hear them sir.”

“Very well,” de Bicardi said, somewhat annoyed. “Sounds like we’ve got a Russki SAG heading west, though its bloody far north for them. Odd. We’re already too far out of our patrol area. Let’s get up to communication depth and tell the fellows back home what we’ve heard.”

Trafalgar ascended and unreeled its tethered comms buoy. In seconds the burst message was travelling spaceward at light speed, passing another message being broadcast continuously from the opposite direction, from the orbiting communication satellite. When it arrived...

“Sir, you need to see this!”

De Bicardi grabbed the printout, read it, and muttered, “Bloody hell...”

**Fourth Post:**

“Sir?”

Morgan blinked his eyes.

“Sir? you asked us to wake you after ninety minutes sir.”

Morgan sat up, slowly remember ring to send USS Boise on its deep speed run west. “I’ll be on the bridge in a minute sailor.”

Morgan stood up, straightened his uniform, and walked out into the CIC. The officer of the deck was already slowing to five knots and ascending above the layer as planned.

“Once we’re above the layer, let’s start a north-south search pattern to see if we can pick anything up on the towed array,” Morgan said.

For the next several minutes USS Boise trailed her towed array listening for any sign of the Russians to the west. Morgan had taken his boat well outside his patrol area on a hunch that there was more to this contact than a solitary DDG speeding west. Just as his heart was beginning to sink he hear, “Conn, sonar, I’m picking up screw noises from multiple surface contacts in the first convergence zone on an approximate bearing of two-seven-zero. Two early for count or classification. Give me some time.”

Then, paydirt. “Conn, sonar, one of those skunks sounds an awful lot like a Kiev-class carrier. I think I can discern one or two DDGs, a CG, and two frigates that look like they’re acting as flankers north and south of the main group.”

“Now that’s interesting,” Morgan said to the officer of the deck, a young lieutenant, “Kiev class up here means either Kiev or Baku, and they don’t normally just send them charging west at flank speed like that. Let’s firm up the contact and then go shallow and report. Then we’ll turn back east and get back on station.”

Over the next half hour Boise’s sonarmen were able to positively identify the helicopter carrier as being in fact the Kiev, and were also able to get a firm fix on one of the Krivak-class frigates protecting the Soviet formation’s southern flank. A few minutes later Boise ascended and sent off its burst transmission contact report, duly receiving in return the news that the Russian ships were now targets literally as well as conceptually.

“Damn,” muttered Morgan. “I’ll bet the rest of the Red northern fleet is breaking out too. Hope they didn’t manage to get behind us like the Kiev group almost did. What’s Connecticut going down there, sleeping?”

The captain and crew of the Seawolf-class boat USS Connecticut, almost 200 miles to the south, were not in fact sleeping, but neither had they managed to detect anything useful in the last two hours, either. Myself, as captain, had to resist the urge to alter course or poke up to periscope depth to snoop around. Knowing we are on DEFCON 4 was disconcerting, and if war did break out you can bet that the Russians are going to lay so many sonobuoys on this patch of water that you could cross the exits to the white sea without getting your feet wet. No, stay deep, stay slow, only minor course variations to throw off a possible sniff if the Russians can get one. As we head northeast the water deepens gently until we can unreel our towed array and take advantage of the convergence zones in the deeper water. After about another hour the patience pays off.

“Conn, sonar, I have a surface contact, in the second convergence zone, maybe 30-70 miles, approximate bearing one-six-zero. Don’t know who he is, but he’s making a lot of noise and moving fast.”

“Roger, maintain course and speed.”

A few minutes later, “conn, sonar, that skunk is definitely a Kirov-class battlecruiser. I can hear the pump noises on his reactor plant working overtime. He’s moving out sir. Can’t make out anything with him though.”

“Well,” I say, “he’s not coming out alone, that’s for sure.” This is an ominous development. Just three hours ago we essentially received a war warning, and now one on the major units of the Soviet fleet is rushing out, unannounced and unscheduled at high speed. I need more information.

“Helm, put us above the layer. Let’s see if we can hear anything else coming out with him.”

Connecticut ascended to 98 feet, continuing to creep at 5 knots on a northeasterly course. After a few minutes my fears were realized. We detected a virtual stream of surface contacts coming north-northwest out of the white sea. Frigates, destroyers, cruisers, in addition to the battlecruiser we had heard earlier and then lost when he passed through the convergence zone. SOme were moving at 30 knots, some 25, some 20, some 8. “Sonar, let’s start getting this picture sorted out. I want to know if we pick up any more of their heavies. They got two Kirovs up here, two carriers, two baby carriers. We need to report if they are moving or not.”

“Aye sir. No love on any of them yet, but one of these CGs is starting to sound a lot like one of those new Slava-class cruisers.”

“Got it, this looks like a sortie by a good chunk of the northern fleet. It’s unlikely that the heavies aren’t there somewhere. Let’s go deep again, pick up speed and see if we can get in among the stream.”

Connecticut dove and accelerated to 20 knots for 30 minutes, then slowed and ascended again. The sonar room worked to reacquire the surface contacts we’d lost during our speed run. Then, an excited voice, “conn, sonar, I’ve got one of the CVs sir, contact’s firming up, she’s the Kuznetsov, flag ship of the northern fleet!”

“Give me a proper contact report sailor.”

“Uh, aye sir, relative bearing is about three-four-zero-range about 7 to 10 miles. She’s making turns for I’d say 30 knots, and she has a couple DDGs and that Kirov in close escort.” Then, “Sir, there’s something else. There’s a Sovremeny class destroyer about 16 miles south that’s on a course to pass directly over us if we maintain present course and speed. I can’t guarantee he won’t hear us.”

I walk over to the navigation chart. We’re in relatively shallow water, only 600-700 feet. To the east and west the ocean floor is even shallower, but to the north is a channel close to 800 feet. Every foot of water over our heads is key to staying concealed.

“Very well, alter course to three-four-zero. Navigator, put us as deep as we can go here and then increase speed to 20 knots. we’ll dash north to the deeper water, the dog-leg east to get out of the way of that DDG. Then we’ll come up above the layer again and have another listen. We can’t report in and risk detection until there’s some distance between ourselves and all these Russians, but I have a bad feeling about all this.”

Elsewhere, things were starting to happen more quickly as well. On board USS New York City Commander Beam was in his cabin doing efficiency reports when he heard, “Captain to the conn.” He happily set aside the paperwork for whatever the welcome distraction could be.

“What is it, Mr. Woodford?” he asked the officer of the deck as he strode into CIC.

“Sir, sonar reports a submerged contact on the lowed array, dead ahead. He’s below the layer, only moving at five knots. It’s an SSN for sure, and not one of hours. Range is maybe ten thousand yards.” USS New York City was currently moving south above the thermal layer, trailing its towed array below, making counter detection by the deeper submarine unlikely at this range.

“All right,” Beam said, “nothing too unusual.” lets alter course to the east somewhat and swing around behind him to see if we can get a classification.”

Far to the north, Commander de Bicardi on HMS Trafalgar was just turning his boat around to creep back south at maximum depth when his sonar room reported multiple surface contacts in the second convergence zone to the east. He ordered Trafalgar to turn towards the target and was shortly rewarded with classifications. This group was more interesting that the last, consisting of a slew of amphibious transports including LSTs, LCMs, LPDs, as well as numerous escorts.

“Now this is interesting,” de Bicardi muttered. “Those amphibs are far out here, aren’t they, and with a war on they can only be headed south, either for Iceland or the North Sea. Better get a contact report off now while they’re still distant, then work in and see if we can better a better count and composition of the group.”

**Fifth Post:**

Commander Beam on USS New York City had a decision to make. NYC was trailing a nuclear submarine that they were as yet to identify heading west-northwest at a slow five knots. It was definitely an SSN and definitely not NATO, but the fact that Beam’s sonarmen were as yet unable to identify the type at a mere six thousand yards meant that it must be a newer class of sub. And yet, his orders were to trail boomers and major surface units, not attack boats, and this one was getting close to the western edge of his patrol area. So, option A was to keep trailing the presumed Russian out of the patrol area and try to identify him, which would be difficult to do since, as a more modern sub, he probably had a towed array of his own, or option B, to break off contact, report, and head back to his patrol area in search of more lucrative targets.

Beam decided to go with option B. New York City ascended to send off a contact report. The War warning the Beam received in the process made him mutter, “I guess we’re going with option C.” Then louder, “Weps, we have a firing solution on that skunk?”

“Roger sir,” the weapons officer said, somewhat startled.

“Well, we’re at war,” Beam said, handing over the message. “Let’s take the shot. We’re going to be some of the first people to get some shots in for our side. We’ll launch two fish above the layer and keep them there until he hears them, then send them down for the endgame.”

Over the next several minutes New York City descended back down to let its tail hang below the thermal layer and reacquire the target. Once the tracking party had a good solution Beam ordered, “ Make ready tubes one and four. Fire on my mark.”

“Tubes one and four ready sir.”

“Fire one. Fire two.”

The two Mk48 ADCAPs launched from New York City’s torpedo tubes and proceeded above the layer on wire guidance. They ran unnoticed for several minutes and 55 knots and then, “Conn, sonar, he’s heard them sir. He just went to full power! It’s a Victor III, sounds like he’s trying to get to full speed.”

“Send the fish down through the layer,” Beam ordered.

The Soviet sub quickly built up to its maximum speed of 30 knots with the torpedoes on his tail, trying to outrun them. “No return shots,” Weps noted, “he had no idea we are here or and no idea where we are now. H should have at least sent a torpedo back along the bearing of our own torps.”

“Maybe he’s worried about other Russian subs in the area,” remarked Beam.

“There is that, sir.”

The Mk48s inexorably ate up the range between themselves and the Russian sub. The target tried countermeasures, but to no avail. The lead torpedo smashed into the Victor’s propeller shaft the detonation of its warhead ruptured the pressure hull. NYC’s sonarmen listened as the other boat imploded under the pressure of 800 feet of water, then sank to the ocean floor.

“Scratch one Russki sub. Let’s go find some more.”

Several miles away and several hundred feet above the ocean surface, the sonar technician aboard a Russian Mi-14 ASW helicopter reported to his pilot, “Tovarich captain, I just picked up an explosion on buoy 19, and just a minute ago I thought I heard torpedo motors on buoys 20 and 23!”

“Very well, Vasily, I’ll call the patrol planes and see if we can get some more buoys over here. We’re out of buoys and low on fuel, but it sounds like the bloody Americans are down there making trouble. We’ll see if we can put down a blanket of buoys and see what we can hear.”

“Yes, comrade captain.”

**Sixth Post:**

At the northern edge of X-Ray station Commander de Bicardi on HMS Trafalgar was maneuvering his boat towards the thundering herd of Russian amphibious transports and escorts moving west at 16 knots. Over the past two hours his sonarmen had lost contact with the Russian ships as they passed out of the first convergence zone at about 30 miles and then reestablished contact as his boat and the Russian task group neared each other on reciprocal bearings. At his point Trafalgar’s sonar had begun to pick up the lead escorts against the background noise of the rather loud amphibs, and de Dicardi ordered his sub to angle south.

“We shall try to avoid the lead escorts and let them pass, then turn sharply north and try to run in among the sheep. We will launch a spread of torpedoes against the largest amphibs, then reload with Harpoons and launch these to foil any counterattack. Then we will take advantage of our own bedlam to slip away east,” he briefed his officers in his maddeningly aristocratic yet professional clipped prose.

As the Russian ships began to pass to port of Trafalgar’s east-southeast creeping course, de Bicardi’s cockney lead sonarman was able to get a complete picture of the formation.

“Sir,” he briefed, “the Ivans ‘ave got a strong escort. Up front is a Krivak-class frigate, an ‘ese followed by an Udaloy, a Kresta-class cruiser, and two Sovremeny’s leading what looks like more ‘an twelve amphibs of dif’rent types ‘an classes, all bunched into a tight column behind the Kresta. Then behind and to the port and starboard of these is two Kashins bringing up the rear.”

“Those Kashin’s are the weak spot,” commented de Bicardi, “we shall move into the column ahead of them but behind those Sovremenys. This should allow us to get among the transports without having to move to quickly and generate noise. All right, let’s be about it. ‘England expects’ and all that.”

As the lead Soviet escorts passed abeam of Trafalgar de Bicardi ordered a turn due north, staying above the thermocline to try to avoid the Udaloy’s towed array. The Russian transports thundered now on a perpendicular course ten miles ahead, still well beyond the range of Trafalgar’s under-performing Tigerfish torpedoes. Over the next thirty minutes Trafalgar worked northward, passing dangerously close beneath the southernmost Kashin-class destroyer.

Then, just as de Bicardi and his crew began to breathe easier in anticipation of the excitement of getting in among the transports, the cockney sonarman called, “sir! Torpedo in the water bearing three-three-zero relative! It looks to be about six thousand meters distant.”

“Calm down, calm down,” admonished de Bicardi. “Helm, be so good as to make your depth eight hundred feet. DO not increase speed.” Trafalgar quietly passed under the layer and went deep and quiet.

Chastened, the sonarman reported again after a few minutes, “it doesn’t have us sir.”

“But they’ve certainly gotten a sniff of us,” mused the captain. “We’ll have to adjust our plan of attack. Torpedo room, reload tubes one through four with Harpoons, if you please.” Trafalgar carried only four of the missiles. “We shall come back up once the Sov formation has passed and launch on the transports from behind, where they sonar sensors and air defenses are weakest.”

Over the next several minutes as Trafalgar dove deep the sailors in the torpedo room labored to remove the Tigerfish torpedoes from four of the sub’s five tubes and replace them with the four Harpoon missiles. Once the task was complete, de Bicardi ordered his boat to ascend once again. By this point Trafalgar, creeping north at five knots, had passed astern of the Soviet formation, and the individual ships were easily identifiable on the British sub’s sonar displays.

“Select four of the nearest LSTs as targets for the missiles and launch on my mark,” ordered the captain.

“All ready sir.”

“Fire!”

Soviet Rear Admiral Stolich aboard BPK Krondstadt, the Kresta II-class cruiser acting as flagship of the amphibious task force, was nervous. One of his escorts had reported several minutes earlier that they had heard what they believed were reactor noises on the southern flank of his formation. He had ordered a Metel ant-submarine missile launched into the area to see if they could spook whatever enemy menace was there, but to no avail. Now he continued westward in the hope that speed would be his best defense against any NATO submarines that might be there.

Just as he was reaching for his glass mug of tea set in a metal holder, and officer on the flag bridge called out, “Tovarich Admiral, missiles!”

One by one Trafalgar’s Harpoons broached the surface and ignited their rocket motors, temporarily lighting up the dark Arctic sky to the east and behind the Russian ships. The missiles fanned out from their launch point, streaking and wave top level towards four of the Russian transports.

Back aboard Trafalgar, de Bicardi ordered a sharp turn to starboard and a rapid descent back below the layer to clear datum from the launch point.

Stolich watched the radar display in horror as the four - there appeared to be four - missiles streaked west into the rear of his formation. Then his to Sovremeny destroyers, already on alert from the sniff the formation had gotten earlier, came to light. It was a race between the SAMs from his two best air defense ships and the approaching Harpoons. Missiles leapt off the launchers and first one, then two Harpoons exploded, shredded by the SAMs’ shrapnel. The Harpoons had been launched from too close a range, however, and the remaining two bored in relentlessly. One tore into a Ropucha-class LST, moments before the second impacted an Alligator-class LST, igniting fires and causing flooding in both vessels.

The Russian Admiral was enraged. The troops and equipment on these transports were vital to the Soviet plan to close the Atlantic for the vital early days of the war. “Get that bastard!” he bellowed into his radio transmitter to the commander of his ASW screen.

Several miles away, another Metel anti-submarine rocket (known to NATO as the SS-N-14 Silex) leapt from the torpedo tube of the formation’s Udaloy destroyer. The rocket lofted out of the water and sped to the terminus of the four enemy missiles, the dropped its torpedo into the water once it reached the predetermined point.

Back aboard Trafalgar, de Bicardi once again heard, “torpedo in the water! It’s right above us sir!”

“All stop!” the captain ordered, some stress finally creeping into his voice. Trafalgar’s pump jet propulsion ceased, and the sub glided through the water, a shadow in the deep. “Sonar, a report if you please.”

“It’s passing in front of us sir, port to starboard, above the layer. Now it’s passing down our starboard side. It sounds like it’s doing circles around us, searching. Hasn’t got us, sir.”

The UGMT-1 Orlan torpedo continued to circle around the point in the sea where Trafalgar now lay motionless. After several minutes it ran out of fuel and sank to the bottom. But just as the British crew was beginning to heave a sigh of relief, a second torpedo splashed into the water almost in the same spot where the first had circled. De Bicardi waited while this one too completed its fruitless search, then ordered five knots on a northeasterly course. Two more torpedoes splashed into the water astern of the British sub. This time their active seekers found Trafalgar, and both fish bored in. One was lured away by a noisemaker decoy but the other motored through the bubbles and continued to close the distance. At the last minute de Bicardi, whose boat was now working up to flank speed, ordered a radical turn to port. The Orlan torpedo closed...and swam through the knuckle of water created by Trafalgar’s wake without exploding. The sonar room’s cockney-accented chief looked out into the bridge and thought he actually saw some sweat trickle down his captain’s high forehead.

Two more SS-N-14s fell into the water well to the rear of Trafalgar, but these were too distant to have any hope of detecting the British sub.

“Well,” de Bicardi said to no one in particular in his clipped accent, “that was somewhat exciting.”

Back aboard Krondstadt, Stolich was fuming. Two of his precious transports were in flames and he hadn’t even been able to exact revenge on the offending enemy submarine. He had expended valuable ordnance in an attempt to flush out the enemy, but in the end had come up dry. He couldn’t devote any time to effectively hunt the submarine. His remaining transports needed to get to their destination on time, and he didn’t want to give the NATO sub yet another shot. One of his Kashins had taken the surviving crew off of the the Ropuchka, but the commander of the Alligator (Tepir in Russian) LST was reporting that his fires and flooding were under control and that he might be able to restore engine power in a few hours. Stolich ordered him to continue, but warned him that he couldn’t devote any escorts to protect him. The Russian amphibious group continued west, now short two of its transports.

A few hours later Trafalgar came to periscope depth. De Bicardi noted the obviously sinking Ropuchka and then saw the Alligator which appeared to be making very slow progress westwards. A Tigerfish torpedo was dispatched and one more thundering explosion lit up the Arctic night. Trafalgar headed south, back into X-Ray station.

**Seventh Post:**

While Trafalgar’s battle with the amphibious convoy and its escorts went on far to the northeast, at the western end of X-Ray station USS Boise’s night was just starting to get interesting. Commander Morgan had kept his boat on an east-southeasterly course and above the thermal layer after breaking contact with the Kiev group hours earlier. Up until now they had heard nothing since turning back towards their patrol area. That began to change as Boise-s sonar room, taking advantage of the deep water under the sub’s keel, began to pick up surging surface contacts approximately 30 nautical miles in front of them in the first convergence zone, heading directly for them at 30 kts, then lost them again as they passed out of the CZ. Before they lost contact Boise’s sonarmen were able to distinguish two different DDGs, one Kirov, and on carrier. Unknown to Morgan, the USS Connecticut to the southeast had monitored the passage of this carrier group out of the White Sea several hours earlier, but owing to the confined spaces in those waters had been unable as yet to make a contact report and was consequently unaware that a war was on, though the captain had his suspicions.

“We’ll maintain course and speed until we pick them back up again at closer range,” Morgan told his bridge watch, “then we’ll go deep and quiet and try to get inside the formation to see if we can get a shot at that flattop. Their sonar performance will be seriously degraded at that speed”

The American submarine and the Soviet carrier group continued to close over the next thirty minutes until Morgan hear, “conn, sonar, I’m picking them back up. Same composition, same bearing. The carrier is going to pass just to our port side if we maintain course.”

“Helm, make your depth 800 feet, then all stop,” Morgan ordered.

“Aye, sir.”

USS Boise descended through the thermal layer and into the deep as the Russian ships thundered on towards her. An Udaloy II-class destroyer, the lead ship of the formation, passed to Boise’s port side. The Kuznetsov and the Kirov-class battlecruiser (Boise’s sonarmenr had now distinguished this ship as the RKR Kalinin) would also pass to the American submarine’s port side, though much closer. Morgan’s plan was to launch three fish at the carrier and one at the battlecruiser, then rapidly reload and launch one more torpedo at the Kalinin before going deep and clearing datum.

The big Soviet ships thundered past, with the Kuznetsov only 4000 yards distant. Morgan was turning his boat to port to match bearings and launch his torpedoes when he heard, “conn, sonar, there’s another destroyer bringing up the rear sir. It sounds like another Udaloy. If he maintains current course he’s going to pass within one mile of us.”

“Damn,” Morgan swore, “that completely screws our egress plan. This isn’t a suicide mission. Let’s adjust.”

Judging that the oncoming destroyer would not be able to detect his boat while travelling at 30 kts, Morgan decided to allow the DDG to pass and then use the two torpedoes he had intended for the Kalinin to dispatch the nearer threat. But he would have that carrier, nothing was going to divert him from that now.

The minutes ticked by and the throbbing of the oncoming Udaloy’s screws grew louder and then began to pass to starboard.

“Conn, Udaloy two’s range is under 1000 yards,” reported the sonar room.

“It’s time,” said Morgan. “Helm, bring us to bearing three-three-five.”

USS Boise slowly turned, bringing her nose to bear on the receding sterns of the Russian ships.

“Tracking party, are our solutions on the carrier and the Udaloy still good?” asked Morgan.

“Roger sir,” the weapons officer reported.

“Very well. Match generated bearings and shoot!”

Aboard the Soviet carrier Kuznetsov, flagship of the Red Banner Northern fleet, Counter Admiral Starka was just standing up from his chair on his flag bridge, preparing to turn in and get some sleep. It was after 2am local time, the second day of the war, and so far things had been going according to plan. His fleet was fully at sea, trying to run the gauntlet of NATO submarines that he knew had to be here so as to break out into the North Atlantic. So far, other than some losses to the amphibious landing group up north, his fleet’s transit had been unopposed. Then, just as he turned to walk the few meters to his flag cabin, his eyes shot to a luminous flash on the horizon.

The first MK48 Mod 5 ADCAP torpedo had run straight and true to a point right under the stern of the Udaloy-class destroyer Admiral Zakharov before detonating, creating a luminescent column of water that lifted the destroyer’s already wrecked propellers completely out of the water. The Admiral Zakharov was doomed before her stern settled back into the water, and the second MK48 that bored in and broke her back only ensured that fewer survivors would jump from her decks into the frigid arctic sea.

“What happened?” demanded Starka, “why was there no warning of an attack?” Just then his receiver started buzzing. It was his flag captain one deck above. The report made his blood run cold.

“Sir, Kalinin reports multiple torpedoes heading our way from the southeast, range approximately six thousand yards.”

Kuznetsov was already at flank speed, and Starke felt the deck begin to tilt slightly as the ship’s captain altered course to put the torpedoes on his stern. Minutes sped by as the amazingly fast American torpedoes, the sonar on his carrier reported they were moving at 55 kts, closed with his precious ship. To starboard he watched the Kalinin, a dark shadow in the night with a luminescent tail from its churning propellers, turn to bring its Metel ASW missiles to bear on the threat vector. Two blindingly bright streaks erupted from the battlecruiser’s boxy launchers as the Russian counterattack lofted into the cold night.

Aboard USS Boise Commander Morgan heard, “Torpedo in the water! Make that two, two torpedoes in the water, directly astern, range under one thousand yards!”

“All ahead flank!” ordered Morgan as the Russian UMGT-1 Orlan torpedoes began their search pattern. “Take us deep!”

“Conn, sonar, it sounds like one of the torps has us, the other is still searching.”

“Sir,” the weapons officer reported, “we’ll lose the wires on the fish if we evade.”

“No choice,” answered Morgan.

USS Boise dove, turned, and raced southwest at its best speed of 32 kts away from the torpedo chasing at a speed of 45 kts. “This is going to be close,” Morgan muttered.

The Russian torpedo inexorably ate up the distance. The torpedo room called of the range, 800 meters, 700 meters, five hundred meters, 300, then, “conn, the torp’s screws have stopped. I think it ran out of gas sir.”

Morgan let out a ragged breath. “Very well, slow to five knots, bring us around back on a northerly heading. Let’s see if we can make sense of what our weapons are doing.”

The Boise’s MK48s, with much farther to travel then the rocket-delivered Russian weapons, were just now closing with the fleeing Soviet carrier. Kuznetsov’s captain could do nothing but trail decoys. In this situation he was better off maintaining a steady course in hopes of outrunning the American (he assumed they were American) or at least giving his towed decoys the best chance of luring them away. The Soviet ships had detected three incoming weapons, and he knew his chances of avoiding all of them were slim.

As it played out, the decoys failed completely. The first Mk48 sped past it and detonated under Kuznetsov’s starboard-most propeller, wrecking both the shaft and the screw. The explosion also lifted the carriers stern and pushed it left. The resulting turmoil in the water threw off the seekers for the following two fish, both of which exploded in generally the same part of the big carrier’s starboard quarter, tearing a long gash in the hull and flooding several compartments. Kuznetsov began to list to starboard.

“On the flag bridge, the carriers captain reported to Starka by phone, “Tovarich Admiral, we can make eleven knots, no more. Flooding is under control, and we have no fires.”

Starka, whose strategy had un-raveled in the span of only a few minutes, asked, “what of the enemy submarine?”

“We launched a counterattack into the area where we believe the torpedoes came from, but heard no explosion. The enemy is still out there comrade.”

“Very well, take us north at whatever speed you can make. Call in the aviation to hunt the enemy submarine. Those lollygaggers were supposed to have cleared this channel before we ever arrived!” Starka fumed.

USS Boise ascended back above the layer and once again made contact with the Russian ships.

“Conn, sonar, the enemy flattop is hurt but she’s not dead, sir. And that Kirov is riding close escort now.”

“They’re still in range, just barely,” reported the weapons officer.

“Let’s see if we can finish them off. Get a solution, two fish for the carrier, two for the Kalinin.”

Minutes later four more torpedoes ejected from Boise’s tubes and started running for the big Soviet ships.

It took several minutes for the Soviets to detect the spread of American torpedoes, but when they did, Admiral Starka knew his flagship was in serious trouble. To starboard, Kalinin when to full power and surged ahead of the stricken carrier, but Kuznetsov’s damaged screws could only produce eleven knots, and the whole ship was vibrating with the effort.

In the end, the carriers death was surprisingly graceful. The two Mk48s bored in, one impacting under the stern and destroying the remaining propulsion that Kuznetsov possessed, and the other impacted her port quarter, temporarily correcting the original list, but causing unconstrained flooding at the stern. Kuznetsov began to settle as her crew gathered on the rear of the flight deck to step into the icy sea and waiting life rafts. Among them was Admiral Starka, his career now in tatters, waiting for a launch to take him to Kalinin, which had outraced its own tormenting torpedoes.

After creeping south away from the scene of action for two hours, Commander Morgan on USS Boise came up to communication depth and transmitted a burst message to CINCLANT:

“Scratch one flattop.”

**Eighth Post:**

While the Kuznetsov was sliding beneath the waves of the Arctic Ocean, USS New York City at the southwest corner of the X-Ray station patrol area was creeping south at five knots after having dispatched the Victor III several hours previous. The thrill of that engagement had worn off, but not the euphoria felt by Commander Beam at having dispatched one of the enemy’s more capable subs so early in the war. NYC’s sonar operators had heard nothing since then, however, and Beam had taken his crew off of action stations. Currently the American sub was staying above the layer, trolling its towed array below like a deep sea fishing trawler looking for its steel prey.

As the last hours of the first day of the war slipped by, however, New York City’s sonar night watch began to pick up a distant rumble in the first convergence zone, 35 miles to the east southeast. Beam, who couldn’t bring himself to turn in for some sleep even though he knew he should take every opportunity available to him at this point, walked into the sonar room to watch over his sailors’ shoulders as they slowly distinguished between sever contacts.

His lead sonar technician, eager to get his captain to stop breathing down his neck, decided to feed him some preliminary information to maybe encourage him to head back to the bridge.

“Sir, this looks big. I’m making out what looks like a Kirov, so either Kirov herself or Kalinin up here, and Kuznetsov. They sound like they’re escorted by two DDGs, but I can’t make out the type as yet. If they keep their current course and speed we should intercept their formation in about an hour. They sound to be making about 30kts.”

A thrill coursed through Beam’s veins. Getting a Russian sub was one thing, but now he had an almost textbook shot at what looked like the flagship of the whole Russian fleet.

“All right, we’ll maintain course and speed. We’ll lose them when they pass out of the convergence zone, but as soon as we reacquire and get a good range, speed, and bearing check we’ll dip below the layer and move in for a shot at the big boys,” Beam ordered.

Another thirty minutes passed as the Russian ships duly disappeared from the American sonar scopes and then reappeared right on cue about 10 miles from Beam’s boat. This time however, the lead sonarman ad some interesting news.

“Conn, sonar, I’ve pegged the Kirov-class as the Kirov herself, but the sound on the carrier is off from what we have on file for Kuznetsov, sir.”

“What do you mean?” Beam asked, walking back into the sonar room.

“Well, sir,” the sonar tech said, turning in his chair to look at his captain, “what I mean is that she sounds newer, quieter, improved, like she has new screws or something. Kuznetsov just got back from a deployment, didn’t she? They couldn’t have refitted her that fast, not with four brand new screws, certainly?”

“No…,” Beam said thoughtfully, “no they couldn’t have, unless…”

“I see what you’re thinking sir. She’s got to be the Varyag! I didn’t think she was in commission yet.”

“Neither did I,” the captain responded, “but intel has been telling us that the Russians have been ramping up their naval building, big time. You can bet if they were planning to start a war that they would want to start it with two fleet carriers instead of one. We need to get this sent up.”

USS New York City came up to communication depth and sent off a burst transmission with their contact report that seriously altered CINCLANT’s calculations for the balance of naval power in the North Atlantic.

Aboard the TAKR Varyag, Admiral Shustov, the commander of the Red Banner Northern Fleet’s Aviation Group 2, was seriously concerned. Several hours earlier an ASW helicopter had reported explosions just to the north of his projected course, indicating almost certainly that there was one of those bloody quiet NATO submarines operating there, but since then the aviation assets hadn’t been able to get even a sniff despite a prodigious expenditure of sonobuoys. Shustov desperately wanted to slow his group down so as to bring the formidable hull and towed array sonars on Varyag, Kirov, and his two escorting Udaloy-class destroyers to bear against the submerged threat. As it was, his high speed made his ships essentially blind below the water. His consternation was amplified by the paper message he now held in his hands that told of the disaster that had befallen Aviation Group 1. Kuznetsov sunk?! In the first twelve hours of the war?! He knew this news meant that the success or failure of Soviet strategy in the North Atlantic rested with his sole surviving large carrier. Despite the loss of Varyag’s sister ship, his own command, combined with the rest of the Northern Fleet assets, was a force to be reckoned with.

Shustov’s orders were inflexible, however. The fleet had to get to the open ocean at best speed to execute STAVKA’s grand strategy. But, to the Admiral’s thinking, STAVKA’s strategy was served in no way by losing its most powerful assets in the opening moves of the war. His own course, closest to the Kola and Norwegian coast, was itself a compromise between STAVKA’s obsession with getting the fleet into open water and Shustov’s hope that the more southerly track would avoid the bulk of the lurking NATO submarines.

As Shustov fretted over his orders, Commander Beam and USS New York City quietly descended below the thermal layer as they closed on an intercept course with the Soviet formation’s starboard flank. Beam felt confident in his ability to get inside the Russian screen undetected, given how fast they were steaming, but there was safety in the Russian’s speed as well. If he had to evade or alter course for any reason he would quickly fall behind the Russians. Catching up would mean generating noise, which he couldn’t do here and now.

As it happened, not evasive action was necessary, and USS New York City closed on the starboard quarter of the two speeding Russian capital ships undetected. Kirov was furthest north, between NYC and the Varyag.

Beam briefed his plan: “at six thousand yards we’ll launch two fish each at Kirov and Varyag, then I want the torpedo room to turn and burn to get a fifth torpedo into the tubes and launched at the carrier before we go deep and clear datum.”

Beam’s heart rate rose steadily as his boat drew closer to the predetermined point at which he would loose his weapons, and because of the continuous flow of coffee he was drinking that occasioned frequent trips to the head.

As New York City neared the attack point, Beam ordered, “open outer doors on tubes one through four. Flood tubes one through four. On my mark…”

Four Mk48s ejected from USS New York City’s torpedo tubes, trailing their wires behind them. The sailors in the torpedo room worked franticly to load a fifth weapon into the number one tube. Soon this torpedo too was speeding towards the Varyag at 55 kts.

Aboard Varyag, Shustov heard the dreaded report. “Tovarich Admiral, the screen commander reports multiple torpedoes incoming from the northeast!”

“Tell him to flood that area with torpedoes!” Shustov ordered curtly. He wasn’t about to let this skulking submarine, undetected or not, have a clean shot at his ships.

Soon Metel ASW rockets were erupting from the box launchers on the trailing Udaloy, lighting up the inky Arctic horizon.

New York City’s chief sonarman gave the bridge a play-by-play of their onrushing torpedoes and the responses of the Soviet ships. “They’ve turned away from the fish sir, range now 4000 yards to Kirov, 3500, 3000. Four thousand yards to Varyag. The torps have Kirov, sir. They’ve gone active. Closing, now 1000 yards, 800…”

The two torpedoes closed inexorably on the fleeing Russian battlecrusier with a 20 kt speed advantage. Three more were heading towards the more distant but slightly slower Varyag.

“Four hundred yards, two hundred, one hundred…”

The rumble of an explosion was audible through the American sub’s hull.

Admiral Shustov watched in horror as the water directly amidships of the dark shadow that was Kirov to his ships rear flashed and turned to foam, lifting the World War I-battleship-sized cruiser out of the water. Shustov didn’t know it then, but the torpedo’s warhead had detonated directly under Kirov’s keel, breaking the ship’s back. As the stricken ship settled back into the roiling water, the second Mk48 impacted directly on its starboard side. The explosion tore a massive hole along the side of the ship, flooding numerous starboard compartments on several decks. Kirov rapidly began to take on a list to starboard that started slowly but then accelerated as more and more seawater rushed in. The battlecruiser’s superstructure crashed sideways into the sea, and then Kirov was belly up, sinking below the waves with nearly her entire crew of 700 sailors and officers.

Back aboard New York City, the double explosion prompted cheers from the crew that were quickly silenced by the frantic call from the sonar room of “torpedoes in the water! They’re right on top of us sir!”

“Crash dive!” ordered Commander Beam, “all ahead flank!”

Despite Beam’s caffeine-fueled rapid response to the new threat, geometry was against him and his boat. The first two Orlan torpedoes had separated from their rockets and splashed into the sea directly behind him in such a way that their circular search patter required only a quarter turn before the seekers on both weapons found and locked on to the American sub, only a quarter mile distant. Both torpedoes followed the submarine as it dove, its screw desperately pounding the water in an attempt to claw the boats speed up from 5 kts to 32. The effort was for naught. Both torpedoes plowed through the noisemakers that Beam ordered to be ejected to try to create a screen, and his boat was moving too slow to make any radical evasive maneuvers. The first Russian torpedo impacted New York City’s screw, wrecking it and flooding the engine room. As the American sub’s engine noises ceased the boat began to descend stern-first. The second Orlan bored in and completed the destruction, impacting on the submarine’s back just below the sail, opening up the bridge to the sea and mercifully killing Commander Beam and his entire bridge crew. The broken hull of USS New York City and its now dead crew descended toward the ocean floor, joining Kirov and its crew.

Aboard Varyag, Admiral Shustov was in shock at the loss of Kirov. One minute it was there, and seemingly the next it was gone. Then his receiver buzzed. It was his screen commander.

“We got him, Tovarich Admiral. We recorded two explosions from the vicinity of our ASW rockets, and then breakup noises.”

“Very well,” Shustov returned the receiver. Good news, but it wouldn’t help him or his carrier, who were still being chased by three American torpedoes. He was going to need some luck to survive this night. He said a prayer to the God that the State told him he wasn’t allowed to believe in.

Lady Luck, or God, smiled on Shustov’s prayer. Varyag was trailing a torpedo decoy that succeeded in seducing the lead American weapon. The Mk48 exploded violently several hundred yards behind the carriers churning screws. This explosion caused the second torpedo to lose its target in the resulting acoustic chaos and also explode prematurely. That left one torpedo churning towards Varyag. As it closed, the carrier’s captain ordered a radical turn to port, not that his decoy was expended, in a last desperate attempt to create a knuckle of water to lure away the ship’s tormentor. This last evasion failed, and Admiral Shustov actually watched the luminescent wake of the American torpedo as it closed with Varyag’s port side, dozens of meters below him. Just before it impacted, one of his staff officers grabbed him and threw him to the deck, cutting his face.

The explosion shook Varyag’s entire 60,000 ton bulk. Alarms screamed and Shustov thought he could detect a slight list. Then the engines slowed, and his receiver buzzed. It was the ship’s captain.

“Tovarich Admiral, the damage is not too severe. We have some minor flooding along the port side. I’ve slowed the ship to give the damage control parties some help in shoring up the hull, but I expect to be able to make full speed despite the damage. Flight operations should be able to continue as soon as we resume our course.”

Shustov let out a ragged breath and thanked the God he hadn’t believed in until five minutes before. Red Banner Northern Fleet had had a very bad night to this point, but one of its fleet carriers and one of its battlecruisers were still afloat, and Russian strategy was still tenuously intact. Added to that was the destruction of a NATO submarine. But it had been a close-run thing, and he cursed STAVKA for not allowing him to conduct his task group as he knew how. The price for their meddling had been the lives of Kirov’s 700 crew.

**Ninth Post:**

To the southwest of the battles that were ending around the Soviet carrier groups, USS Connecticut was in a bind. In his attempt to maneuver closer to the ships passing to his east, Connecticut's captain had unwittingly put his state-of-the-art open-water attack submarine into the middle of a Soviet carrier group centered around the Kiev-class carrier Baku. This would have been ideal, except for the fact that he had barely 600 feet of water under his keel, even shallower water on all sides, and didn’t know for sure yet whether the world was at war or not. These restricted waters prevented him from using his boat’s greatest strength, the ability to go deep and cruise silently at relatively high speeds to maneuver into positions of advantage.

“Sir,” the lead sonarman told his captain, who was watching over his shoulder at that moment in the sonar room, “the formation looks like the helicopter carrier here, two Kashin-class destroyers, one of them sounds like a Mod, here and here. These two are doing lead and trail for the carrier. Then further to the west” (Connecticut was currently east of the main bulk of the formation) “is what sounds like a Kresta II cruiser. There was that frigate that passed us earlier sweeping ahead of the formation. We lost him a few minutes ago. And just know we picked up another frigate bringing up the rear. They're all moving at 8 knots, and their chances of picking us up under these conditions are better than makes me comfortable.”

“Me too,” said the captain, “and you can bet the air above us is swarming with Bears and Helixes."

Aboard TAKR Baku, less than four miles from Connecticut, the Russian task group’s ASW Commander, Senior Captain Rodnik, heard one of his staff officers call, “Tovarich captain! Baku’s towed array is making intermittent contact with a submerged target on a bearing of zero-four-zero. It is very faint, but there is definitely something there comrade.”

Rodnik had received with horror the news of the loss first of Kuznetsov, then of Kirov. He was determined that the same fate would not befall his charge.

“Order the Admiral Levchenko to put a rocket torpedo onto that bearing, two miles from our location,” Rodnik commanded brusquely.

“That is a little close tp us,” the staff officer protested mildly, before a withering look from the captain turned him back to his communication terminal to send the order. A few seconds later a Metel anti-submarine torpedo roared out of the launcher of the Admiral Levchenko, an Udaloy-class destroyer a dozen miles to the northeast, and settled onto a course towards Baku. Two miles distant the torpedo separated from the rocket and dropped into the sea.

“Torpedo in the water! Torpedo in the water bearing three-one zero!” called the lead sonarman, a little too excitedly. “Range looks to be about two miles sir,” he said, more calmly this time.

“This isn’t normal at all,” muttered the captain, "maintain course and speed for now." Then and there he knew they were at war, but he couldn’t bring himself to shoot and potentially be the one to start World War III without confirmation. The torpedo, though uncomfortably close, was too distant to actually pick him up, but it did tell him that he had been detected but not localized. The noise of the fish should actually give him a few minutes to to communicate, evade, or attack. But first he needed more information.

“Release the comms buoys,” he ordered, “report what we’ve heard so far and see if there are any orders from Norfolk.”

Back at CINCLANT Headquarters in Norfolk, the report from Connecticut provided the last piece of the puzzle regarding the whereabouts of the major units of the Red Banner Northern Fleet.

“Sir,” the J2 briefed Admiral Adams, CINCLANTFLT, “that accounts for every one. We have both Kuznetzovs, both Kirovs, both Kievs, and both of the Slavas, not to mention the amphibs that Trafalgar picked up and all the escorting older cruisers and tin cans. The Varyag being ready for sea was quite a shock, but it appears Boise was able to put Kuznetsov herself out of action. On the losses ledger we picked up New York City’s distress beacon a few minutes ago.”

“Damn,” muttered Admiral Adams. Losing not just men, but also whole ships, was a new experience for him. He didn’t like it, but he felt proud of what his young captains had accomplished so far. He hoped the rest could stay alive. He would need every boat he had, what with the whole Soviet navy surging into the north Atlantic and all of his own carriers out of position. The Russians couldn't have piked a worse time to start a war. But what did we expect? he asked himself, that they would give us a courtesy call to let us know that the war would start on Thursday?. Waiting until the Atlantic fleet carriers were out of position and attacking in the dead of winter was looking like a brilliant stroke on the Russians' part.

After sending their burst transmission and receiving the by this point expected war warning in return, USS Connecticut went deep. Her captain knew he only had a short time before the enemy torpedo circling to his west ran out of fuel. When that happened, he would be vulnerable to detection again.

“Weps,” he said to the weapons officer, “it’s time we show these Russki bastards what this boat can do.” He left un-said that he had come to the conclusion that the only way out of the predicament that he had maneuvered his ship into was to fight his way out. This was going to be tight.

**Tenth Post:**

“Weps, do we have solutions on all the targets?” asked the captain of USS Connecticut.

“Roger sir. The shots will be a little long, but we’ve got good solutions on all enemy ships. I’d recommend concentrating on the center of the Russian formation.”

“That’s what we’ll do. I want to fish targeted at each of the Kashins, and four at the carrier. If we’re going to do this, let’s make it count.”

This was where USS Connecticut would show one of the decisive advantages of the Seawolf-class submarines over the older and smaller Los Angeles-class boats. Connecticut’s eight torpedo (as opposed to a 688’s four) tubes, housed in a two-deck torpedo room, allowed her to launch a devastating opening salvo. Her captain intended to make good use of this advantage.

“Match generated bearings and shoot!”

The bid attack submarine shuddered eight times as one after another each of her torpedo tubes was emptied their deadly contents into the sea.

“All fish are running normal sir,” reported the weapons officer.

“Conn, take us as deep as we can go,” ordered the captain. “Make you course one-five-zero, speed 28 kts.”

“Course one five zero, speed 28 aye,” responded the petty officer.

Connecticut’s captain would try to use the confusion of his attack and the ability of his submarine to cruise silently at relatively high speeds to escape from the center of the Soviet formation. At this range, he knew at least some of his torpedoes were bound to miss, but if he could put some distance between himself and the Russian ships then they stood a good chance of survival, which he viewed as his primary mission at this point.

Aboard Baku, Senior Captain Rodnik cringed as he heard the report he had been dreading.

“Tovarich captain, there are torpedoes, many torpedoes headed this way!” called his staff officer. “There is much noise between our own torpedo and these new ones, but there could be as many as ten! I cannot give you a clear bearing, but their range appears to be approximately 7 kilometers.”

Ten?! How was that possible? Rodnik considered. Could there be two enemy submarines out there? How would they be working together? He thought NATO submarines usually operated alone. Whatever the situation, it appeared that his attempt to drive the enemy away has spooked him into launching a large though long-range attack.

“All ships evasive action away from the incoming torpedoes. Order all ships to go active with their sonar, and order the Admiral Levchenko to launch another anti-submarine rocket,” ordered Rodnik.

“All the Russian ships just went to full power sir, sounds like they’re turning their screws to us and...they all just started pinging sir. Multiple medium and low frequency sonars just lit up from the bearings of all the targets we’ve been tracking...wait...there’s another one sir, a low-frequency sonar pinging far to our north. It sounds like the one they put on their DDGs, but I can’t be sure at this range sir.

Luck had smiled on USS Connecticut. She hadn’t heard the Udaloy-class submarine Admiral Levchenko that had been protecting the northern flank of the Baku’s formation, but neither was the potent Russian ASW destroyer near enough to detect the American sub. In fact, Connecticut’s attack location put her beyond the reach of any of the Russian sonars now pinging away. The captain felt rather pleased with himself until...

“Con, sonar, torpedo in the water! One just dropped in right behind us, just about where we launched our fish from.”

“All ahead flank!”

Connecticut accelerated downward through the thermal layer, building up to her maximum speed of 35 kts.

“I don’t think it has us, sir,” the sonar room reported. “Fish is circling, looks like about 2000 yards behind us.

“Slow to 5 kts, give me a report on our own fish,” ordered the captain.

“We lost the wires when we dove, sir, but they all appear to be running straight and normal.”

Senior Captain Rodnik was desperately trying to maneuver the ships of the task force whose ASW defenses were his responsibility out of harm’s way. His two nearest escorting destroyers were already at flank speed, but the big Baku was only slowly building up to her maximum of 30 kts. His sonars hadn’t picked up any enemy submarines, but they had localized the tracks of eight torpedoes heading for the heart of his formation. Then, the captain of the nearest Kashin-class destroyer did something incredibly brave. In an attempt to save the carrier, he turned his ship across the wake of the bigger ship to try to decoy the torpedoes away. The ploy didn’t quite work as Rodnik had hoped, though the destroyer captain’s bravery was oddly rewarded. The four fish heading for Baku continued to home in on the carriers thrashing propellers, but the two targeted on the destroyer lost their prey and plowed past both ships in search of another target.

Baku was not as fortunate. The four MK48s closing on her continued to draw closer. The first was lured away by the carrier’s towed decoy, and a huge explosion aft marked the effectiveness of that piece of equipment. The detonation of the first torpedo caused the second to malfunction, but the two remaining bored in and struck the helicopter carrier on her starboard side. Two huge geysers on water drenched the ship’s superstructure as the explosions shook the ship like a piece of paper.

As Baku passed out of the mist and falling water, Rodnik’s first impression was that the damage was not fatal. The ship’s engines were still moving her at maximum speed, and his staff reported that the ship’s sonars were still intact. He would let Baku’s captain handle the damage to the ship. His job was to exact revenge on the NATO submarines that were tormenting him.

“Tell the aviation commander that I want every helicopter aloft, every maritime aircraft searching the area between us and Admiral Levchenko,” he ordered.

“Captain,” the staff officer reported, just after the attack one of our buoys may have picked up reactor noises, somewhere west of where those torpedoes came from.

“What are you waiting for?!” Rodnik yelled. “Tell Admiral Levchenko to put another rocket on top of it, now!”

**Eleventh Post:**

The Captain of USS Connecticut, Commander Ahab Romeo by name, was beginning to breathe easier after the chaos his torpedoes had apparently caused in the Soviet ship formation. His sonar technicians were tracking the Russian ships fleeing away from his torpedoes like spokes away from the hub of a wheel. Then came the rumble of explosions as the Mk48s exploded against the Baku. As the torpedoes were occupying the attention of the Russian sonarmen, Romeo had taken Connecticut deep and increased speed, increasing speed to 30 kts so as to clear the datum of his attack. Romeo was just about to order his boat to slow when the sonar room reported, “sir, a torpedo just started pinging to our north...range seems to be about two miles.”

“They must have caught a sniff of us when we picked up speed,” muttered the captain. “OK, here’s what we’re going to do...”

Commander Romeo explained on for a few minutes, then set his crew to work. Forward in the double-decked torpedo room the weapons handlers had managed to reload four of eight torpedoes. These they now readied for launch.

As the Russian Metel torpedo continued to search two miles the north, Connecticut turned from her southeast course to a westerly one, back towards the Baku.

“Flood tubes one, two, four and five,” ordered Romeo.

“Tubes flooded sir.”

“Launch tubes one and two at target one, then cut the wires and execute part two.”

Two Mk48s ejected from Connecticut’s torpedo tubes and sped on a pre-determined course towards the stricken Russian helicopter carrier. Immediately the American submarine turned hard to starboard until it was moving away from the weapons it had just launched.

“Fire tubes four and five,” ordered the captain.

Two more Mk48s sped northeastward towards the distant Udaloy which could still be heard pinging with its distinctive low-frequency active sonar. Connecticut once again turned sharply to starboard, accelerated to a quiet 20 kts, and descended on a southeastward course.

“Let’s hope they don’t expect us to evade towards the coast,” Romeo muttered.

Aboard Baku, Senior Captain Rodnik’s fist struck the arm of his command chair at the inability of his primary anti-submarine weapon, the Metel rocket, to find its mark. Baku had taken damage, and he just watch one of his escorting ships, the Kashin-class destroyer Stroyniy, take two torpedo hits to his north and begin to sink. Baku could still launch aircraft and fight, but his task force had been hurt and so far he had failed in his task as the group’s ASW commander. Just then he received reason for his blood pressure to shoot even higher.

“Captain!” called the staff officer, “the Admiral Levchenko reports multiple torpedoes in the water, they report they are under attack and evading to the north!”

Another officer reported, “sir, Baku’s towed array reports they hear two torpedoes bearing on us!”

Rodnik gritted his teeth. There had to be two NATO submarines out there in a area of ten square kilometers. How on earth could he be missing both of them? He had eight helicopters and maritime patrol aircraft dropping listening devices and searching for the magnetic signature of the enemy submarines within an absurdly small area. In fact, his aircraft were in great danger of colliding with each other. Why was this so hard!?

“Order the Levchenko to counter-attack!” Rodnik shrieked. “Again!”

“Sir,” the staff officer reported lamely, “Levchenko reports that they are heading north and cannot turn to bring their rocket launchers to bear until they’ve evaded the torpedoes heading towards them!”

Rodnik looked at the man, mouth agape. How could this be happening?

As USS Connecticut sped silently southeast towards the Russian coast her sonar operators noted with satisfaction two explosions on the bearing where Baku should have been, though none on the bearing of the Udaloy. Romeo hadn’t expected anything from those two fish other than to distract the capable ASW vessel enough to allow him to escape. Not that his sonar room was picking up a forest of active buoys pinging far in his wake, Connecticut’s commander could breathe a little easier. He had managed to get his boat into a pickle, but this time he’s been able to fight his way out...this time.

Senior Captain Rodnick had collapsed into a catatonic state shortly after the two torpedoes impacted the flagship of his task force. Baku was a wreck. She was afloat, but the one of the escorts was coming alongside to pass over a line. She would not be returning to port under her own power. One more capital ship on the Red Banner Northern Fleet was out of the fight.

Twelfth Post:

Commander Daniels and USS Baltimore had passed a quiet first night of the war since detecting the westward moving Soviet SAG in the hours after receiving their war warning. Baltimore had continued on their southeast course across the center of X-Ray station without encountering even a frigate or patrol corvette. That changed in the early hours of 14 February, the first full day of World War III.

“Conn, sonar, we’ve got a faint submerged contact off our port bow. I can barely make it out, but I’d say it’s at least ten miles away.”

Daniels spoke quietly. “Helm, slow to just enough so that we have steerageway. Let’s assess who this is.”

Aboard the Soviet Sierra I-class submarine Kostrama, Captain Dovgan was receiving a similar report from his sonar room. “Tovarich Captain, I detected a very faint contact just now to our port bow. It was there for just a minute, and then it disappeared.”

“Can you be sure? What is the range?”

“I could not get a range my captain, it was too faint, and then it vanished.”

Dovgan thought for a moment, then decided, “we will continue our current course. I doubt he would have heard us if we only heard him so faintly.” Dovgas was less sure of this last statement than he tried to sound. “We are very quiet. I we maintain our current slow and quiet speed we will be able to use our towed array as we slip past him to detect him...if there is anything there.”

“Yes captain,” the sonar officer responded.

Kostrama continued on a northwesterly course at five knots, her captain growing increasingly uneasy.

Back aboard USS Baltimore the situation began to become more clear over the next hour.

“Conn, sonar.”

“Sonar, aye,” responded Commander Daniels.

“Sir, we’ve got a firm track on this guy. He’s cruising at five knots on a reciprocal heading to us, just above the layer. He’s a quiet SOB. I can’t get a firm fix on type or even nationality right now. He’s going to pass us to port at a range of about 6 miles.”

“Trafalgar is supposed to be north of us,” Daniels responded, “but she should be in her own PZ. Any sub in our sector should be hostile. Still, I’d like to get a better fix on him before we take the shot, just to be sure. We’ll wait until he passes us, then turn and get into has baffles to close the distance.”

And that is precisely how it happened. Over the next two hours USS Baltimore slipped around behind the unidentified submarine and picked up speed to 8 kts until she was following at a range of under two thousand yards.

“Conn, sonar, I still can’t give you a solid fix on who this guy is. He sounds Russian to me, and if I had to guess I would say he’s one of their newer boats, maybe an Akula. He’s just too quiet for me to be sure sir.”

“Very well, we’ll continue to follow. :et me know if he makes any course changes.”

“Aye sir.”

Aboard Kostrama, Captain Dovgan couldn’t shake the feeling of being watched. He submarine had continued silently, trailing his new towed array, but his operators hadn’t heard a thing since their initial contact nearly three hours previous. His orders were to break out into the north Atlantic to support the fleet’s operations there, not to hunt submarines here in his country’s home waters. In light of that, he planned to continue on as steadily and silently as he could so as to avoid any engagement that could compromise his primary mission. He had confidence in the ability of his Project 945 Barracuda class boat. Still, he couldn’t shake his uneasiness. The sonar room was beginning to think that they hadn’t heard anything at all, but Dovgan didn’t agree. The Americans were out there...

By now Baltimore had been following Kostrama for over six hours. Commander Daniels was satisfied enough by the target’s course and speed that he was not in fact following any NATO boat. He didn’t have a classification, but anybody behaving this way in this part of the world had to be Russian. Daniels made his decision.

“Weps, I want to Mk48s on this guy, with two more ready to go if need be.”

“Aye sir,” the weapons officer responded, the turned and gave the proper orders to his torpedomen.

“Tubes two and four ready sir,” he reported a few seconds later.

“Very well, match generated bearings and shoot!”

It took Kostrama’s sonar operators several seconds to detect the torpedoes closing from directly astern. By then it was almost too late. Almost.

“Go to full power!” ordered Captain Dovgan. “Eject two decoys, one on either side, on my mark.” He waited as his sonar room called back the relentlessly decreasing range to the torpedoes even as his own submarine worked up to its full speed of 35 kts. “Now!” he ordered as the pings of the Mk48s began to become audible through the hull.

Two noisemakers ejected from Kostrama, spinning and crating clouds of bubbles to confuse the Mk48s. Dovgan had gambled by maintaining a straight course, but he had a theory about the effectiveness of his countermeasures. He thought they might prove to be more effective if he presented as small a target to the enemy seekers as possible. His gamble paid off. Both Mk48s plowed through the noisemakers bubble clouds and passed by the Russian submarine, one to either side. Suddenly, their seekers had no more targets and they continued on into the empty ocean.

Onboard Baltimore, Commander Daniels had been first gratified as his sonar room identified the surging submarine as a Sierra-I class boat, then frustrated as his weapons closed without the expected explosions at the end of their run.

“Conn, sonar, our torps missed. They are now more distant than the target. He must have managed to lure them away somehow, sir.”

Daniels clenched his fist. “Fire tubes one and three, he ordered.”

Dovgan was just about to order his boat to slow and turn to fire a torpedo back down the bearing from which the enemy weapons had come when his sonar room reported two more torpedoes inbound. His successful evasion gave him hope. If he could repeat this performance then he would have gained enough range on his tormentor that they might be unable to take another shot without increasing their own speed and thus making them audible to him. If they did that, he could fight back. If they didn’t, well, he could continue at flank speed away from the enemy hunter. His boat was faster than anything the Americans, except those new Seawolfs...

“Maintain course and speed,” he ordered, but take us below the thermocline layer. We will evade these just as we evaded the last too.”

Kostrama repeated her previous maneuver, with the same results. Both enemy torpedoes passed her to port this time. Dovgan was gaining confidence.

Commander Daniels was flabbergasted. How had this SOB managed to evade four Mk48s?! These were supposed to be the most sophisticated torpedoes in the world! Now the enemy submarine, evading at flank speed, was nearly beyond the effective range of his weapons. He had one more shot and then his chance was gone.

“Weps, this time maneuver the fish so they come in at an angle,” Daniels ordered.

“Aye sir.”

“Fire tubes two and four.”

Captain Dovgan was really beginning to believe he would survive this engagement despite the fact that he now had a third attack inbound to his baffles. His boat was making 35 kts in the deep, and he had easily evaded four of the best weapons the Americans had. He felt confident he would do the same to these last ones and then he was sure he would be out of danger. The he would go shallow and radio for the Maritime Aviation units who were supposed to be sanitizing the sea around him to come and hunt down his tormentor.

Everything unfolded as before until, “Captain, the torpedoes are diverging behind us! They are going to bring them in at an angle this time.”

Dovgan’s blood froze. How had he not anticipated this? He hadn’t calculated how his tactic would work from an oblique angle, and the geometry of the enemy attack meant that at least one weapon would attack him from the side if he turned to put the other directly behind him. In the end, he decided his best chance was to continue straight.

It was the wrong decision. Both Mk48s bored in, this time ignoring the siren calls of the noisemakers. The explosions crumpled Kostrama’s hull like a tin can, sending her to the bottom and cutting short the lives of Captain Dovgan and his sixty crew.

Commander Daniels was gratified to finally hear the death of what should have been an easy prey under the circumstances. He had been forced to expend a large proportion of his weapons, and he coulnd’t be sure that he wouldn’t need those torps in the coming days. But it was a victory. He turned his thoughts towards the east as Baltimore came about and cleared datum.

**Thirteenth Post:**

Histories of the Battle of X-Ray Station would generally record the first day of WWIII as a smashing victory for the NATO forces in the Barents Sea. The Red Banner Northern Fleet had lost its flagship, the carrier Kuznetsov, as well as one of its powerful battlecruisers, two destroyers, two amphibious transports, and two attack submarines, in addition to the helicopter carrier Baku being put out of action for the duration of the conflict, and the carrier Varyag receiving minor damage. However, the Soviets still possessed a powerful force heading into the north Atlantic to prosecute the war with a creative strategy that would present the allies with daunting challenges.

On the other side of the ledger, the allies had lost the Los Angeles-class submarine USS New York City while attacking the Varyag battle group. Worse was to come. In the late morning hours of 14 February Soviet naval aviation was able to detect, localize, prosecute, and sink the most successful American submarine to date, the USS Boise, killer of the Kuznetsov. The loss was tempered because much of the Boise’s crew, including her captain, Commander Morgan, survived the ordeal. After receiving a mortal hit from an air-dropped Soviet torpedo, the stricken submarine performed an emergency blow, surfacing the boat and allowing the surviving crew to abandon ship. They were subsequently rescued by Soviet patrol frigates and spent the remainder of the war as POWs.

The remainder of the Red Banner Northern Fleet, wounded but still powerful, re-consolidated and reorganized, and proceeded into the north Atlantic via the Norwegian Sea...