**Northern Fury 9, Hold the Line**

**AAR By Joel Radunzel**

Post 1

It's day four of WWIII in 1994 and the Soviets are steamrolling south. Over the past two days they have occupied and fortified Iceland and landed a large force at Trondheim in Norway. The Russians have built up significant air and air defense strength at Keflavik and in northern and central Norway, complicating NATO attempts to keep the SLOCs open. One of the reasons they were able to get so far so fast is that all of the US carriers were out of position when the war began. Now the nearest one, the USS *Enterprise*, which was rushed back into service after an accelerated overhaul and reactor refueling, is headed north protected by two *Ticonderoga* cruisers to try to hold the line north of the NATO convoys starting to cross the Atlantic. Going north with only one carrier at this point in the war is extremely hazardous, but the Americans have no choice.

A screenshot of a computer

Description automatically generated with low confidence

Yesterday the two Soviet *Kuznetsov* CVBGs put in to Reykjavik and Trondheim, respectively, to refuel and rearm. We have lost contact with them, but all indications are that they are coming south. In addition, dozens of Soviet submarines are headed for the GIUK gap *en route* to interdict the vital SLOCs from North America to Europe, where the epic battle for Germany is raging. Three convoys are currently at sea, two composed of Naval Reserve Fleet RoRos carrying the complete equipment of the US 24th Mechanized Infantry Division, followed by a third convoy composed of merchantmen carrying more general supplies. Overhead, a constant stream of Civil Reserve Air Fleet aircraft are ferrying men and supplies to the front.

To protect these, we have the *Enterprise*, her escorts, and air wing, supported by the British Tornados and AEW aircraft at RAF Lossiemouth in Scotland. These have been reinforced by the American F-15Cs of the 493rd TFS, recently withdrawn from Norway after helping to blunt the Soviet aerial offensive there. Canadian fighters our of Gander and Goose Bay, supported by tankers, are pulling CAP over the central north Atlantic, and US Air National Guard F-16s are running a similar patrol over the southern tip of Greenland. A squadron of Louisiana Air National Guard F-15As are ferrying to Thule in northern Greenland, where the southerners are sure to enjoy the balmy February weather.

Opposing us, the Soviets have ferried at least one regiment (40 aircraft) of Mig-29s fighters and another of Su-24 attack jets to Iceland, which they have begun to fortify with significant SAM defenses and at least a full airborne division. We can also expect to face 1-2 regiments of Soviet Long-Range Aviation bombers operating from the Kola and North Norway. The Russians are supported by very potent jamming and AEW resources, as they have been in the previous three days of fighting. Taking these out and keeping the *Enterprise* group hidden will be vital to NATO success.

We also have numerous subs, a mix of *Los Angeles*, *Permit*, and *Trafalgar*s, screening north of the *Enterprise* and east of Iceland, to hopefully thin the herd of Russian boats coming south. Finally, we have are at least a dozen Soviet SSNs/SSGNs already in the north Atlantic.

So, here we go...

Post 2

Dawn broke across the flight deck of USS *Enterprise* as the nuclear carrier steamed northeast towards Iceland, surrounded by her escorts. Overhead, pilots flying F/A-18 Hornets were aloft providing close-in CAP for the formations, while farther forward a pair of Tomcat pilots searched for threats to their airbase. The *Big E*’s CAG had ordered an ES-3A shadow ELINT bird aloft at daybreak to sniff for the electronic telltales of Soviet ships and aircraft. Two E-2 Hawkeyes were also aloft over the formation, their radars radiating so that the ships below could maintain electronic silence.

Very quickly the ES-3A’s crewmembers monitoring the aircraft’s sensors began to detect the distinctive emanations of the search radars and powerful jammers carried by Soviet Su-24 EW birds. Plotting the sources of the Russians’ electronic noise over the next half hour, the American airmen were able to deduce that the Soviets had thrown out a cordon of the potent jammers arcing around the entire southern half of Iceland. Now and there a return off of a Russian radar revealed that an unknown number of Mig-29 fighters were lurking within the electronic noise as well.

The previous four days of fighting had shown that the Soviet EW aircraft could render the American AIM-7 Sparrow missiles, with which most of the Enterprise’s F/A-18s and F-14s were armed, all but useless in long-range engagements. Immediately the CAG aboard *Enterprise* began diagraming out a plan to take down the Soviet jammers operating south and west of the island. Above decks, six F/A-18Cs sat waiting, each armed with six of the deadly AIM-120 AMRAAM missiles that had proved to be the allies’ best air-to-air weapons in aerial combat to date. Below on the hangar deck, crews were loading big AIM-54 Phoenix missiles onto F-14s in anticipation of having to counter a raid of Soviet missile-armed bombers. The AIM-54s were potent missiles, with a range of nearly a hundred miles, but trying to hit a nimble fighter with one was like chasing a Ferrari with a school bus. These weapons would be saved to defend against threats to the carrier itself.

Far to the east, north and west of Scotland, the sensors aboard the British E-3D Sentry AWACS bird were feeding that aircraft’s technicians the same story, except with an ominous twist. The AWACS’s crew were zeroing in on a separate formation of recon birds, likely Tu-16Ls emanating their own jamming signals, accompanied by one OECM aircraft, transiting the gap between Iceland and the Faroes. The controllers vectored one of the two teams of Tornadoes on CAP to strike out over the ocean to try to intercept them before they could burst into the north Atlantic in search of the convoys. Two more Tornadoes rolled down the runway at Lossiemouth to replace them.

Far to the south, French Atlantique maritime patrol aircraft were rising from western France and heading west to sanitize the sea lanes in front of the foremost convoy, which was carrying advance elements of the US 24th Mech.

Back aboard *Enterprise*, two Sparrow-equipped F-14s lurched forward on their catapults amid clouds of steam and wobbled into the sky while their pilots set a course northeast towards the nearest Soviet Su-24 EW aircraft. They proceeded under radio and radar silence, hoping to take advantage of one thing the Soviets lacked so far, airborne radars.

Post 3

For the two Tomcat pilots, the most difficult part of their mission was finding the Soviet EW Su-24. The Russian jets’ powerful jammers put out an enormous amount of energy. The technician aboard the ES-3A near could only give them fuzzy vectors to the jammers’ source through the electronic haze. When the pilots reached the general area where the enemy aircraft appeared to be circling, they began a long, banking turn, sweeping the sky with their powerful cameras to find the lone Russian snooper.

After several minutes of searching the back-seater on the lead F-14 spotted a dark shape in his TV scope. Zooming in, the dot resolved into the distinctive boxy swing-wing shape of the Su-24, its pilot flying a racetrack pattern, unaware of the danger he was in. The Americans altered course to come up on the Russian’s tail. When close enough, the lead Tomcat jock locked on to the twin-engine Soviet jet and sent a Sidewinder missile straight into its left tailpipe. The Russian crew never even knew they were under attack, but did manage to radio a warning back to Keflavik as they craft spiraled towards the sea. The Americans turned their big fighters east, heading towards the next Su-24 in the perimeter, due south of Iceland.

Relying on vectors still from the crew of the ES-3A, the two American jets entered the general area where the next Su-24 was circling and began another search. After several minutes they were unable to locate the EW aircraft visually, so the lead pilot decided to take the risk of activating his radar. His back seater did so, and immediately their AWG-9 picked up the lone blip of a Su-24 to the east. Both Tomcat pilots flipped on their afterburners and rocketed towards it.

As the American naval fighters neared missile range of the Su-24, the tables suddenly turned. The lead Tomcat’s WSO had illuminated his radar again to get a precise fix on the Russian EW aircraft. In doing so, he had inadvertently given away his aircraft’s position to the technician aboard the Su-24 who radioed the information to the pilots of four Mig-29s circling nearby to the north. These turned south and accelerated, illuminating their own radars in the process.

The Russian fighters were within fifteen miles of the Americans and on their flank. They immediately launched missiles at the intruders, forcing the F-14 pilots to jerk their aircraft into violent evasive maneuvers, unable to fire back. The engagement was short. The agile American fighters both evaded the incoming missiles while their prey, the Su-24, fled east. The pilots of the short-legged Mig-29s had been operating at the edge of their effective range and the short burst of afterburner had exhausted their fuel reserves, forcing them to turn back towards Keflavik after only one salvo of missiles. Now the Americans turned and counterattacked, downing two of the fleeing Migs with a volley of Sparrow missiles.

Having survived the ambush by the Soviet Migs, the American aviators turned their radars east to locate their original target, the swing-wing Sukoi trying to escape eastward. This they did quickly, and after a short tail chase downed it with another pair of AIM-7s.

The crew aboard the ES-3A were already detecting the signatures of Soviet replacement jammers taking off from Keflavik, as well as the radar of an AEW Helix helicopter in the Denmark strait of the type carried by Soviet carriers. More ominously, they were seeing intermittent returns from multiple Tu-16L reconnaissance bombers transiting the same area accompanied by an unidentified OECM platform. These would be the responsibility of others, however. The two Tomcat crews, short on both weapons and fuel and far from their base, turned southwest and headed for the safety of the Enterprise.

Post 4

Far to the east, in the gap between Iceland and Scotland, things were developing somewhat differently. Here the E-3D orbiting over Scotland had early on detected several Tu-16Ls and an OECM platform on a course to break into the North Atlantic. The technicians aboard the Sentry had also detected the radar of two low-flying Beriev Be-12 ASW float planes. The controllers aboard the AEW aircraft decided to vector two Tornadoes from RAF Lossiemouth out to sea to try to intercept these snoopers. The two interceptors, radars off, spread out until they were separated by fifty miles and then swept west.

The RAF had decided to keep the American F-15Cs of the now-veteran 493rd TFS in reserve at Lossiemouth. Now a draw upon those reserves began to appear necessary. The controllers on the E-3 detected four dangerous Su-27s approaching from the north from the direction of Bodo in Norway. The previous days’ fighting around the Shetlands and Faroes had shown these to be more than a match for the Sky Flash-armed Tornadoes. The pilots of a pair of AMRAAM-armed Eagles taxied onto the runway and rocketed into the sky, headed north.

Now the threats started to multiply. Two of the Tornado pilots on CAP duty north of Scotland had been shifting west to try to get a shot at one of recon birds shooting the gap. These had apparently come too close, as several Mig-29s now lit off their radars from the direction of Iceland. More troublingly, numerous Su-33s also illuminated their radars to the west. Several minutes of analysis by the AWACS controllers determined that these were headed east towards the CAP Tornadoes.

To the south, the two Tornado pilots sweeping west into the north Atlantic had outrun the radar coverage of the E-3 and now had to rely on increasingly vague directions from controllers who were tracking the Soviet snoopers solely by the Russians’ own radar and jammer emissions. After several minutes flying through where the Russian recon birds should have been, the northernmost Tornado pilot decided to energize his own radar to help his search.

The sensor quickly returned several low-flying contacts, helicopters, meaning that a surface task force was nearby. This fact was confirmed soon after when the Tornadoes RWR began beeping to tell the pilot that he had been illuminated and locked on to by either a Kirov battlecruiser or a more modern Slava-class cruiser. Either way, a missile was rising from the threat to the north to meet him. The pilot turned south and dove, turning off his radar as he did so. The shot had been made at extreme range and the Soviet missile burned out before reaching the British jet. The location of one of the Soviet carrier groups was now approximately known by the pilot, who radioed the information to the AWACS over Scotland.

Farther south the second Tornado fighter pilot decided to energize his radar. His sensor illuminated a Beriev Be-12 ASW flying boat directly ahead and low. The pilot dropped below the thin clouds to identify. Once he did, the slow-moving Russian bird was downed by a single Sky Flash into its flank which sent it cart wheeling into the ocean.

Back to the north and east the Soviet Su-33s were approaching the CAP to the northwest of Scotland.

Post 5

The Soviet naval fighters southeast of Iceland were operating beyond the radar detection range of the RAF’s E-3D over Scotland. As such, the controllers new they were there based on intermittent detection of the naval Flankers’ own radars. After a while these went silent as well. A pair of American F-15s had been directed that way to intercept, but these were operating under radar silence as well. Neither side’s pilots knew where their opponents were.

After passing several dozen miles beyond the radar detection range of the AWACS, the American pilots decided to energize their own radars. What they saw when they did so was a shock. Eight Su-33s were all around them, to the west, north, and south, heading east. The Russian aviators were apparently as surprised as the Americans and were slow to respond. The two veteran American Eagle jocks started locking up Russian fighters and launching AMRAAMs as quickly as they could switch targets. Then, with nearly a dozen missiles in the air radiating outward from the American aircraft, the pilots turned east and kicked on their afterburners, chased now by Soviet return fire.

The outnumbered Americans, having flailed around like a wolverine in a chicken coop, were saved by the chaos of the engagement. Soviet missiles went wild as the aircraft guiding them were destroyed by the AMRAAMs snapshot by the American flyers. When the last missile exploded, the two Americans were being pursued by only two surviving Su-33s. But between them the two Americans possessed only one remaining AIM-120, and another group of Soviet fighters were approaching fast from the west.

The Eagle pilots fled before their pursuers. The pilot carrying the one remaining AMRAAM managed to bring his aircraft’s nose around and launch his missile, having to brave and evade a Russian weapon in return, but his gamble paid off with another Flanker going down in flames. However, the Americans couldn’t stay on afterburner all the way back to Scotland. Eventually they would have to slow, and then the second flight of Su-33s would be upon them.

Suddenly, to the American pilots’ surprise, missile contrails flashed overhead, going west. To the right, the pilots saw more contrails, headed in the same direction. The AWACS informed them they could cut their engines. Their support had arrived. Two more Eagles, supported by four Tornadoes to the north who had been freed to come west when the Su-27s over the Norwegian Sea had turned for home, filled the sky in front of the onrushing Soviets with AMRAAM and Sky Flash missiles. The Soviets twisted and dove to evade the weapons, but one after another the broken shapes of robin-egg blue and grey-painted Russian fighters fell from the sky after flying through the shrapnel thrown by the NATO missiles.

When the sky cleared, only one Soviet fighter remained, escaping back west on afterburner. In the running engagement the NATO pilots had claimed fifteen Sukois, nearly half of a Soviet carrier’s air group. To the southwest, however, the Soviets were exacting some measure of revenge on the two snooping Tornadoes, exposed far out over the north Atlantic.

Post 6

The British pilot on the north end of the two-ship sweep of Tornadoes over the north Atlantic had been acting like a fox in a henhouse. He was at the limit of his fuel endurance and decided to unload his long-range Sky Flash missiles into the screen of Soviet ASW helicopters below him before turning back. This he did, downing three before he was reduced to just Sidewinders for armament. Then he and his wingman, fifty miles to the south, turned back east for Scotland, skirting the last known location of the Kirov/Slava contact to their left.

All was going well until four Su-33s, likely the CAP of the Soviet carrier lurking to the north, lit off their radars ad rocketed south on and intercept course with the Brit. His wingman turned north to support, but both pilots were too far from base and too low on fuel to use afterburners. Soon multiple missiles were inbound. The British pilot evaded one, then a second, but a third blew the large tailfin off his Tornado, sending the jet spiraling towards the sea.

The wingman, still possessing Sky Flash missiles, got some measure revenge by downing one of the Su-33s while it was engaged with his leader. The second Brit then had to turn and run. But he, too, couldn’t go to afterburner to escape, and the Russians closed relentlessly on his tail, finally sending two missiles into his tailpipes. That was the unhappy end of the attempt to intercept the Soviet recon birds southeast of Iceland.

Fortunately for NATO, these aircraft appeared to be screening ahead of a task force rather than searching for targets in the Atlantic, as their signatures began racetrack patters between Iceland and the Faroes. The RAF commander at Lossiemouth, pleased with the attrition to the enemy carrier’s air group, ordered two more flights of AMRAAM-armed F-15s aloft to sweep towards the estimated position of the Soviet task force in the hope of drawing out and destroying what remained of the Soviet fighters.

Post 7

Under the sea, the captain of HMS *Talent*, a *Trafalgar*-class nuc boat, was running his submarine deep to get into the Iceland-UK gap ahead of the Soviet *Varyag* carrier group. He was late getting here, having tarried in port so as to take on a load of six of the wonderful new Spearfish torpedoes which were replacing the nearly useless Tigerfish weapons. The new torps possessed a top speed of close to eighty knots, far outpacing the pathetic 35 knot speed of the Tigerfish.

“Captain, sonar,” called the chief sonarman in the nearby sonar room.

The captain set down his lukewarm tea on his armrest and responded, “What is it, Freddy.”

“We’ve got a faint contact, bearing about zero-three-zero...firming up...it’s definitely a submarine, sir.”

“Helmsman, slow to five knots,” ordered the captain.

For the next several minutes *Talent*’s sonar crew firmed up the contact. After about half an hour the sonarman reported, “Sir, it’s a *Sierra*-class boat. She’s making about five knots, just below the thermocline. If she maintains course and speed, she will pass us near to starboard.”

The captain nodded, then altered his boat’s course slightly to port in a bid to swing around the flank of the Russian.

While the submarines dueled under the sea, above the waters the flight of F-15Cs from RAF Lossiemouth was playing ferret to the *Varyag*’s air group. Already severely depleted by the early run-in with another pair of American Eagles, the Soviet naval aviators were not eager to venture out from the protective umbrella of their ship’s SAM envelope. But when the American pilots dashed in and lofted a pair of AMRAAMs at the Soviet helicopters patrolling the waters ahead of the Soviet carrier group, the Su-33 pilots had no choice. Three of them turned south to pursue and engage the Americans.

The Eagle jocks fled south, drawing the Russians away from their ships, which the Americans still hadn’t managed to locate exactly. Then, when the time was right, the two turned back into their pursuers. The Soviet pilots launched their AA-10s at extreme range, forcing the Americans to fly into the face of oncoming missiles to launch their more deadly but shorter ranged AMRAAMs before turning away from the oncoming threat.

The opposing missiles passed each other, going in opposite directions. The Russian pilots were at a disadvantage in that they had to keep their radars pointed at the Americans to keep their targets illuminated, while the Americans could open the range with their oncoming threats. The American missiles arrived first, downing two of the three Russian fighters, while the Americans easily evaded the less capable Soviet missiles. They then turned and ruthlessly hunted down the lone fleeing Russian, leaving no naval fighters above the *Varyag* group. The Americans, still armed with several AMRAAMs, were ordered back east by the Scotland AWACS to provide security for a Nimrod to definitively locate the Soviet task force.

Back aboard HMS *Talent*, the captain had made his turn in onto the starboard flank of the Soviet *Sierra*, which despite its slow speed had apparently not heard the British boat. The captain intended to disabuse him of his ignorance shortly.

Not only were the Spearfish torpedoes fast, they also outranged anything carried by the Soviet sub. The captain ordered two of the weapons launched but run above the layer so as to mask their sound from the Russian. The tactic worked. At long range the Soviet sonar operators failed to detect the two fish until it was too late. Both eighty knot weapons dove through the thermocline and detonated against the Soviet submarine, ripping gaping holes in its hull and sending it and its crew to the bottom of the Faroes Gap.

Post 8

For a while now the aerial sparring between the two sides died down as the Soviet naval air groups, what remained of them, retreated to their carriers and the protection of the Soviet escorts’ SAMs to lick their wounds and regroup. This allowed the CAG aboard the Enterprise to vector the crew of a P-3, escorted by two F-14s, to reconnoiter the area where he suspected to find the western-most Soviet task group with its long-range radar. Simultaneously, two of the airborne F-15 pilots escorted a British Nimrod to the area where the eastern Soviet carrier group was expected. The crews on both aircraft soon detected the blips on their radar scopes denoting the positions of the two Russian battle groups.

As the reports came into the Enterprise’s CIC, the picture began to become clear for the American carrier group’s commander. The western Soviet group, likely centered on the carrier *Kuznetsov*, was thundering south through the Denmark Strait at 18 knots, while the eastern group, likely headed by the carrier *Varyag*, was pushing southwest past the southeastern coast of Scotland on a course that would combine the two Soviet groups in the coming days if maintained. More troublingly, they would both converge approximately on the location of the *Enterprise*’s patrol area, possibly overwhelming the American task force.

The American commander did not wish to risk his ships, and especially his carrier, the only one available in the North Atlantic for at least a couple of days, in a missile exchange with the more numerous Russian ships, particularly if they were supported by missile-armed bombers, as they were sure to be once the American commander was forced to reveal his ships’ location. His first inclination was to launch an alpha strike on the nearer *Kuznetsov* group. The anti-surface strike package was already readying in the hanger deck, but the task group commander was concerned about the weight of the strike. Even with jamming support from his embarked EA-6B Prowlers, would it be enough to overwhelm the defenses of the Soviet group, which he knew by now consisted of at least one *Sovremeny*-class destroyer, one *Slava*-class cruiser, and a *Kirov* battlecruiser, as well as the *Kuznetsov*’s own formidable defenses? And even if the attack succeeded, his planes would need time to rearm for a second strike on the *Varyag* group.

The American commander considered his other assets and decided on a different course of action. He would turn his task force east, towards the *Varyag*, and begin to close the range to that more distant threat. Then he ordered an ELF message sent out to the three Los Angeles-class submarines sweeping north into the Denmark strait, ordering their captains to go deep and make speed runs to put themselves astride the course of the *Kuznetsov* group. The commander hoped at the very least that these potent subs would be able to take a bite out of the Soviet carrier’s escorts, if not sink the flattop themselves. If they succeeded, then the *Enterprise*’s commander would be free to concentrate his entire air group against the *Varyag*, hopefully smashing both Soviet carriers in the course of a day.

Over the next several minutes, the captains of the American submarines *Portsmouth*, *San Juan*, and *Chicago*, received and acknowledged their orders, altering course for the Soviet task group. Aboard the American boats, excitement swelled as each captain announced to the crew that they would be hunting big game in a few hours.

Back aboard the *Enterprise*, the task group commander knew that he would need to thin the Russians’ ASW screen if his own submarines were to have a chance at penetrating to the capital ships in the center. That meant knocking down the helicopters that would be swarming out ahead of the Soviet task group. The crews of these aircraft had proved to be distressingly effective at hunting down NATO submarines trying to penetrate the various Soviet task groups that had been transiting the Barents and Norwegian seas over the past several days. The commander wanted them eliminated, and his CAG had the plan to do it, a plan that would not only eliminate the ASW helos but might also draw out much of the remaining *Kuznetsov* Su-33s where they could be destroyed.

Post 9

While the CAG worked to put his plan to sweep aside the Soviet’s aerial ASW screen aside, encouraging news arrived on the *Enterprise* from 2nd Fleet HQ. A squadron of upgraded F/A-18Cs capable of employing the AIM-120 missile was being made available to the Enterprise group. The squadron was at Naval Air Station Norfolk and would need to make a long flight up the east coast of North America, including two air-to-air refueling, but once onboard they would triple the number of aircraft on the American carrier that could carry the potent missile. The air staff went to work coordinating the long ferry mission.

In the meantime, the *Enterprise*’s air group went to work stripping the *Kuznetsov* task group of its aerial eyes. Two flights of F-14s approached the Russian battle group from the south. Once they were in range, the pilots all lofted a single Sparrow missile towards the flock of Ka-27 helicopters that were patrolling the waters in front of the oncoming Soviet ships. One tandem-rotor aircraft after another exploded and fell into the sea.

The maneuver was not without risk for the Tomcats, however. To keep their radars pointed at the Soviet helicopters long enough for the semi-active homing Sparrows to strike their targets, the American pilots had to fly into the SAM envelope of the Soviet ships, then turn away and rocket out of range once their target was destroyed or the AIM-7 missed. This game of cat and mouse continued, with the F-14 pilots dashing in to knock down a Russian ASW helicopter, then being chased back out again by SA-N-6 missiles launched by the *Kirov* and *Slava* cruisers at the center of the formation. After several rounds of this, the Soviets had had enough. The Russian task group commander ordered six of his remaining Su-33s south in pursuit of the American raiders.

The F-14 pilots, warned by the controllers in the E-2C monitoring the battle, turned their noses south and fled. Most had expended the majority of their long-ranged Sparrows, and besides, experience over the past few days had taught the NATO air forces to be wary of taking on Soviet high-performance fighters with the disappointing AIM-7. They instead turned on their afterburners and ran.

The Russian flyers, enraged at the cold-blooded destruction of their helicopter air group by the Americans, pressed their pursuit hard, trying to claw enough range on the Americans to launch their own response. They rocketed south as well, and flew right into the teeth of the Enterprise CAG’s trap.

All six of the *Enterprise*’s AMRAAM-capable F/A-18C pilots, flying abreast, lit off their radars simultaneously and volleyed of their missiles, two per approaching Russian. The Soviet pilots, faced with an impossible situation, tried desperately to evade. For four of them, the effort was futile. The surviving two, with the tables now turned, turned back north and fled before the oncoming American Hornets, trying desperately to gain the safety of their task group. They succeeded, but now the F-14s returned to continue sniping at any Soviet helicopter whose pilot dared to lift his craft off the ship’s deck. *Kuznetsov*’s air group was being reduced to impotence, and to the south three American submarines were gathering.

Post 10

While *Enterprise*’s air group was picking apart the *Kuznetsov*’s ASW screen, far to the south, tragedy struck. The fast transports of the Naval Reserve cargo ships carrying the equipment of the 24th Mechanized Infantry Division had been crossing the Atlantic with no escort but two antiquated reserve warships. They had been relying on speed for protection, but as bad luck would have it a Soviet *Victor II* submarine happened to be astride the convoy’s course. The Russian skipper had unknowingly evaded the P-3 patrolling ahead of the American convoy and worked his way in close. Just after the American patrol aircraft left station for lack of fuel, the aggressive Russian put two spreads of torpedoes into the big transports, sinking several as well one of the escorting frigates before disappearing into the depths. Much of the equipment for an entire American mechanized division, meant to reinforce the epic battle now occurring in central Europe, was settling to the bottom of the Atlantic. The Americans would get some manner of vengeance a few hours later, however, when the submarine USS *Sturgeon*, ordered into the area to hunt the Russian, tracked, and eventually sank the enemy boat without even drawing a counterattack.

Far the east, the Russians attempted to make life difficult for the RAF defenders of Scotland. A flight of six Su-27s tangled with the RAF’s CAP of four Tornadoes. The Brits held their own long enough for a flight of AMRAAM-armed F-15s from the 493rd to reinforce and drive the Russians away, trading one Tornado for three Flankers. With the Soviet thrust defeated, the F-15 pilots vectored into the Iceland gap to squeeze the shoulder of the Soviet breakout into the Atlantic. The maneuver worked, as the Eagle driver pounced on and annihilated a flight of four Tu-16 bombers, three configured for recon and one for EW.

With the 24th ID convoy under attack and *Enterprise*’s airborne fighters busy splashing Soviet ASW helicopters, a new and unexpected threat developed, this time to the stream of CRAF airliners carrying soldiers and supplies across the Atlantic to Europe, as well as dependents and casualties in the opposite direction. During the day Soviet Mig-31 interceptor pilots had been testing the seam between the radar coverage provided by Enterprise E-2C Hawkeyes and the E-3 Sentries operating out of Scotland. A rotating patrol of Canadian CF-18s, supported by tankers, was covering the gap by operating out of Goose Bay in Newfoundland. So far these had been able to turn back the Soviet probes, but they lacked direction from airborne radar and were exposed over the middle of the ocean.

Enterprise’s CAG had just made the decision to shift one of his precious E-2s east to cover the gap until an E-3 from Gander came on station. Just then, the technicians aboard the E-2C reported a large formation of contacts taking off from Keflavik, headed south. They immediately vectored the patrols harassing the Soviet ASW screen on an intercept course to the southeast. However, these flights were short of ordnance, some were short of fuel, and they would need to punch it to intercept the Russians before they were in the CRAF stream. The Hawkeye’s radar operators tallied a dozen bogeys headed south before the Russians passed out of detection range. The CAG ordered his ready fighters launched and then vectored his CAP eastward as well. Every second would count in this race.

The two Canadian CF-18 pilots on patrol, informed of the threat by the Americans, tanked up from the accompanying Stratotanker and then vectored northward. They would need to use their own radars to locate the Russians, but they knew where to look. At this range from Iceland the Soviets wouldn’t have the fuel to try anything pretty. On the other hand, the two Canadians were carrying only four AIM-7s and four AIM-9s between them for this long range patrol, and they would be outnumbered six to one until the Americans arrived.

Both Canadians, after flying north for what the controllers on the E-2 judged to be a sufficient amount of time, energized their radars in unison. They immediately detected the massed Soviet formation directly ahead. The pilots split up, one turning east and the other west, before turning back to engage the oncoming Russians from an oblique angle rather than straight on. The flight leader judged that the Russians didn’t have the fuel to both chase his jets and cut the aerial bridge. He intended to force them to choose.

As the two pilots turned back towards the Russians, each selected one of the enemy contacts, locked onto it, and loosed a Sparrow missile at maximum range. Both missiles flew true, exploding and sending shrapnel into the path of two of the Soviet jets. Five to one, though the flight leader. Now the Canadians each selected a second target and fired their last remaining AIM-7s. By now the Russians were wise to the attack and had activated their own radars, identifying their aircraft as Mig-29s. The Russian pilots evaded the second attack, spoofing the Sparrow missiles with chaff and jinking maneuvers. The Canadians were down to Sidewinders as they pressed into the flanks of the Russian formation, who barely paused in their southward lunge.

The Soviet pilots had not anticipated such an aggressive attack from pilots who were so outnumbered, and as the Canadians anticipated they did not have the fuel for a dogfight. AIM-9s flashed into the Russian formation, downing two more of the Migs. Four to one, but now the Canadians were out of missiles. On top of that, one of the CF-18s had caught a Soviet short-range air-to-air missile as its pilot flew through the Soviet formation. Now the odds went down again. Eight to one, and the Canadian flight leader was down to guns.

The NATO pilot looped around to get on the tail of the Russian raiders. He hid himself in the clouds until he was close, then popped up beneath the trailing Russians and loosed a burst of 20mm fire into the belly of a Mig. The Russian jet exploded, then the flight leader shredded another. But now he was completely out of ammunition. “What do I do now?” He thought. “Ram them?” He was about to do just that when he saw puffs of explosions begin to appear in and among the surviving Migs to his front.

The over his radio he heard an American accent say, “Go ahead and back off, Canuck. We’ve got this now. Good work!”

American F-18s and F-14s, arriving in staggered order, shredded the six surviving Russians with a mix AMRAAMs and AIM-7s. The last Soviet pilot died less than a hundred miles north of the oblivious CRAF flights. The aerial LOCs were safe, for now.

Post 11

With the Soviet attempt to disrupt the air bridge to Europe defeated and the ASW helicopter screen ahead to the westernmost advancing Soviet carrier group swept aside, the drama of the afternoon turned towards the attack runs being made by the three American 688-class attack boats on the Soviet task group. The first to approach the Soviet task group was USS *San Juan*. This sub was also the newest of the trio of boats vectored towards the Soviet ships.

The *San Juan*’s captain had maneuvered her via a high speed run so that his boat was now astride the projected course of the Soviet carrier group. Now he ordered his helm to slow to five knots and ascended to communications depth. The communication mast raised, and the comm techs immediately reported numerous messages and broadcasts from the P-3 shadowing the Soviet formations, giving the exact position and formation of its ships. Two DDGs were leading the group, though the patrol aircraft had not as yet been able to identify their type. The captain judged that at least one was likely a dangerous *Udaloy*. His plan of attack called for thinning the Soviet escorts with his four Harpoon missiles before attempting to penetrate the formation. As his boat was now within range of the oncoming Soviets, the captain judged now a good time to commence his attack.

In quick succession, four missile canisters ejected from *San Juan*’s torpedo tubes and broached the surface. The Harpoons’ rocket motors ignited and sent the weapons streaking northward into the arctic dusk. *San Juan*’s captain kept his boat shallow so his ESM mast could collect data if and when the Soviets lit off their radars. He had targeted all four of his missiles on the escort in the southeast corner of the formation, which was composed of four destroyers in a box around three larger ships. The Soviets were operating under EMCON, which made them difficult to identify but also precluded their early detection of the inbound weapons. Their early warning was to have been provided by their AEW helos, which were now doing good impressions of an artificial reef at the bottom of the Denmark strait. Stripped of his airborne sensors, the Soviet task force commander had clung to the idea too long that radar silence offered him anonymity.

The first warning the Russians had that they were under attack came when the first of the Harpoons flew to the end of its vector and activated its radar seeker. The three training weapons followed suit. They quickly acquired the destroyer directly in their path, right where it was supposed to be, and made slight adjustments as they maintained their wave top altitude above the dark, choppy waters. The Soviet crews reacted quickly, as in seconds every radar in the formation was radiating. Back aboard *San Juan*, the ESM techs quickly identified the targeted ship as an *Udaloy*. The *San Juan*’s captain swore as the other lead ship was identified as a far more dangerous *Udaoy II*. These were trailed by a *Slava*, a *Kirov*, and the *Kuznetsov* at the center of the formation, which were in turn trailed by two more destroyers that appeared to be *Sovremeny*s. A powerful formation indeed, the captain though. *Enterprise*’s and the P-3s’ sensors had all noted the same information.

The Soviet defenses did their best in the little time they had. The lead Harpoon was shattered by a SAM launched from the targeted *Udaloy*, the *Admiral Kharlamov*. The next weapon flew through a cloud of chaff ejected by the target and impacted into the sea beyond. But the third and fourth missiles struck home, one striking the ship’s bow, causing major flooding. The other hit and blew apart one of the Admiral Kharlamov’s two quad-box launchers for the ship’s *Metel* ASW missiles, causing extensive shrapnel damage to the superstructure.

*Admiral Kharlamov*’s captain immediately ordered his ship to slow to three knots, both to limit the flooding to his ship’s forward compartments from the hole in the bow and to slow the winds that were fanning flames from the second hit. Medics arrived on the bridge to care for several sailors who had been struck by shrapnel and debris from the second Harpoon. After several minutes the captain was confident that he would be able to manage the fires, but some testing showed that he could not go above five knots without the flooding in the bow becoming intolerable.

On *Kuznetzov*, the task group commander made the decision to slow the entire formation. *Admiral Kharlamov* could still fight. But of greater import, when the formations’ radars had energized the extremely long-range surface search set on *Slava* had returned numerous surface contacts due south, at the extreme end of the sensor’s detection range. This, the Soviet admiral knew, could only be the Americans’ *Enterprise* group, coming north to block the Soviet thrust at the SLOCs. This was priority intelligence for Red Banner Northern Fleet, and the Soviet commander radioed a contact report back to Murmansk. In minutes, Tu-22Ms from northern Russia were vectoring towards tankers north of Iceland, and pilots ran through the bitter wind towards missile-laden Su-24 attack jets, which had been kept ready at Keflavik for just this opportunity. Back aboard the Russian ships, crews readied their task group’s impressive arsenal of big *Bazalt* and *Granit* anti-ship missiles, called SS-N-12 Sandbox and SS-N-19 Shipwreck by the NATO navies. This would be the Soviets’ best opportunity so far to overwhelm the defenses of an American battle group with a coordinated strike of sea and air-launched missiles.

Post 12

The crew aboard the P-3 shadowing the Soviet formation had noted the slowdown of the Soviet ships and correctly surmised that the southeast destroyer, now known to be an *Udaloy I*, had sustained some damage. The Soviets were still coming south, but now at a pace of just four knots. While the damage to the Russian ship was good news, the slower pace of the Soviet advance would be problematic, as it would improve Soviet sonar performance while the three American submarines approached. Aboard the *Enterprise*, where the American commander was trying to husband his aircraft for a strike on the *Varyag* group to the east, began to explore his options to force the Soviets to speed up again. For starters, he ordered his battle group to turn southeast, away from the oncoming Russians.

The captain of USS *San Juan*, noted the types of Russian ships in the formation to the north based on his boat’s ESM mast reading. After receiving an update on the Soviets’ range and course from the P-3’s crew, the captain took his boat deep and proceeded north, aiming for the weak point in the Soviet escort screen held by the damaged *Udaloy*.

To the southwest, the captain of USS *Providence* was bringing his submarine to communication depth to receive the targeting data for his boat’s missile attack on the Soviet task group. With the update on the locations of the Soviet ships, the commander ordered his four Harpoons launched on a vector for the *Udaloy II* at the southwest corner of the Russian formation. Four more missiles broached the surface of the choppy Denmark Strait, ignited, and settled into their sea-skimming flight profiles, heading northeast.

The Russians had once again turned off their radars in a vain attempt to confuse targeting for further missile attacks. All this accomplished was to once again reduce their response time for this new attack. Once again, the Soviets first warning was the activated radar seekers on the incoming weapons. This time, however, their defenses proved more effective.

The target of Providence’s attack had been the *Udaloy II*-class destroyer *Admiral Chabanenko*. This new ship, with better sensors and fire control, quickly activated its radars. SA-N-9 missiles streaked outward towards the oncoming threats, knocking down two of the Harpoons. The other two were engaged and destroyed by the destroyer’s 30mm CIWS before they could close enough even to do any damage. Providence’s attack had failed to do any damage to the Soviet ships and had instead only alerted the Russians to the probable presence of a second NATO submarine. Providence’s captain took his boat deep and turned east, planning to intercept the Soviet ships as they continued south.

Now the captain of USS *Chicago*, approaching from the southeast, took his turn to launch Harpoons at the Soviets. His weapons streaked in towards the damaged Admiral Kharlamov. The Russians, alerted by the earlier attacks, reacted well, but not well enough. One missile slammed into the destroyer’s flank and exploded in the engine room, leaving the ship dead in the water. That was enough for the Soviet task force commander. He ordered his ships’ missiles launched toward the American formation far to the south. *Granit* missiles exploded from their launchers, heading south, while the older supersonic *Bazalt* missiles arced upwards in their supersonic trajectories.

The controllers on the orbiting E-2C, who were also now tracking the Russian ships, detected the threats as soon as they were launched. Perhaps more troubling, they also detected a large formation of aircraft approaching from the northeast, from the direction of Iceland...

Post 13

The missiles launched from the Soviet carrier group came on, the *Granit* missiles skimming the wave tops while *Bazalts* flew in a supersonic arc. They would take several minutes to enter the engagement envelope of *Enterprise*’s escorts. The American carrier’s CAG ordered the airborne CAP north to try to thin the *Granits*, which were coming on in a long stream, as fast as they could be launched by the crews of *Slava*, *Kuznetsov*, and the *Kirov*-class battlecruiser *Kalinin*. The *Bazalts* would have to be engaged by the Aegis systems aboard the *Ticonderoga*-class cruisers USS *Cowpens* and USS *Anzio*.

While the E-2C’s techs tracked the southward progress of the Soviet missiles, onboard *Enterprise* the ready fighter, six F-14Ds with a heavy load of AIM-54 Phoenix missiles taxied into the catapult and roared skyward into the darkening sky, their tailpipes glowing blue. The CAG vectored them to the northeast, towards the twenty-four bogeys approaching from Iceland. The deck crew on *Big E* scrambled to get more fighters, F-18s and F-14s, into the sky as quickly as possible. To the west of the formation, the flights that had completed the destruction of the Mig-29 raid on the ALOCs were returning. They were low on weapons, and several were low on fuel, but they increased speed to try to interpose themselves between their ship and the oncoming raid.

As the *Bazalt*s nosed down and closed to within range of the SM-2MR Block II and Block III missiles aboard the Aegis cruisers, the crews of both ships energized their powerful AN/SPY-1 radars and began tracking the threats for themselves, no longer relying on the information second-hand. Both captains ordered their systems set to automatic, and in moments missiles were erupting out of both ships VLS cells, leaving long fiery trails in the arctic dusk.

As the SM-2MRs climbed, the pilots of the four fighters of the *Enterprise* CAP dove onto the sea-skimming Granits. Each pilot engaged with his long-range Sparrows first. The AIM-7s, which had proved such poor weapons to date against the nimble Soviet fighters, proved very adept at knocking down the big SS-N-19s which flew straight and level above the choppy waves. Nearly every one hit. The disadvantage for the American pilots was that they could only engage one target at a time, which meant that by the time they were engaging their third target with a Sparrow they were also maneuvering to engage closer targets with their short-range AIM-9s. Two of the pilots even used their cannons to destroy a missile before the stream of Soviet weapons flashed past, and the Americans broke right and left to clear the airspace for the Aegis system to engage low as well as high.

Far above the US CAP, SM-2s were exploding into the paths of the incoming SS-N-12s, knocking them down with great regularity. Rarely did one of the Soviet missiles require a reengagement, and those that did never needed a third treatment. In a few short minutes the sky was clear of the older Russian missiles, and *Cowpens* and *Anzio* were free to focus their attention on the remaining sea-skimming *Granit*s, which were just now beginning to appear on the ships’ radar screens due to their low altitude.

Farther to the northeast, the pilots of the ready F-14Ds, loaded for bear with Phoenix and Sparrow missiles, were coming within range of the large Russian raid from Iceland. The big AIM-54s began to drop from the Tomcats’ bellies, ignite, and accelerate into a Mach 5 arc towards the enemy aircraft. In minutes the six Tomcat drivers had launched all of their AIM-54s and now closed to Sparrow range.

The big American missiles tore into the Soviet formation, composed of a regiment of Su-24 attack jets. The Russian’s did what they could to evade, but their own heavy loads of AS-4 missiles limited their agility. Yellow flames illuminated the cloud tops as one swing-wing jet after another flew through a cloud of shrapnel. The Soviet pilots emerged from the maelstrom with only half their numbers, screaming into their radios for support from their own fighters. But the Mig-29s that were to have escorted them had been thinned during the day by the American thrusts towards the Soviet EW aircraft, and the remainder had been lost in the ill-fated thrust towards the ALOCs. A pair of Mig-31s over central Iceland did turn to engage, but they were still too far to pose a threat to the Americans. The remainder of the Russian fighter jocks were deciding that discretion was the better part of valor for this fight.

Now the Sparrow missiles arrived in the Russian formation from two directions as the ready group from the *Enterprise* and those returning from the ALOC fight converged on the bombers. The Americans were short on AIM-7s, and they quickly closed to Sidewinder and even cannon range, evading the ineffectual IR missiles launched by the Sukoi drivers in a desperate attempt to defend themselves. In minutes it was over, the Soviet raid annihilated before a single Fencer approached to within missile range of the American battle group. The American fighters, low on ammunition, turned back towards their carrier, now chased by the two Mig-31s, but without conviction on the Russians’ part.

The missiles from *Cowpens* and *Anzio* were just splashing the last of the *Granit*s at a comfortable range from the American ships when one final threat developed. Four Tu-22M bombers, which had been circling west of Iceland for just such an opportunity, had threaded the seam between the Americans intercepting the Soviet surface groups’ missiles and those destroying the Su-24 raid. Belatedly, the CAG vectored two of his pilots who still had missiles to engage this new threat, but it was too late. Eight missiles streaked towards the Enterprise as the supersonic Russian bombers turned back to fly over Keflavik and the safety of the SAM batteries there. A Tomcat driver managed to catch one of the Soviets and bring the big swing-wing bomber down, but the other three escaped.

*Anzio* and *Cowpens*’ Aegis systems easily dealt with this last threat, but both cruisers’ magazines had been seriously depleted repelling the complex attack. The CAG remarked that the squadron of AMRAAM-armed Hornets inbound after a long flight from Norfolk couldn’t get there fast enough.

Post 14

USS *San Juan*’s captain maneuvered his 688I-class boat towards the southeast quadrant of the oncoming Soviet formation’s perimeter, towards the corner where the *Udaloy* he had fired his Harpoons at would have been. His sonar operators had heard two distant explosions from the ship’s bearing, followed several minutes later by a third. He was banking on the fact that the ship was well and gone. *San Juan* proceeded north-northwest at a quiet five knots.

On the surface, the Soviets task group had completed taking the survivors off of the sinking *Admiral Kharlamov* and were now proceeding south at 18 knots again in an attempt to bring their shorter-ranged SA-N-14 missiles into range of the American task force. The Soviet commander knew it was a major risk, but with his air group destroyed and *Varyag* still hours away, he saw little choice. *Kuznetsov* and her consorts steamed on through the icy night.

Over the next hour USS *San Juan*’s captain was gratified to find his supposition correct. He had put his boat through the gap in the Russians’ ASW coverage. Past the outer screen, he approached the three capital ships in the group’s center. He was just beginning to feel confident when his sonar room excitedly reported a torpedo to port. The sonar operators aboard *Admiral Chabanenko*, the *Udaloy II* to the west, had caught a whiff of the *San Juan*’s reactor plant noises on their towed array. *Kalinin*, at the center of the formation, had launched a *Metel* ASW torpedo at the general area of the contact.

The torpedo was nearly three miles distant, no real threat to *San Juan* as it circled in its search pattern, but the American captain knew that the Russians were looking for him now. He increased speed to 20 knots and attempted to break contact towards the Soviet ships, keeping his boat deep. More torpedoes rained down from above, some closer, some further away, until the American felt he had no choice but to launch his fish at maximum range and break contact. The captain ordered four Mk48s fired, two at the Slava to the west of Kuznetsov and two at the carrier. The weapons shuddered out of their tubes and the torpedo room went through the drill of reloading as their boat turned away to starboard.

Unfortunately, the attack had finally given the Russians the sonar fix on the American boat they had been looking for. *Metel* torpedoes now began to fall in the water with troubling accuracy. *San Juan* went to full speed and evaded one, then another, but a third fired by *Kalinin* splashed down broadside to the American boat and only a quarter mile away. The Americans had no chance and the torpedo struck their boat amidships, instantly flooding the control room and sending *San Juan* and her crew to the bottom.

However, in their haste to destroy the American sub the Russians had failed to detect the Mk48s, fired at long range but now speeding into their attack runs as they acquired their targets. *Slava* attempted to turn and run away from the fish, but this only exposed the cruiser’s screws to the Mk48s’ big warheads, which exploded one after the other beneath the warship. The first wrecked the *Slava*’s propulsion, the second completely separated the fantail from the rest of the ship. The big cruiser’s bow slowly lifted out of the water, then began to slide backwards beneath the dark waves.

*Kuznetsov* was slower to turn that *Slava*, which meant she was broadside to the American weapons when they struck, tearing to large holes in the carrier’s flank. Seawater rushed in and *Kuznetsov* began to take on a list, but heroic work by her damage control parties soon brought the flooding under control. Soon, the big Soviet ship was proceeding south once again, albeit at a much-reduced speed of four to five knots. The Soviet commander, furious at his losses, was determined to take some measure of revenge on the Americans in the absence of orders from Red Banner Northern Fleet for him to withdraw his battered force.

Post 15

The *Enterprise* task group’s commander had monitored the battle around USS *San Juan* to the north, from the perspective of the crews aboard his airborne E-2Cs who reported the launches of multiple SS-N-14 missiles followed by the disappearance of the contact marking the position of the *Slava* and the slowing of the rest of the formation. The commander assumed at least one other of the Soviet ships had suffered damage, he hoped the *Kuznetsov*. Then *San Juan*’s rescue beacon started transmitting.

The commander knew the next closest sub was one of the older *LA*-class boats, USS *Portsmouth*. She would be trying to penetrate the formation from the west, right past the dangerous *Udaloy II*. The commander was willing to bet money that it had been that ship that had compromised the *San Juan*. He needed to take the *Udaloy* out to give *Portsmouth* a chance. He didn’t want to dilute the alpha strike readying in Enterprise’s hangar bay by sending penny packets at individual Soviet ships, but he only had one weapon in his task force that could reach the Russians. The Spruance-class destroyer USS *Thorne* still carried eight Tomahawk anti-ship missiles, some of the last ones in the fleet. With precise targeting data on the Soviet ships provided by the E-2s, the commander ordered *Thorne* to launch all of them.

The big Tomahawks roared out of the VLS cells on USS Thorne in long fiery columns of smoke before tipping over one at a time and settling into their flight northwards. The stream of missiles took nearly twenty minutes to travel the nearly 200 miles between task forces. In the darkness, the crew of the destroyer *Admiral Chabanenko* was slow to detect the incoming threats, but when they did they reacted quickly, launching SA-N-9 missiles and activating their CIWS systems. One Tomahawk after another fell to the Soviet defenses until only two were left. One of these was decoyed by a chaff rocket, but the last one flew into the destroyer’s hull amidships and exploded.

The damage aboard the *Admiral Chabaneko* was terrible, but her crew considered themselves to be elite and quickly brought the fires and flooding under control, though the captain quickly learned that his ship could barely make more than three knots without opening up more seams to the sea. His weapons were better off, however, and so were his sensors. His bow and towed array sonars were still functioning normally, and only one CIWS array had been knocked off of its mounting. Even so, the *Kuznetsov* task group was quickly being reduced to a formation of cripples. The commander aboard the carrier radioed headquarters asking for permission to withdraw, but received no response. That was when the *Admiral Chabanenko*’s captain called, reporting a faint submerged contact approaching from the west.

The Soviet technicians tracked the contact for nearly half an hour, losing it more than once but then requiring it, always closer to the task group. Growing impatient, the Soviet commander ordered *Kalinin* to turn and start dropping *Metel* torpedoes in the vicinity of the contact to flush out what he was sure was an American submarine.

Post 16

USS *Portsmouth*’s crew didn’t even know they had been detected until the Russian weapons started dropping into the water, uncomfortably close. The captain ordered evasive maneuvers and a snapshot of two torpedoes towards the nearest destroyer, which he was tracking by the noises emanating from its damaged hull. The enemy ship was still at long range, but it was the only target within reach. The two Mk48s sped on their way.

*Admiral Chabanenko*’s captain received the report of inbound torpedoes with resignation. He could do nothing to evade with the shape his ship was in. Instead he focused on feeding the best information he could to the *Kalinin*’s captain, who continued to salvo off SS-N-14 missiles in the Americans’ direction. After the fourth or fifth missile left *Kalinin*’s canted tubes, *Chabanenko*’s captain was gratified to hear his sonar operators announce an explosion on the American submarine’s bearing, just before both American torpedoes detonated below his own ship’s keel, breaking the destroyer’s back in two places and killing much of the crew.

Aboard *Enterprise*, the task group commander noted with satisfaction the disappearance of the contact marking the Russian *Udaloy*, then swore as his communication officer reported that *Portsmouth*’s rescue beacon was squawking. Two nuc boats in less than two hours! He might have to divert an air strike towards the *Kuznetzov* after all.

Just then, explosions wracked both the *Kalinin* and the damaged *Kuznetsov*, yellow flashes visible to the F-14s on CAP who had been inching north as the Soviet screen was whittled down. On radar, the technicians watched as the blip marking *Kalinin*’s position split in two and then disappeared entirely, while the contact marking *Kuznetsov* steadily grew more faint as the ship settled into the water, listing heavily to port.

The sacrifice of *Portsmouth*’s crew had not been in vain. While the Soviet defenses had concentrated on the older US submarine approaching from the west, to the east USS *Chicago*’s captain had used the opportunity to sneak his 688i boat to within close range of the Soviet capital ships and fire a spread of Mk48s. The Soviets never heard Chicago, whose captain took her deep and imitated a hole in the water while his sonar techs listened to the death throes of the two ships above them.

But *Chicago*’s work was not done yet. Soon her sonar room reported the thrashing propellers of the two trailing *Sovremeny*-class destroyers. Whether they were surging forward to counterattack or rescue survivors, the *Chicago*’s captain did not know, and didn’t particularly care. He slipped his own boat in between the advancing destroyers and ascended, then when he was practically at point blank range fired two fish at each Soviet ship. The Russians never even had a chance. All four Mk48s ran true, and four powerful explosions reverberated through Chicago’s hull.

The American captain evaded again. He was a professional, after all. But after several minutes he could not resist the temptation to come to periscope depth and survey his work. Through the low-light periscope he took in the sight. To the south, *Kalinin* was gone, and the port half of *Kuznetsov*’s flight deck was awash, hundreds of sailors in life vests congregating around inflatable life rafts that were being slid into the water as the ship sank. To the east and west, both *Sovremeny*s were sinking and burning, sailors jumping from the superstructures into the icy water. Satisfied, the captain ordered a message sent to *Enterprise* and anyone else who was listening.

It read: *Kuznetsov* and escorts annihilated. Go get *Varyag* for us.

Post 17

As the long night wore on, NATO forces scored more successes, and took some losses. Down south along the SLOCs, French Atlantique patrol aircraft detected and sank two soviet submarines attempting to intercept the transiting convoys. Another Soviet submarine was detected by a P-3 along *Enterprise*’s eastward course. S-3 Vikings from the carrier took over the prosecution and eventually sank a Russian *Sierra*-class boat.

In the air, the Americans began to press in onto the flanks of the Soviet breach in the GIUK gap. The F-15 jocks of the 493rd Fighter Squadron from Lossiemouth sent sweeps over the gap between Iceland and Scotland, which the *Varyag* group had recently vacated. The American veterans of fighting in Norway and now the north Atlantic ambushed two groups of Soviet recon aircraft, sending eight Tu-16s of various models down in flames to the waves below. They also used their AIM-120s to take a heavy toll on the Mig-29s sent out from Iceland to interfere. The skies behind the advancing *Varyag* were becoming decidedly unfriendly for the Soviets.

The 122nd Fighter squadron of the Louisiana Air National Guard were consolidating in the high arctic, at Thule, in northern Greenland. The pilots in their F-15As were there to defend the Arctic route against Soviet bombers headed to north America, but also to press in on the western flank of the Russian surge into the Atlantic. They set up a patrol area along Greenland’s east coast and raided Soviet recon and EW aircraft transiting the Denmark Strait. Without a supporting AWACS, the hunting was difficult. Also, Soviet Mig-31s were probing the American defenses. Several skirmishes ensued, costing three Eagles and three Migs, whose pilots were able to use their longer-range missiles to good effect versus the American AIM-7s.

North of Scotland, RAF Tornadoes and F-15s from the 493rd fended off more probes from Su-27s, with heavy losses to the Russians as well as the downing of two more of the British jets. Inexorably, the gap in the GIUK defenses was shrinking as NATO air power came to bear. It shrunk much further as the AMRAAM-armed F/A-18Cs from Norfolk arrived and, after a quick turnaround by Enterprise’s deck crew, began patrolling north and northwest of the task group, adding their weight to the F-14s and F-18s already there. Their arrival was timely, as several uncoordinated raids by Tu-22Ms occurred in the early morning hours, all turned back or shot down by the American fighters before they could launch their missiles.

Finally, with the aerial defenses of the north Atlantic largely secure, Enterprise’s CAG was ready to launch the strike he had been preparing all night. The weight of Enterprise’s air group would hit the one remaining gap in the NATO defenses, the Soviet’s carrier group centered on the carrier *Varyag*.

Post 18

With several hours of darkness left in the night, the alpha strike began taking off from *Enterprise*’s deck. Nine A-6Es with Harpoon missiles, three S-3s with the same, eight F/A-18As armed with AGM-84E SLAMs, four F-14Ds to provide top cover, and two EA-6B Prowlers for EW support. The strike refueled from KA-6s which had taken off first and topped off their tanks, then they headed east, the Tomcats leading.

A British Nimrod had been shadowing the Soviet task force all night, its crew feeding position reports to the Americans, while F-15s from Scotland had stripped the Soviet formation of its aerial eyes and CAP. Now, *Varyag* had but one surviving Su-33, and it had flown north to try to protect the Tu-16s from the Greenland Eagles. The strike package from Enterprise covered the three hundred miles between the two task forces in about an hour, heavily laden as they were. In the last few dozen miles, the F/A-18s accelerated ahead through the darkness. They would lead the attack.

As the controllers aboard the Nimrod fed the Americans data, the strike aircraft arranged themselves into their pre-planned attack formation. Then, as the lead Hornets passed within forty miles of the Soviet ships, their wings erupted in flame as two SLAM’s shot forward and dove for the sea. Moments later, the sky behind and bellow the Hornets lit up in fiery trails as the pilots of the rest of the strike launched their forty-one Harpoons.

The Varyag’s formation, like that of the Kuznetsov, had been operating under EMCON to try to confuse American targeting. This would prove to be a fatal mistake. The Hornet pilots had targeted four of the AGM-84Es to thread the gap directly between the two Udaloy-class destroyers that were screening the front of the Russian formation. The SLAM, unlike its cousin the Harpoon, was guided to its target by passive rather than active sensors. This meant that, in the early morning darkness, the first warning the Soviets had that they were under attack was when the four weapons slammed into the *Slava*-class cruiser *Oktyabrskay Revolutsiya* and exploded. The damage was as terrific as it was unexpected, and fires raged out of control along the Russian warship’s length. The Soviets’ best air defense ship was out of play.

The rest of the Soviet formation reacted quickly to the explosions at the center of their formation, powering up their radars and defensive systems. The crews aboard the two *Udaloys* activated their sensors just in time to see two more SLAMs headed for each ship. The four missiles all struck home, wrecking both of the destroyers topside and leaving them listing and burning. The entire western perimeter of the battle group was now wide open, and the sensors aboard *Varyag* and the Kirov-class Frunze told their operators of the swarm of missiles that were sweeping over the wreckage.

The A-6E crews had divided their thirty six missiles, targeting twenty at the *Varyag* and sixteen at *Frunze*. Soviet missiles began to streak upward from the Russian capital ships, joined by others from the two *Sovremeny*s trailing several miles behind. Just then, the EW specialists aboard both EA-6Bs activated their jammers, sending intense electromagnetic radiation back down the bearings of the Soviet sensors. The Prowlers’ crews also added a HARM each to the maelstrom approaching the enemy ships. Russian SAMs went wild, jinking upwards or diving into the sea, until the American missiles closed the range sufficiently for the Russian radars to burn through.

Harpoons began to explode above the wave tops as the Soviet defenses began to find their mark, but it was too little too late. In all, the Russians did well, knocking down or decoying more than half of the American weapons. Even so, six missiles slammed into *Frunze*, and nine more dove down into *Varyag*, all exploding in quick succession. Both ships began to burn fiercely.

The last American aircraft to attack were the S-3 Viking pilots, who used their six Harpoons to make sure of the two burning *Udaloys*. As the Amaerican formation turned back east, the night sky lit up with two tremendous explosions as *Varyag* and *Oktyabrsaya Revlolutsiya* blew up within seconds of each other, the *Slava* as fires detonated the SS-N-12s in her deck, setting off a chain reaction of other burning ordnance, and the *Varyag* as fires reached her ruptured aviation fuel storage. The *Frunze*’s end was less dramatic, but no less sure, as the battlecruiser slid beneath the fuel-oil laden waves, extinguishing her fires as she sank.

To add insult to injury, the sole surviving Su-33 pilot had come screaming back south in pursuit of the Americans who had wrecked his task force, only to be ambushed by the pilots of the four American Tomcats and splashed without ever getting a shot off in return. Moreover, in an attack that would garner criticism after the war, the two Russian *Sovremeny*s, the only survivors of the task force, would fall victim later in the morning to Spearfish torpedoes launched by HMS Talent, which had been trailing the Russians, as the two warships attempted to pick up survivors from the disaster.

By midday on the 18th, *Enterprise*’s commander could confidently report that he had annihilated two Soviet carrier battle groups and effectively sealed off the ALOCs from Soviet aerial attack. A NATO perimeter of fighters supported by tankers, AWACs, and maritime patrol aircraft stretched in a long arc from Greenland to Scotland, ready to pounce on any Soviet aircraft that tried to fly south of Iceland. The SAM magazines on *Enterprise*’s escorts were low on ordnance, but other than that the Americans could confidently start planning their counterattacks against Soviet-occupied Iceland.