**Northern Fury 14, Here Comes he Cavalry**

**AAR By Joel Radunzel**

Post 1

We're a week into World War II in 1994. Iceland, as well as North and Central Norway have fallen. In the last scenario, the *Enterprise* CVBG withdrew under pressure and was replaced by the fresh *Carl Vinson* group. Also, the *Eisenhower* CVBG fought its way north from the Med through a screen of Soviet submarines. Both battle groups are now approximately four hundred miles south of Iceland, ready to start offensive operations to retake the island from the Soviets.

The Soviets have not been idle. They have managed to concentrate a large amount of combat power on Iceland, including two air Divisions of fighters, including many modern ones (Su-27s, MiG-29s, and MiG-23s), an air Division of bombers (Su-24s), an air division of support aircraft, and a division of SAM batteries, mostly concentrated on Iceland's southwest peninsula around Keflavik and Reykjavik. This will be a tough nut to crack, but the carriers only have part of it.

A picture containing map

Description automatically generated

The strategy to take down the Soviets on Iceland will consist of a series of one-two punches, with the US Navy punching during the day, and the USAF punching at night. This scenario encompasses the first phase of this operation.

Starting at 0600 tomorrow, both Carrier Air Wings will conduct a massive sweep north to engage the Soviet air forces on Iceland. The sweep will consist of two full squadrons of Phoenix missile-carrying F-14s and two squadrons of AMRAAM-carrying F/A-18s. These will engage the enemy and then withdraw to rearm. The plan is to conduct this sweep three times during the day tomorrow in order to annihilate the Soviet aerial defenses on the island. Then at 1800 the USN will clear the air over Iceland to make way for a massive USAF strike coming in from the UK and Greenland during the night.

Of course, while all this is going on, the carriers and their air wings will need to defend themselves from Soviet subs and remain hidden from the Soviet bombers. To this end, ASW aircraft are up, and the air wings have aloft a picket line of EA-6B Prowlers to screen the formations with electronic noise as well as E-2C Hawkeyes for early warning. Ahead of the advancing carriers, a line of US Los Angeles-class attack boats are moving towards Iceland to clear the way for the carriers, gather intel on the Soviet defenses, and rescue downed aviators from the icy waters of the February North Atlantic.

Will the might of two full CVBGs be enough to defeat the Soviet air forces on Iceland in just twelve hours? Read on to find out!

Second Post

The two pairs of F-14 Tomcats of the Combat Air Patrols for the two American carriers, *Carl Vinson* and *Dwight D. Eisenhower*, thundered down their steam catapults and into the sub-arctic dusk. The two carriers, each surrounded by powerful rings of escorts, were about four hundred miles from each other, and each was about four hundred miles from the south coast of their objective, the southwest peninsula of Iceland. While the two pairs of pilots ascended in their big fighters and flew north to screen their floating homes, the two American battle groups continued to steam in the same direction, angling slightly towards each other to provide increasing mutual support. The savaging of the *Enterprise* battle group earlier had taught the Americans the importance of mass against the powerful Soviet forces on Iceland. Tomorrow, however, the Soviets would be getting a taste of their own medicine, when the mass of the combined air groups if the US carriers swept north.

In the carrier’s air group ready rooms, squadron officers were finalizing the plans and rosters for the coming sweep. Pilots were being sent to eat hearty dinners from the galley. Once fed, the pilots would turn in early (though few of them would sleep easily) to get some shut eye before their zero-three-hundred wakeup call. Around the ship formations, helicopters from the escorts buzzed to and fro, lowering their dipping sonars and dropping sonobuoys to screen their vessels from the ever-present threat of Soviet submarines. To the north, a picket line of EA-6B Prowlers, E-2C Hawkeyes, and ES-3B Shadows both watched for Soviet aerial threats and sent electronic noise forth to confuse any enemy sensors that tried to reach south.

The American battle groups needed to push north through the night to close the range with the Soviet bases on Iceland. This would allow the Navy fighters scheduled to engage the Russians tomorrow to remain on station longer and fly more sorties, since less time would be spent transiting to and from the carriers. But steaming closer to the Soviet bases increased the threat to the American ships as well, both from submarine and from air attacks.

The Soviets on Iceland knew the Americans were coming. It had been the intervention of *Vinson*’s air group that had saved the *Enterprise* from destruction earlier, and the *Ike* group had plowed through a screen of Soviet submarines in its transit north. But without precise knowledge of the American carriers’ whereabouts, there could be no effective attacks from Soviet missile-armed bombers or missile submarines, which were proving to be the most dangerous weapons in the Soviets’ arsenal. But the previous week of combat had taken a heavy toll on the Russians’ dedicated long-range-maritime reconnaissance aircraft, so much so that few were now available to search for the American ships.

Instead, the VVS (Soviet Air Forces) commander on Iceland decided on an unorthodox tactic to find the American flattops. At the same time as the American Tomcats were thundering off their decks, flights of Su-27 interceptors, the most capable fighters in the Soviet inventory, roared down the runway at Reykjavik airport, ascended to cruising altitude, and turned southeast to set course over the North Atlantic.

The Soviet commander determined that he did not possess the ability to find both American carriers, so he had ordered his fighters to sweep towards the probable location of the eastern one, as this one would be closer to the Soviet Tu-22M3 Backfire bombers now operating from Norway, and would thus be easier to strike once found. The four Flankers flew south through the darkening sky.

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Two hundred miles to the west of Iceland, the chief petty officer overseeing the sonar room aboard the *Los Angeles*-class submarine USS *Newport News* called, “Con, Sonar, I have a faint submerged contact ahead—designate Goblin Three—bearing zero-nine-zero, range approximately one five miles. Seems to be moving from north to south.”

The American submarine’s captain, Commander Anheiser, responded quickly but calmly, “Helm, slow to five knots. Come to new heading zero-seven-five. Let’s figure out who we’re dealing with, then slip in behind him.” Hunting Soviet subs wasn’t *Newport News*’ assigned mission right now, but if one had just happened to stumble across the American hunter submarine’s path...

*Newport News*’ course angled slightly north of their previous easterly course, and the American submarine slipped slowly and silently through the dark, icy waters to the contact fifteen miles ahead.

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North of USS *Dwight D. Eisenhower*, the two pilots of the carrier’s CAP, who had now been circling in their racetrack pattern for nearly an hour, heard one of the Hawkeye controllers call over their radios “Red Lightning Three-Five, this is Seahawk Three. Two bogeys bearing three-one-zero. Come right to three-four-five to intercept. Keep your radars off, over.” The flight lead clicked his transmit button twice in acknowledgement, then banked north and pushed his throttles forward to full military power.

Heart rates for both pilots began to climb as they flew north. The Americans knew that anything approaching from the north certainly sported red stars on its tail. Both aviators had been disappointed to see their names on the CAP mission line of their air group assignment board instead of the next day’s sweep, but that disappointment was forgotten now as they flew towards the first engagement of the night. As they flew, the pilots heard the AWACS controllers order the pair of ready F-14s standing by on Ike’s forward catapults into the sky as backup.

Third Post

The Soviet pilots flying south in their Su-27s were operating at a distinct disadvantage to the Americans coming to meet them. First, they were operating beyond the range of support from any of their electronic assets, which included A-50 Mainstay AWACS and as well as electronic warfare assets operating over northern Iceland. They were thus blind to what was ahead of them until and American plane either switched on its radar or flew within the detection range of the Russian fighters’ own radars. The Soviet aviators, knowing that they were operating within the detection range of the blasted American Hawkeyes, were not making any pretense of stealth, but were instead flying with their radars on and radiating. Instead of stealth, the Soviets would rely upon the impressive maneuverability of their aircraft to fight through American opposition and get close enough to detect the US fleet.

The American Tomcats had taken off with a mixed air-to-air loadout of AIM-54 Phoenixes, AIM-7 Sparrows, and AIM-9 Sidewinders. The Sidewinders would be of limited use, since dog-fighting at night over the water would not be the favored choice of either side. The Phoenixes, on the other hand, outranged anything the Soviets brought to the fight, and were active radar homing to boot, which meant that they could guide themselves to their target in the terminal phase of their attack profile. Their disadvantage lay in the fact that the big AIM-54s were not the most maneuverable weapons with which to engage the nimble Flankers. The semi-active homing Sparrows, on the other hand, needed to be guided to their target by the firing aircraft’s radar, though these missiles too outranged the R-73 missiles carried by the Sukhois.

As the pilots of the two American jets closed to within Phoenix range of the Soviets, directed by the controllers on Seahawk 3, each Tomcat pilot switched on his powerful AN/AWG-9 radar, acquired the oncoming bogeys, locked an AIM-54 onto the contact, and fired a missile, both pilots announcing, “Fox Three!”

The two huge Phoenixes ignited their engines and accelerated to Mach 5 as they arced upwards to the upper edge of the stratosphere. Reaching their apogee, the big air-to-air missiles then tipped back downwards and dove towards the Soviet jets, whose pilots still did not know for sure that they were under attack. Only when the AIM-54s were in their terminal dive and emitting their own targeting radars the Russian pilots begin to react.

Still, the Su-27 was an incredibly maneuverable jet, and the Sukhois were piloted by the best airmen the Soviets could train. They responded quickly, throwing their twin-engine, twin-tailed jets into violent evasive maneuvers. It was already too late of one of the Soviet pilots, however. The first AIM-54 exploded just as he was throwing his stick over. The expanding cone of shrapnel riddled the Soviet fighter from above, killing the pilot before it also destroyed both engines. The Su-27 fell from the night sky.

The second Soviet pilot was quicker on the uptake and managed to both deploy chaff to confuse the missile and get his aircraft on a course perpendicular to the threat. The Phoenix, unable to compensate for the maneuver, exploded its warhead into the empty air just behind the Russian fighter’s tail. Feeling the air buffet his aircraft, the Soviet flier turned his nose back towards his attackers and searched his radar screen for something, anything, that he could shoot back at. His only reward was to see that another of those blasted missiles was already inbound. He threw his jet into yet another violent turn and evaded this one as well, all the while trying to work his fighter closer to the Americans so that he could bring his own missiles to bear.

The surviving Soviet pilot evaded a third AIM-54, the last carried by the American fighters, and now he was within missile range, as the USN pilots had been continuing to close the distance as well. The Russian brought his radar to bear against the nearer of the two American jets and loosed an R-27 missile. Just as he pressed the trigger though, his RWR began chirping, telling him that his fighter had been locked onto by a fire control radar. His dilemma now was to evade the missile he knew was bearing down on him from somewhere ahead in the dark sky, and thus abandon the missile he had just launched, or to keep his nose pointed at the American fighter to guide his own missile in and take his chances. He chose the latter option.

Keeping his nose pointed at the American, the Soviet pilot scanned the darkness ahead for any sign of the incoming missile. There! A flicker of light high and to the left. The Russian punched his chaff dispenser and gritted his teeth. His own missile was approaching and… BOOM! The Sparrow missile exploded in the chaff behind the Flanker, buffeting the Soviet fighter but leaving it undamaged. The Russian let out a breath and refocused on his own weapon, which was almost to the enemy F-14, whose pilot was not performing his own defensive maneuver...

In his concentration, the Soviet pilot failed to notice that his RWR was still chirping. The second Sparrow missile, fired by the other member of the CAP, exploded into the Su-27s starboard side. The jet’s aviation fuel ignited, and the entire aircraft disintegrated in a yellow fireball that lit up the inky arctic night.

Fourth Post

*Ike*’s CAP, the two F-14s of flight Red Lightning Three-Five, didn’t have long to celebrate their victory. They had expended the bulk of their long-range armament in downing the two Flankers, including all of their Phoenixes, and behind the first two Soviets was coming another flight of Flankers. These had been on a different part of the Russians’ search pattern and had responded to calls to help from their compatriots, as were another flight of two from further away. With only two Sparrows left between them, the American pilots followed the instructions of the controllers on Seahawk Three and turned south. The Soviets came on riding their afterburners.

These two Russians were eager to avenge their squadron mates, and they bored in on the withdrawing Americans. Too hard. Before they knew what was going on, the Soviet pilots were dodging Phoenixes from the reserve flight of Tomcats from *Ike*. Four AIM-54s were sufficient this time to down the two Soviet interceptors, and then the four Americans turned north on the remaining two Flankers, who were arriving late to the fight. AIM-7s and R-27s crossed paths as the two sides played a high stakes game of chicken with their radars and semi-active homing missiles.

The result of this engagement was another Flanker going down in Flames, and his wingman fleeing for Reykjavik, though none of the Americans had enough weapons remaining to pursue. Overall, the Americans could be very satisfied with their performance. Taking advantage of the aerial radars, control, and jammers, they had downed five of the Soviets’ best fighters in just a few minutes with no losses. But the Russians kept coming, with more flights of Su-27s now showing up at the northwest margins of Seahawk Three’s radar display. To counter the relentless Soviets, *Eisenhower*’s CAG would have to start launching jets that were earmarked for the following day’s sweep. Reluctantly he ordered a flight of AMRAAM-armed F/A-18Cs into the air.

Despite the losses they were inflicting on the Russians, the American Battle Group was in danger. If even one of the Soviet Flankers penetrated the American screen far enough to detect the American ships, then the pilot could radio a report and two regiments of Soviet missile-armed bombers would be on their way to deliver a heavy blow. So the Soviets continued to come on, and the *Ike*’s CAG continued to feed aircraft into the fight to keep his flattop safe.

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USS *Newport News* had been working around to the north of their contact over the past hour. The American submarine was now in the baffles of what they had identified as a *Victor III*-class boat. Captain Anheiser was trying to work his own boat close enough to put a pair of Mk48s up the Soviets’ ass when the sonar room reported a course change on the contact.

“Con, Sonar,” called the Chief, “contact is turning to starboard…he’s coming about…he’ll have us soon if his turn continues!”

Damn! thought Anheiser. He wasn’t nearly as close as he had intended to be, but now he had no choice.

“Weps!” he ordered, “snapshot on the contact, tubes one and four…fire!”

Two MK48s ejected from *Newport News*’ tubes and accelerated to sixty-five knots on a course for the Soviet *Victor* six miles distant.

The crew of the Russian submarine had not known they were being tailed, but the high-pitched whine of the two American torpedoes disabused them quickly of their sense of security. But the Soviet captain had ace up his sleeve. He didn’t know exactly where the American submarine—it had to be a submarine—was at this moment, but the incoming torpedoes gave a decent idea. The Soviet captain ordered his boat to continue its turn until it was headed directly towards the enemy weapons while at the same time ascending to shallow depth. Then, when his boat was just below the surface of the choppy waters, the captain ordered, “Fire the Vyuga!”

Aboard *Newport News*, the sonar chief shouted, “Transient! The contact just launched a weapon! He…turning away now and accelerating…that launch sounded like a missile, not a torp. No screws.”

That was odd, thought Anheiser. The…SS-N-15! Russian submarines carried the RPK-2 Vyuga missile, which was essentially a torpedo strapped to a rocket that could be used to conduct stand-off attacks against other submarines…

As if on cue, the sonar room called, “Con, Sonar! High speed screw to stern! Sounds like a torpedo, sir! Range one mile! It’s circling.”

“All ahead flank! Hard right rudder.” ordered the captain. Then, “Take us down as deep as you can, helm!” The defensive maneuver forced the Americans to cut the wires on their two MK48s, which continued south autonomously.

*Newport News* almost escaped the search pattern of the Soviet torpedo, but not quite. The weapon detected the diving American submarine at the edge of its active sonar search range and altered course to pursue. Captain Anheiser knew he was in trouble when the sonar room reported “constant bearing, decreasing range.”

As the Soviet weapon closed on *Newport News*’ stern, the American skipper ordered noisemakers launched, then a radical course change to create a knuckle in the water for the torpedo’s sonar to home in on. One or the other of these evasive maneuvers worked, because the Soviet torpedo plowed into the bubbles and the knuckle and emerged through the other side to find…nothing. The weapon had missed, and *Newport News* was coming around to put yet more space between herself and the threat.

The Soviet crew was not so fortunate. Though without direction from the *Newport News* via their wires, both torpedoes managed to acquire the Russian submarine and bored in. The Soviet captain maneuvered his boat wildly and launched noisemakers, but to no effect. In quick succession, the big American weapons struck the hull of the Soviet boat and exploded, ripping the submarine open like a tin can both fore and aft. There were no survivors.

After taking several minutes to ensure that the Soviet boat was truly dead, Captain Anheiser ordered his boat back onto its eastward heading, towards the west coast of Iceland.

Fifth Post

The sparring between the *Eisenhower* CVBG's CAP and the Soviet Su-27 pilots trying to find the American carrier continued through the night, with disastrous consequences for the Russians. The American CAG kept a steady stream of fighters airborne to counter the repeated Soviet thrusts, which were delivered blindly and with increasing desperation. Before the night was out, nearly an entire regiment of Su-27s, forty aircraft, had been shot out of the sky by long-range American missiles, with no loss to the American air group other than the ordnance necessary to complete this feat. More importantly, the *Eisenhower* and her escorts remained masked from Soviet radars and thus safe from Soviet bombers and missiles.

Soviet submarines stalking the American carriers suffered a similar disaster. The captain of the most dangerous Soviet boat in the vicinity, the *Sierra II*-class hunter submarine *Nizhniy Novgorod*, had been slowing working westward on a hunch that this course would put him astride the course of the carrier *Carl Vinson*, which had intervened so improvidently to save the *Enterprise* earlier. The Soviet captain had been correct in this assumption, but slightly off in his execution of his plan. Instead of finding himself sitting astride *Vinson*'s course, he now looked through his periscope at the silhouette of an oncoming *Perry*-class frigate, part of the carrier's outer screen.

Knowing that he could not increase speed for fear of being detected, the Soviet captain decided instead to try to fight his way in towards the carrier. He would sink the frigate, then use the ensuing confusion to work further west and attack the flattop.

"Weapons officer," the Soviet skipper ordered, "fire two torpedoes at the American frigate contact from tubes one and three!"

He listened as his orders were carried out. *Nizhniy Novgorod* shuddered twice as compressed air ejected the two homing torpedoes from their tubes. Next he ordered, "Dive two forty meters and make your course two-four-zero degrees, speed five knots."

The sonarmen aboard the American frigate heard the Soviet weapons almost immediately. In moment they had discerned that the torpedoes were headed for their ship. The frigate's captain ordered up a course reversal and flank speed, while the ASW officer called to the airborne ASW helicopters and S-3s of the screen to come turn the hunter into the hunted.

The Soviet captain's gambit had been a mistake. The Americans had not known he was there, and if he had simply continued westwards rather than engaging the *Perry*, he might have achieved a shot against the *Vinson*. As it was, the courses of his torpedoes acted as an arrow pointing straight to the location of his boat, nullifying his submarine's stealth. In minutes, the swarming American ASW helos had localized him. A few minutes more, and Mk46 lightweight torpedoes were splashing into the water to neutralize the threat.

The Soviet captain did not live long enough to know whether or not his own weapons had achieved success against the American frigate. Had he lived, he would have been disappointed with the result. Deprived of the guidance from *Nizhny Novgorod*, the two Soviet torpedoes failed to locate the evading American warship. They continued on into the vastness of the North Atlantic, eventually running out of fuel and sinking to the ocean floor.

Two more Soviet submarines, a *Victor III* and a *Victor I*, achieved even less success. They were located by the American screens of the two carriers without ever detecting one of the escorts, and sunk in quick succession by aerial torpedoes. The seas south of Iceland were becoming increasingly safe for the carriers to begin their dawn offensive.

Sixth Post

Two hours before dawn, both American carriers began launching their fighter sweeps. First off the deck were the support aircraft. S-3 Vikings configured as tankers went up first, followed by more EA-6Bs, and another E-2C. Next, each carrier launched a single F-14 equipped with a TARPS recon pod. The pilots of these special mission birds stayed low and headed for the rugged south coast of Iceland. Next up were half a dozen F/A-18s and F-14s carrying TALD decoys. Their mission would be to coax the Soviet SAM operators around Keflavik and Reykjavik to turn on their radars and reveal their locations. Once these aircraft were off the deck, flight after flight of Phoenix, AMRAAM, and Sparrow-armed Tomcats and Hornets began to thunder down the steam catapults and into the brightening sky.

Three hundred miles to the north, the Russians were launching as well. The Soviet commander, after his interceptors’ disastrous failure to find the American carriers, had correctly surmised what would come next, and he intended to be ready. Modern MiG-29 fighters and MiG-31 interceptors began to launch from the two main airfields, followed by older MiG-23s. The Soviet pilots flew north and circled over Iceland’s northwestern Westfjords as the sun rose in the southwestern sky.

The two TARP-equipped F-14s streaked north at little more than wavetop level. Several dozen miles behind, at ten thousand feet, came the TALD-carrying jets. Behind them, being careful to stay beyond the margins of Soviet radar detection range, circled the squadrons who would engage the Soviet air forces. Even farther south, the new *Arleigh Burke*-class destroyer USS *Mitscher*, one of *Carl Vinson*’s escorts, began to launch twenty Tomahawk cruise missiles from its VLS cells. The weapons rose atop their pillars of flame and smoke, then nosed over to the north.

The first aircraft that the Russian radars detected were the TALD birds. The pilots of these fighters flew north in what looked like a strike formation, with the TARP birds to the front and low. The Soviet fighters north of the Icelandic southwest peninsula turned south at the direction of their controllers and went to afterburner to intercept the supposed inbound strike. The Soviets led with their MiG-29s and -23s, with the Foxhounds following in support. More Soviet jets began to launch from their airfields as fast as their pilots could taxi onto the runway.

The two formations approached each other over the waters south of Iceland. At sixty miles from the coast, the American jets released their TALDs, which to the Russian radar operators looked for all the world on their screens like standoff cruise missiles. Now the Soviet pilots had to choose: pursue the American jets, which were even now turning back south, or engage the standoff weapons that they had launched. In the end, the Russians opted in favor of defending their airbases, and vectored towards the TALDs. The Soviet pilots began to light off their fighters’ radars to target the incoming missiles.

This was all the encouragement the American fighter jocks, circling to the south, needed to wing into their own attack. As the Soviet fliers dove at the TALDs, they heard their radar warning receivers begin to chirp that American radars were tracking them. Once the RIOs of the American F-14s began to detect their opponents, they locked their powerful radars onto the Soviet jets.

The Russians were now between a rock and hard place. They had just begun to launch against the TALDs, and could not reorient against the American aircraft without abandoning their semi-active radar homing missiles. To make matters worse, they had just detected the twenty Tomahawks flashing underneath at wavetop level. Forty plus American missiles heading for the southwest peninsula was not a threat they could ignore. So they continued with their original attacks.

At that moment, the Americans engaged in their first real attack of the day. From half a dozen Tomcats flying in line abreast, the pilots rippled off two dozen AIM-54C Phoenixes, then followed the big missiles in to get within AIM-7 Sparrow range.

Seventh Post

Over the noses of their fighters, the American pilots could watch their Phoenix missiles as firefly like dots dropping seemingly straight down into the Soviet formation against the dark blue background of the early morning arctic sky. Then the missile warheads began to detonate. Broken Soviet jets began to fall out of the sly like fiery comets even as the Russians used their own weapons to knock down the TALDs and Tomahawks. The AIM-54s took a heavy toll. They had been all been targeted against the dangerous MiG-31s in the Soviet formation, and they did very well against those blazingly fast but unmaneuverable interceptors.

TALDs, Tomahawks, Phoenixes, and MiGs crisscrossed the sky ahead of the oncoming American pilots. As the last AIM-54 detonated, the surviving Soviet pilots, who had done what they could against the American cruise missiles, turned south to close the distance with their assailants. They were just in time for their RWRs to announce that another wave of missiles, these ones AIM-7 Sparrows, were inbound from the advancing line of Tomcats. This second attacks swept in among the gaggle of oncoming Russian aircraft. The American RIOs had targeted these weapons against the maneuverable but short-ranged MiG-29 Fulcrums. Several of these were smashed down into the water below over the next few seconds, but still the Russians came on, knowing that they had to close the distance if they wanted any chance to strike back. Powerful jamming from EA-6s to the south was hindering the Russians’ attempts to lock their own radars and missiles onto the American aircraft.

The Soviets had now lost nearly two-dozen aircraft to the Americans. The remaining pilots were enraged by their impotence and rode their afterburners in pursuit of the withdrawing Tomcats. The two surviving Foxhouds began to volley off their AA-6 Acrid long-range missiles in a desperate attempt to gain some measure of revenge. But just when it looked like the Soviets might catch the nearest F-14s, the next wave of American fighter pilots lit off their radars.

A squadron of F/A-18Cs had been coming on behind the initial sweep of Tomcats. The pilots of the Hornets now began to volley off their active-homing AMRAAMs at the approaching Soviet jets. The missiles flashed past overhead of the withdrawing F-14s, forcing the Soviets to break of their pursuit and evade. This new attack swept in among the Soviets, and in just a few moments the few surviving Russian pilots were fleeing back towards Iceland with the Hornets in pursuit.

In the meantime, the surviving TALDs and Tomahawks had been nearing the Icelandic coast. The Soviets were forced to energize the radars of their defending SAM batteries, revealing their location. The strength of these defenses was sobering to the technicians aboard the ES-3B Shadow ELINT bird that was monitoring Soviet emissions several dozen miles to the southeast of the air battle. They logged enough the locations for enough radars to indicate at least four battalions of potent SA-20 SAMs defending the southeast peninsula. The US Navy fliers would need to avoid the respectable bubble that these systems protected over the major Soviet bases, into which the few surviving Soviet pilots of the air battle were withdrawing.

The engagement of the past several minutes had been an unmitigated disaster for the Soviets. They had lost dozens of fighters to the American sweep without exacting any sort of revenge. That was about to change, however. The sacrifice of initial engagement had allowed time for another squadron of MiG-31s as well a half a squadron of Su-27s to get off the ground, and more MiG-29s and -23s were joining these every minute. The elite pilots of these Foxhounds and Flankers now headed out of the relatively safe skies over Keflavik to engage the oncoming squadron of American Hornets.

Eight Post

The American Hornet jocks had over-pursued the few survivors of the initial sweep, and the MiG-31 pilots now turned the tables. Racing south at almost Mach 2, the back-seaters on the Soviet interceptors locked their powerful radars onto the F/A-18s. Once they had a solid target, the Soviets launched their own big, long-range AA-6 Acrid missiles. These air-to-air weapons, the biggest such missiles in the world, were the Soviet equivalent of the AIM-54 Phoenix, and they far outranged the AMRAAMs carried by the American Hornets.

The US naval aviators, belatedly realizing their peril, turned back south, becoming now the pursued rather than the pursuers. A fresh half squadron of F-14s had been following behind the Hornets. The RIOs of these fighters now locked their own missiles onto the Russians and began loosing more AIM-54s northwards. Phoenixes and Acrids passed each other in the upper troposphere on their long-range, Mach 5 arcs towards their targets. The Soviet missiles, launched first, also began to arrive at their targets first, but not by much since the American Hornets were fleeing away from the threats as fast as their afterburners could take them. The F/A-18 pilots now twisted and turned their fighters in violent evasive maneuvers. Even so, several Hornets went down, shattered by shrapnel from the big missiles’ warheads.

Next the Phoenixes arrived among the Foxhounds, and the results were devastating. In seconds, only a pair of the big interceptors were still flying, out of what had been a full squadron. But the Foxhounds had provided a vital service. Their long-range missiles had provided sufficient cover for the Flankers, Fulcrums, and Floggers to finally close with the dangerous American jets. Now a massive furball developed about seventy miles off the Icelandic coast, with Hornets and Tomcats twisting and turning with the MiGs and Sukhois. AMRAAMs, Sparrows, and Sidewinders lept of the launch rails of the American fighters while the Soviets responding with their R-73s and R-27s. More and more aircraft joined the fray, with the remaining US Navy squadrons of the sweep arriving to support their comrades, and more pairs of MiGs joining as fast as they could take off from the southwestern airfields.

Several more American jets went down in flames, including a pair of F-14s, but despite this the Americans’ numerical advantage and better organization proved decisive. Over nearly a half hour of aerial combat, nearly every Soviet fighter fell victim to an American missile. The few survivors worked desperately to extract themselves from the unfolding disaster, but in the end only a very few of the nimble MiG-29s and blazingly fast MiG-31s managed to make good their escape. The Americans could pursue these only so far before they were in range of the formidable Soviet SAM defenses, which had minutes before swatted down the last Tomahawk cruise missiles with contemptuous ease. Reluctantly, the Americans turned back from their query.

The CAG of *Carl Vinson*’s air group, who had been controlling the American side of the fight from an E-2C Hawkeye to the south, saw that the Soviets were ceding the skies south of Iceland and ordered his fighters to withdraw. The Americans had expended most of their long-range Phoenixes, Sparrows, and AMRAAMs, and with them most of their offensive potential. They had lost nine aircraft, including seven Hornets and two Tomcats. In return, the naval fliers could claim over a hundred Soviet jets, the core of the Soviet aerial defense of Iceland. Included in these losses were entire squadrons of the best fighters the Soviets could put into the fights, the dangerous MiG-29s, -31s, and Su-27s.

The American pilots recovered aboard their two flattops after their battle, and the deck crews aboard both ships immediately began feverishly rearming and refueling the fighters for the next mission. The American plan called for two more sweeps before nightfall, when the US Air Force would take over the air offensive over Iceland’s skies. The pilots themselves went to their ready rooms for debriefing, after which they would be provided a meal in the galley before their mission briefings for the next sweep.

At the Soviet Reykjavik and Keflavik bases, most of the Soviet ground crews waited in vain for their aircraft and pilots to return. For the few survivors of the battle, their own squadron ready rooms were depressingly empty.

In the waters south of Iceland, yet another American advantage began to tell. The *Los Angeles*-class subs of the American naval screen, who had been proceeding quietly north throughout the night, had come to communications depth at the scheduled commencement of the American sweep. The captains of these vessels now directed their boats towards the rescue beacon of several of the downed American fliers, trying to rescue them before they succumbed to exposure in the icy waters of the North Atlantic. For the dozens of Soviet pilots who had bailed out of stricken aircraft, there would be no rescue.

Ninth Post

With the US air groups back aboard their carriers and the surviving Russian pilots back at their bases, the battle off the southern coast of Iceland settled into a late morning lull. The US electronic surveillance aircraft and jammers remained aloft, as did the CAPs for the two carriers. The Russians, with the heart ripped out of their air regiments based on the southwest peninsula, opted to keep their aircraft on the ground until another threat materialized.

Aboard *Ike*, the CAGs biggest concern was the carrier’s stocks of air-to-air munitions. Many had been expended fending off the Su-27s the night before, and the fighters in the sweep against southwest peninsula had expended even more. *Eisenhower*’s magazines had enough ordnance for one more battle of the type the combined air groups had just fought, after which Ike would be down to the bare minimum stocks necessary to safeguard the carrier against air attack. *Vinson*’s air group, who had not taken part in the previous night’s jousting, was in better shape, with enough ordnance for at least two more maximum efforts.

The carriers were in much better shape in terms of aviation fuel. After the flattops had launched the first sweep, the oilers Supply and Detroit had pulled up even and run fuel lines across. Striking Fleet Atlantic had mandated that these valuable support vessels not operate above the sixty degree northing, and with both battle groups approaching this line the carriers’ commanders elected to suck as much avgas out of these vessels as possible before sending them south. The carriers would continue north to close the distance their fighters would need to cover in the next two missions. With the fuel transfer now complete, the commander of the *Vinson* CVBG detached his Canadian ships to escort the supply south, while *Ike*’s detached the nuclear powered cruiser USS *Virginia* long with two *Perry*-class frigates to escort the *Detroit*. Both battle groups continued to steam north, angling towards each other to improve their mutual support.

The initiative of the battle in the north Atlantic had now passed decisively to NATO with the losses they had inflicted on the Soviet air forces in Iceland earlier in the day. Now the Americans pressed their advantage. Just before noon, the second sweep of the day began to launch from both carriers, which had not closed to within three hundred miles of the island.

The plan for the midday sweep differed from that conducted earlier. The first mission had concentrated both of the carriers’ air groups in one massive punch against the Soviet air wings based around Keflavik and Reykjavik. In this mission, *Vinson*’s pilots would continue to put pressure on the survivors of southwestern air regiments, while *Eisenhower*’s fighters would push up towards the Soviet dispersal field at Hornafjordur, on the south-central coast of Iceland, to try to draw out whatever Soviets were there.

The Americans opted not to repeat their earlier tactic of launching decoys and cruise missiles against the Soviet ground defenses. The magazines only held a limited number of the TALD decoys, and the battle groups would require these and as many Tomahawks as they could hoard in order to dismantle the Soviet SAM defenses tomorrow. Instead, a half squadron of *Ike*’s fighters, composed of both F-14s and F/A-18s, configured themselves into something resembling a strike formation and went to low altitude, making for Hornafjordur. Further south, a pair of EA-6Bs continued to provide EW support to the sweep.

The Soviet fighter regiment at Hornafjordur was composed entirely of older MiG-23s, some of which were airborne over central Iceland at the start of this latest attack. As the American formation crossed to within radar detection range of the Soviet A-50 Mainstays orbiting over northern Iceland, the Russian controllers vectored these towards the Americans. The Russian pilots knew they were outclassed, particularly after the stunning defeat of their first-line fighters a few hours before, but with their airfield under threat the Soviet pilots had no choice but to engage.

Soon the controllers aboard the E-2C directing this eastern part of the battle called to report multiple bogeys approaching from central Iceland and many more rising from the runway at Hornafjordur. Soon the Soviets had put a respectable force of Floggers into the air, and these flew out over the water to meet the American strike. A word from the controllers aboard the Hawkeye prompted the American pilots to begin ascending to meet their adversaries.

The Americans fired first. AIM-7 Sparrows lanced out from the American F-14s in the formation as they passed through twenty thousand feet. At that moment, the Russians played the one card they had left. Hornafjordur airport was defended by a battalion of SA-20 SAMS. The battalion’s commander had kept his radars on standby until American aircraft entered his missiles’ engagement envelope. That had now happened. The Soviet radar operators energized their systems and locked onto the ascending Americans. In seconds, the multiple missiles rose into the cold arctic sky from the battalion’s launchers.

Now the Americans were in a difficult spot. More than a dozen MiG-23s were approaching from the north and northeast, while SA-20 missiles were streaking in from the direction of Hornafjordur. With their RWRs screaming into their ears, the Tomcat crews now had to decide whether to play chicken with the SAMs in order to keep their Sparrows on target, or break off and evade while abandoning the missiles they had launched. The Americans opted for the latter option.

The Americans dove for the deck, trying to put the curvature of the earth between themselves and the ground-based radars that were guiding the SA-20s to them. Robbed of their radar guidance, the American AIM-7s failed to guide to their targets and became a non-factor. The maneuver paid off, however. As the American jets dropped down to below a thousand feet, the radars at Hornafjordur lost them, and the Soviet missiles lost their lock as well.

Now, however, the US Navy fliers were in something of a fix. They were down at low altitude, unable to ascend for fear of the SA-20s, with an ever-increasing number of MiG-23s bearing down on them. The Americans turned south and fled over the water, screaming for support from the rest of the fighters of the sweep. The help wasn’t long in coming. AIM-54s Phoenixes, fired by supporting Tomcats to the south, began to tear into the Soviet formation as they drew closer to the fleeing American jets, then American Sparrows began to do the same. Finally, once the initial group of American jets had cleared the projected radius of the SA-20s, the F/A-18s turned about. Once their radars had picked up the approaching Soviets, the Hornet drivers began targeting and launching their AMRAAMs as quickly as they could shift between contacts. Once all their missiles were in the air, the Hornet drivers winged over once again and dove for the deck.

More and more missiles smashed into the Floggers. Broken jets tumbled from the sky, and still the Russians’ radars could not lock onto the American aircraft through the electronic haze thrown out by the distant EA-6Bs. The Soviets’ fleeting advantage created by the SA-20 ambush was developing into yet another disaster. In minutes, AMRAAMs, Phoenixes, and Sparrows had nearly annihilated the fighter regiment based at Hornafjordur, and those American pilots who still had missiles oriented to the northwest to engage the tattered remains of Soviet airpower that was now approaching the south central coast from the bases on the southwestern peninsula.

Tenth Post

The Soviet survivors of the first sweep against the southwest peninsula had opted not to repeat their mistake of engaging the Americans to the south. After taking on to meet the new American threat, they had remained loitering to the north of Reykjavik and Keflavik, waiting for the American fighters of the *Carl Vinson* air group to come to them. As the American fliers would not risk their jets against the dense SAM defenses that the Soviets had set up over this part of Iceland, the aerial battle to the west never materialized.

Instead, what few Russian jets that did manage to rise from the two main airfields turned east and flew towards Hornafjordur to assist their comrades over the central coast. But after having the formations gutted earlier in the morning, the Soviet showing was pathetic. A few flights of MiG-29s and -31s came out from the protection of their SAM defenses to try to engage the rampaging American fighters from Ike, but the results of these tentative jabs was several more downed Soviet first-line aircraft. In exchange the Russian pilots only managed to shoot down a single additional F-14.

What finally forced the American fighter pilots to withdraw from the central coast was not so much Soviet resistance as the depletion of their long-range missiles. The naval aviators, dashing in to launch their weapons and then withdrawing to clear the airspace for their comrades, were now almost entirely down to short-ranged Sidewinder missiles, and another well-organized Soviet squadron of MiG-23s was coming down from their dispersal field at Akureyri on Iceland’s north coast. While these older jets had so far proven to be no match for the more modern American fighters, they did carry the R-27 (AA-10 Alamo) missiles that far outranged the AIM-9s. The Americans would have liked to bring *Vinson*’s air group, which had encountered no opposition in the earlier kill zone south of Keflavik, around to the east for support, but these jets lacked the fuel for this maneuver.

Instead, *Ike*’s CAG, controlling the fight from a seat aboard one of the E-2Cs from the south, decided that his air group had done as much as they could in this sweep. They would deal with the fighters out of Akureyri on the next and final sweep of the day. Obeying orders, the *Eisenhower*’s squadrons turned their noses south for home, leaving the skies above central Iceland tenuously in the hands of the Soviet pilots, who had not lost upwards of one hundred fifty of their number in a day of brutal aerial combat.

As both carriers recovered their respective aircraft, the tired deck crews immediately began working to prepare the jets for a third surge at the end of the day. Onboard *Eisenhower*, the major concern was an acute shortage of all air-to-air munitions other than AIM-9 Sidewinders. Because of this, *Vinson*’s group would have to bear the brunt of the final sweep. In a brief radio conversation, the two CAGs of the respective air groups discussed a gap that had presented itself in the Soviet SAM defenses that could allow the American fighters to actually dominate the skies over Iceland itself. They hatched a combined plan to exploit this weakness, and then went to their ready rooms to finalize it with their squadron officers. Meanwhile, the rest of the pilots were debriefed and then released to rest and eat some chow. They had a mere two hours before they needed to be in their ready rooms to receive the briefing for their third mission of the day.

Eleventh Post

The next three hours passed uneventfully in the air, but under water the ASW screens of the two carriers, which were now nearing each other as they angled towards the Icelandic coast, detected, localized, and sank a *Victor I*-class sub whose crew had the bad luck to find themselves in the patch of ocean where the battle groups were converging. By sixteen hundred hours, the American deck crews were once again spotting their fighters onto the carriers’ catapults, and for the third time that day the American squadrons winged into the sky.

During the previous sweep, the technicians aboard the ES-3B Shadow ELINT aircraft had noted the locations of the SA-20 batteries on the southwest peninsula and at Hornafjordur. The locations of these defensive systems screened the airfields from attack, but their positioning also left a gap in SAM coverage along the coastline that would allow the Americans to penetrate the airspace over Iceland between Keflavik and Hornafjordur. Shooting that gap, the American pilots could make straight for Akureyri on the island’s north coast, which was the home of the last intact Soviet squadron in Iceland.

The American squadrons spread out into successive waves as they flew north. As the formations of F-14s and F/A-18s approached the coast west of Hornafjordur, a few Soviet pilots rose grimly in their MiG-23s from the airfield at that coastal town. Half a dozen Sparrow-armed Tomcats from Eisenhower broke off to deal with this threat. The rest of the formation continued north, soon going feet dry over the rugged south coast and continuing on towards Akureyri.

The Americans were now over the rugged interior of Iceland, and this was a threat that the Soviets, even given their depleted strength, could not ignore. The fighter regiment at Akureyri had been maintaining a strong CAP over the north coast, if for no other reason than to protect the A-50 Mainstay AWACS and An-12 EW aircraft flying there. It was these support aircraft that were the real target for the Americans’ last fighter sweep of the day, if they could reach them. If not, they would have to settle for bagging whatever fighter pilots rose to defend the bigger birds.

The Americans easily swept aside or drove off the few Floggers coming from Hornafjordur while the bulk of the combined air wings began to engage the Soviet fighter regiment burning south from Akureyri. Sparrow and AMRAAM missiles shot out from the American formation, arcing northwards towards the desperate Russians, who pushed their machines frantically to close with the Americans. Their efforts were for naught. The American weapons tore hole after hole in the Soviet ranks until, finally, there was nothing left flying over Iceland that bore a red star. The pilots from the two American carriers had won complete mastery over the skies of Iceland.

The Soviet fliers had achieved one success by their self-sacrifice, however. In destroying the MiG-23 regiment from Akureyri, the Americans had been unable to pursue the Soviet AWACS and EW aircraft north. Striking Fleet Atlantic had imposed a restriction on the carriers’ fighter sweeps that there were to be no operations north of the sixty-five degree northing line. This was so as not to interfere with some vital special operations missions occurring to the north of Iceland. Now, this restriction saved the crews of the Soviet A-50s and An-12s, who would otherwise have been easy prey for the unchallenged American fighters.

Instead, after circling over Iceland’s snowy interior, the triumphant American squadrons turned south, flying back out over the Atlantic along the same seem between SA-20 batteries that they had used to get in. No Soviet aircraft rose to pursue. If any Russian fighters were left, they had finally decided to practice the better part of valor.

The sky was darkening at eighteen hundred hours as the last American Tomcat flew south across the sixty-two degree line, leaving behind them a shattered Soviet air force in Iceland. Nearly two hundred Soviet fighters had been shot down in twenty-four hours of combat, to a mere eleven on the American side. On top of that, the American task forces and submarines had combined to sink six Soviet nuclear submarines. The two carrier groups, now within easy mutually supporting distance, had turned back south to link up with replenishment ships, whose crews would re-stock the flattops magazines for the next day’s missions.

For the Soviets, the night would bring no rest. As the last US Navy fighters disappeared off the Russian radar screens, to the east the US Air Force was mustering a massive strike from bases in Canada and Greenland to smash the Soviet SAM defenses and begin to pave the way for the Marines to recapture Iceland.