**Northern Fury #14 – Hear Comes the Cavalry**

**AAR by fitzpatv, Oct 2021**

The Eisenhower and Carl Vinson carrier groups are now in position and must (deep breath) take on the formidable Soviet air defences in Iceland. The declared objective is to achieve air superiority over the Reykjanes Peninsula (Reykjavik and Keflavik). It is unclear whether or not this involves destroying the SAMs or just the fighter CAP. There is a suggested plan which involves hitting radars and SAM sites with TLAMs, but the USAF intend to make SEAD a major part of their strike the following evening (for which this paves the way). There are no pre-set victory thresholds for this scenario, which reflects this uncertainty. Overall, I felt it best to just play sensibly and see what happened.  
  
You can only play as NATO. To do the job in 24 hours, you have 115 available Tomcats and Hornets armed with a variety of kit (Phoenix, AMRAAM, Sparrow, TALDs, HARMs, Harpoons, Mavericks, SLAMs and recon pods) plus an authorised maximum of 50 ship-launched TLAMs. Backup is provided by escorting cruisers, destroyers and frigates and five SSNs, plus tanker, AEW, ASW, SEAD and ELINT aircraft.  
  
Ranged against this are about 200 Soviet fighters, ranging from Foxhounds to Model G Floggers, multiple high-end SAM batteries, a regiment each of Backfires and Fencers, EW, AEW and recon planes, tankers and about five SSNs, none of which carry missiles. There is no need to worry about the enemy surface or carrier fleets.  
  
NATO is under a number of operational constraints. Ships should keep below 60 degrees N, especially the AOEs Detroit and Supply. Nothing should go N of 65 degrees (enforced by an exclusion zone) and support aircraft should stay S of 64 degrees. All aircraft need to be S of 62 degrees (marked on map) by the end of the game, to avoid the risk of friendly fire when the USAF arrive for their strike.  
  
There are no neutrals or biologics, so all units can be set to Weapons Free if you wish. In practice, I only did this for ASW, as I didn’t want planes blazing away at unsuitable targets.  
  
Munitions are constrained. There are very few air-to-ground weapons and all are outranged by the enemy Gargoyle SAMs, making them virtually useless. A number of aircraft have to be left on unsuitable loadouts, because there’s nothing else available, while others have ready times which exceed the length of the scenario!. It takes time to ready your ASW planes and you have to make the most of those aloft at the start. The Eisenhower group is chronically short of Phoenixes and the Vinson group don’t have much spare ASW ammo. All-in-all, you have to wonder whether you have enough missiles to destroy the Soviet fighters. One target, one shot is a vital economy. There are no Sentries or Orions, so you are stuck with limited-endurance AEW and ASW aircraft.  
  
I started with my ships’ radars off, relying on Hawkeyes to detect any incoming strikes and posting one well E of Eisenhower, in the direction of Norway. During the carriers’ initial approach from 400-450nm away from Reykjavik, I steered them closer together to provide better mutual support. There was the option of detaching the two AOEs, but I deemed them safer with the fleet. All subs were put on Creep, Just Over the Layer.  
  
The suggested plan in the Briefing is OK as a general template, but has some serious flaws. Fighters with TARPS recon pods are completely impractical given the Gargoyles, which also make the suggested TLAM strike (with or without TALDS decoys) one hell of a long shot.  
  
Probably the most effective way to kill the enemy SAM sites is to shell them with the escorts, but you don’t have time to get them close enough, to say nothing of the increased risk from Soviet aircraft that close to Iceland.  
  
Here’s how it went.  
  
21/2/94 18:00Z: I soon realised that I needed to move at cruise speed to get into reasonable strike range (about 200nm) in decent time, so accepted the inherent sub risk. The Soviets proved to have outlying air bases at Hornafjordur in SE Iceland and Akureyri in the N. All of their radars were ‘dark’ and the mobile SAMs were all hidden. Only a few Foxhounds were aloft, plus Mainstays, recon Badgers and EW Fencers back behind the 65 degrees N exclusion zone.  
  
Fears that the Russians would just stay home were allayed somewhat when a swarm of Flankers headed towards a patrol zone NW of the Eisenhower group. As they neared this, they lost most of their jammer cover. I sent a group of Hornets and Tomcats to engage and shot all 22 of them down without loss, using 33 Phoenixes and 11 AMRAAMs for exactly two shots per plane. Soviet aircraft score two points and NATO planes three, regardless of type. Encouraging start!. The superior range of the Phoenix and ‘shoot-and-scoot’ ability of the AMRAAM were decisive.  
  
19:00 : A Greyhound transport transferred from Vinson to Eisenhower by pre-set Mission and another flew down to Lajes in the Azores. Quite what this ‘COD Transfer’ was about I have no idea and it scored no points.  
  
Meanwhile, a Sierra II SSN approached the Vinson group from the NE and was disposed of by a Seasprite from the frigate Kauffman (25VP).  
  
22:00 : The AI made a well-co-ordinated sub attack across the map, causing me to divide my attention, which is always bad news. Creeping to the W of Iceland, the SSN Newport News detected a Victor III. She was in an advantageous position, behind and to starboard of the Soviet sub, so I tried stalking her. Unfortunately, I wasn’t going to get into range with both vessels moving at 5 knots. Upping my speed to 7 knots was enough to get detected and the Victor spun round. Running wasn’t an option, so I fired three torpedoes at kinematic range. This had the desired effect of causing the Russian to evade withut firing back. However, she did so successfully and came back, out for blood. I repeated the process and, this time, used the respite to head away (a long way away) as deep as possible at Flank.  
  
Meanwhile, USS Scranton, running ahead of the Vinson group, detected another SSN and attacked under AI control while I was pre-occupied with the Victor. The sub fled and betrayed the fact that she was an Alfa by doing 42 knots. As Scranton, confident in her torpedo range advantage, tried to maintain sonar contact, two Vikings winged to the hunt. It wasn’t so simple, however, as this was probably the Alfa that had proved such a slippery customer in Keflavik Capers (the K-316). As before, she dove very deep, beyond torpedo range and shot-off to the SW. Seriously concerned about her slipping through and using her evasive powers to hit the carrier from the depths, I set-up a Mission across her likely path and rushed planes there. I needn’t have worried, though, as she just reversed course and went back above the layer. Scranton ruined the first attempt to kill her by firing torpedoes and spooking her just before the Viking struck, but the Alfa came back for another go and, this time, her luck finally ran out. I hope the Russians never learn how to use these properly.  
  
While all of this was going on, a second Victor III came-in NW of the Eisenhower group and attacked with torpedoes at kinematic range. The Spanish frigate Numancia (back from the dead), managed to evade and, as other ships made haste out of the track of the tinfish, her Seahawk sent the SSN to the bottom. All of this took until about 01:00Z on 22nd February.  
  
01:00 : Russian air activity had been very limited since their Flanker disaster. The patrolling Foxhounds were N of Keflavik, where the Gargoyles could shield them from Phoenix-armed Tomcats, while the support aircraft were safe in the exclusion zone. The Foxhounds could counter any attempt to hit the airports with TLAMs and the SAMs were dark and invisible. Enemy jamming made things even worse. There seemed to be some scope for sniping at the MiGs from the W and I’d just sent a lone Tomcat on a ‘proof of concept’ mission when, to my relief, a great swarm of fighters lifted-off. The Tomcat downed a Flanker and slipped away.  
  
02:00 : As the Russians headed for a patrol zone SW of Keflavik, I sent-in heavily-armed Tomcats from Vinson, two pairs quickly culling eight of the dangerous Foxhounds due to their slight range advantage.  
  
Unfortunately, with my attention on this fight, a trailing Victor I popped-up SW of the Eisenhower group and sank the luckless Numancia, which has been a magnet for trouble all campaign. This cost 15VP and a lot of worry, as the SSN’s position wasn’t precisely known and there was a real risk of her running amok. Broke-off from the air battle and threw lots of ASW planes into an intensive search. I eventually found that the Victor was exactly where her attack had suggested her to be and hadn’t moved. HMS Beaver’s Lynx then put an end to her.  
  
Left under AI control, my fighters took down another octet of MiG-31s, but lost three Tomcats and a supporting Hawkeye.  
  
03:00 : Returning to the air battle, I lost two more Tomcats for eight more Foxhounds and a Flogger. The losses occurred when I missed with my initial shots, then stuck around for a follow-up, one duel seeing both contestants downed. The problem with the Phoenix is that it has to be watched onto the target, which can be very risky when the enemy have missiles with a range only 30nm less and are travelling at 1,350 knots. Perhaps I should run away more, but you can’t outrun a Foxhound.  
  
04:00 : I received a daft message suggesting I send TARPS recon flights over Keflavik, which would have been suicide, especially with the air battle raging. In this phase, another 17 Foxhounds and three Fulcrums went down for two Tomcats.  
  
05:00 : By now, Vinson was almost out of ready Phoenixes, but the Russians were definitely not out of fighters!. I was now feeding-in my AMRAAM-armed Hornets which, with the Foxhounds almost exterminated, could use ‘shoot-and-scoot’ against the less-formidable Fulcrums and Floggers. This was one-sided, with 10 Floggers, 10 Fulcrums and even 7 Flankers destroyed without loss. In the middle of this, I snuck in a TALD decoy run but, predictably, the devices were swatted by enemy fighters without disturbing the SAMs.  
  
06:00 : The colossal air battle SW of Iceland was becoming a massacre, with another 9 Floggers, 6 Fulcrums, a Flanker and two Badger EW planes butchered without loss. What proved to be the 42nd and last Foxhound made a run at the Eisenhower group and, with no Phoenix-armed aircraft around to stop her, managed to destroy a Viking before committing suicide against our SAMs.  
  
07:00 : Still the aerial clashes continued, with another 19 assorted Soviet fighters (mostly Fulcrums) eliminated for the loss of a Hornet which strayed into Gargoyle range.  
  
While this was going-on, the enemy reacted to the last message from the final Foxhound and sent a cloud of Fencers against the Eisenhower. I’d been expecting this and unleashed my reserved Sparrow-armed fighters, with a few AMRAAM planes as backstop. The need to close and use Sidewinders once out of Sparrows cost us three Tomcats to the short-ranged but accurate Aphids, but it was otherwise a ‘Fencer party’, with 35 bandits shot down and no missiles going anywhere near the fleet. I’ve now destroyed this enemy regiment at least three times in the campaign.  
  
By now, it was apparent that the Russians had three Gargoyle battalions near Keflavik, to say nothing of lesser SAMs. Some chance of getting anything past that lot…  
  
08:00 : Our detached Hawkeye spotted a big Backfire strike approaching from the direction of Norway. Again, there was a plan and Eisenhower launched her AMRAAM-armed Hornets, Vinson sending re-armed Phoenix planes across in support. Some fighters stayed over the carrier as a last-ditch defence and Prowlers supported the ships’ jamming efforts. However, things did not work-out smoothly. Suddenly, a score or more Floggers lifted-off from Hornafjordur and counter-attacked Eisenhower’s Hornets. Worse, our planes weren’t quite able to intercept the Backfires before they launched their Kitchen missiles, 44 in all. Worse still, too many Hornets tried to engage the Kitchens under AI control, but couldn’t do so effectively because the missiles were cruising at 74,000’. Finally, the Soviets mounted several diversionary sorties elsewhere on the map which necessitated action from Vinson, if only to protect support aircraft.  
  
I couldn’t be everywhere and felt I had to concentrate on protecting Eisenhower, as even a single hit would probably put her out of action and destroy countless planes. Perhaps I should have trusted my SAM operators, as there wasn’t that much I could do. There were some anxious moments, with some Kitchens only stopped at the last ditch, but none of them scored any hits. Meanwhile, the Hornets disposed of six Backfires and the others withdrew. On the downside, the lack of personal micro-management cost me ten good fighters across the board for 24 of the enemy, mostly Floggers. Still a net VP gain, I suppose.  
  
10:00 : Back in control, I splashed four retreating Floggers, with the survivors setting-up a CAP zone near Hornafjordur. By contrast, the skies over Reykjavik were clear, at least for now. Eisenhower’s air group ammo was almost exhausted and most planes were being reloaded with Sparrows for emergency defence. It seemed best to move the CVBG SW, where Vinson could shield them from any follow-up Backfire strike.  
  
I made a few TALD sorties against Reykjavik, but more fighters took off. Six of these were baited into AMRAAM range by the decoys and eliminated and the Soviets did waste a few Gargoyles, so it wasn’t totally useless. I also tried to target the SAMs with TLAMs, hoping to exploit their slow reload times by feeding missiles in gradually, but found that the targets were too imprecise to aim at. Sending TARPS planes to address this was suicidal, so I didn’t.  
  
11:00 : We were, by now, able to establish an intermittent ’No Fly Zone’ over Keflavik, as illustrated by a Tomcat destroying a Mainstay as it tried to take-off. However, the Gargoyles made this activity one for Vinson’s Phoenix Tomcats only. Between 11:00 and about 13:00, this continued, with several fighters and a Midas tanker downed. Frustratingly, I missed a big launch of replacement support aircraft heading N.  
  
14:00 : Given the lack of Soviet fighters over the Reykjanes peninsula, I switched my attention to the Floggers around Hornafjordur. Over the next couple of hours, we managed to wipe this force out, along with a couple of Flankers which tried to intervene. We lost a Tomcat which slipped into Gargoyle range. By now, there were no Fulcrums left on Iceland. However, the Russians had revealed another regiment of Flogger G fighters, which were now flying CAP around Akureyri where they were hard to get at. We had also learned that there was a Gargoyle site at Hornafjordur.  
  
15:00 : As I couldn’t fire TLAMs at the SAMs or radars, I had the cruiser Arkansas target the Keflavik airport hangars, more in hope than expectation. At least the enemy would have to use SAMs which would not be available against the USAF that evening. Remarkably, we caught the Soviets napping and the eight missiles destroyed nine aircraft in their wrecked hangars. All radars then came on and stayed on.  
  
17:00 : In desperation, I sent up four HARM Tomcats from Vinson to pit their eight puny missiles against the air defences. In theory, jamming aircraft shorten the range of enemy SAMs, so I had three Prowlers in close support, all with OECM switched-on!. In practice, each time the Tomcat stuck its toe in the water, it was fired at immediately. Three times, I backed-off without being hit. The fourth time, I got far enough to fire HARMs at the nearest SAM site, but was shot down before I could get away. Needless to say, the two HARMs got nowhere near the target.  
  
The SEAD rules are the most opaque in the game. I have little idea what jamming range is; how its effectiveness varies with proximity to the target or what difference having multiple jammers makes. Clearly, it is some use, as the effectiveness of the Soviet Fencers testifies. Having Prowlers supporting my fighters in air combat probably helped me in this scenario. I tried to analyse what frequencies various platforms use and jam before the game, but the bottom line seemed to be that both sides can jam each other’s systems. Prowlers can affect a slightly wider spectrum than anything else, but the Russians don’t use the A or B bands, so this is little advantage. I only hope that the USAF is better equipped for SEAD than the USN.  
  
Anyway, just before 17:30 we pulled-out to avoid getting in the USAF’s way. As we did so, to my disbelief, about 25-30 Flankers rose from Keflavik and set-up a CAP zone against the USAF strike. Short of destroying these on the ground (see above for difficulties), I can’t see what I could have done about this. With these Flankers and the 40 or so Floggers at Akureyri, plus the SAMs, we could not really claim to have established air superiority and I wonder if we could have done so by any means.  
  
For the record, I finished with a score of +497. NATO lost a frigate, 25 fighters, a Hawkeye, Viking and Seahawk. The USSR lost four SSNs, an eye-watering 199 fighters, 37 Fencers, 6 Backfires, 3 Badgers, two Mainstays and a Midas. They also used-up 61 Gargoyles, 32 Gladiator SAMs and 5 Grumbles. We did our best, but whether it was enough is a good question…  
  
I’m off for my first holiday abroad in over a year next weekend, so the next AAR won’t be for a few weeks. ‘A Stab in the Dark’ looks like one of those single submarine, all eggs in one basket scenarios where a single mistake or stroke of bad luck costs you the game, but I hope to be proved wrong.