**Northern Fury #16 – Sub Surge**

**AAR by fitzpatv, Nov 2021**

As part of the operation to isolate Iceland and with an eye on the future, NATO aims to push submarines into Soviet waters on the edge of the Barents Sea.

The plan is to establish a picket line between Greenland and Norway with five SSNs, which should also sink targets of opportunity and report major surface units as far as it is safe to do so. Three other subs have special missions. USS Narwhal has to visit two locations on the edge of the Polar Ice Cap and use specialised equipment to gather SIGINT there. The James K Polk is carrying SEALs for what looks like a suicidal mission to establish a listening station on Bear Island, while the L Mendel Rivers must try to tap a Soviet undersea cable to the E of here. There is a small chance of encountering Soviet SSBNs (presumably under the ice cap) and, if so, these should be tracked and reported but NOT attacked, as doing so would risk nuclear escalation. With this in mind, all SSNs start on Weapons Hold for Sub-Surface contacts, though NOT for surface ones.

The USSR is known to have substantial forces in and around the Barents Sea, including patrol planes, a large assortment of subs and hunting groups of Grisha and Pauk ASW craft supported by some cruisers and destroyers with choppers.

You have nine SSNs in all, seven American plus the British Triumph and the French Perle. The US contingent includes the advanced Seawolf. Most start between Iceland, Greenland and Arctic Norway, but Narwhal and USS Lapon begin NNW of Spitzbergen and N of Greenland, respectively. Note that Rivers carries nukes – DON’T use them!

Before starting, I did an analysis of Soviet sonobuoys and ASW weapons. This wasn’t encouraging, as few of them have any depth limits that can be exploited. The keynote to this scenario has to be CAUTION, as getting detected will usually be fatal and each sub lost costs 100VP.

To this end, I assigned Perle, Augusta, Triumph, Atlanta and Lapon to Patrol Zones A-E, respectively, keeping Seawolf back as mission controller and reserve. I hoped to position Seawolf close to the Greenland ice pack and have her go to periscope depth periodically and search for Soviet activity via ELINT. If threatened, she could hide under the ice, which effectively protects subs from air and surface opposition and also negates the nastier Soviet weapons like Stallion, Starfish and Silex, which rely on aerial missile delivery. The other subs were essentially blind beyond what they could get from their sonar, so enemy aircraft would be completely invisible to them unless they risked going to periscope depth.

As so often, a balance had to be struck between moving slowly and cautiously and getting to the objective areas, which are a considerable distance from the SSNs’ starting positions. I opted to move at Cruise speed while keeping as deep as possible. I also made sure that all subs were on Weapons Hold for surface (as well as underwater) contacts to prevent rash AI-controlled attacks.

Much of the area of operations has no layer or convergence zones. This helps avoid being detected courtesy of CZs (at the expense of the reverse), but denies you the cover of the layer, making depth all the more important.

22/2/94 08:00Z : Seawolf almost immediately detected a patrol plane and dived. She headed NW towards the ice shelf, about 9 hours away at Cruise, taking some comfort in the prevailing clouds and rain which, along with the short hours of daylight, would not help Soviet air search.

23/2/94 04:42Z : Seawolf reached the ice pack and went up for another look. There were no emissions within range, so she dived again and headed around NE under the ice edge, staying deep.

05:52 : USS Augusta detected a sonobuoy 11nm ahead to starboard. She swung away to port, aiming for a different entry point to PZ B. I noted that the Russians had already sown 1,425 buoys and that the default score of zero was a Minor Defeat. Augusta got clear.

08:58 : James K Polk (will have to look-up who he was/is), cruising at -984’, suddenly detected an incoming torpedo. It was an AT-2M, suggesting that the culprit was a May or Mail. As Rivers, just 26nm away, accelerated to Flank to clear the area, Polk had a huge stroke of luck as the tinfish failed to lock-on. Radically altering her approach vector to Bear Island, she got away. I was tempted to send her home, but grimly decided to persevere with her mission.

In response, Seawolf popped-up for another look for hostiles, but the Soviets were evidently keeping their sensors switched-off.

10:10 : Narwhal reached her first SIGINT zone and was faced with the prospect of remaining motionless at periscope depth for the next 12 hours as she collected her data. This scored 50VP.

10:26 : Moving too fast at 20 knots, Augusta was surprised and attacked by a Soviet sub. She headed away at Flank, countermanding her Weapons Hold and sending two Mk48 torpedoes down the bearing. She outran the enemy torpedo and sank the offending SSN, which was thankfully only an old Victor I. Scoring 25VP, she restored Weapons Hold and proceeded into the PZ at Creep. The lesson for other subs was to slow down within about 30nm of the PZ.

12:11 : Having a lively day, Augusta detected another sonobuoy 11nm to the NW. She altered course E, went to Cruise and again got away.

13:22 : Narwhal’s listening gear detected a patrol plane some way off over Spitzbergen. This tripped her Dive when Threat is Detected doctrine. After some experimentation, I managed to prevent this by re-setting it to doing so only when planes approached within 30nm. My judgement that the Russians couldn’t possibly detect a periscope that far away proved correct and Narwhal carried-on snooping.

19:47 : Augusta completed 6 hours in PZ B and scored 50VP. I could have withdrawn her, but the briefing states that subs only leave PZs under exceptional circumstances, so I kept to the spirit of this, simply avoiding unnecessary movement and keeping deep.

22:10 : Narwhal finished her first listening task (the interruption made no difference), collected 50VP and steered for SIGINT Zone B under the ice pack at depth.

22:24 : USS Atlanta, having approached PZ D as far as possible under the ice, completed her 6 hours and added another 50VP to the score. She then kept under the ice pack in the PZ for the duration.

23:24 : HMS Triumph completed her stint in PZ C for another 50VP. At +275, the score was still only Average. Triumph’s position in only 270’ of water and rather close to the Soviet ASW base on Spitzbergen was a cause for concern, but there didn’t seem to be any better alternatives in those relatively shallow waters.

24/2/94 05:43 : The French SSN Perle finished her 6 hours in PZ A for another 50VP. Still only Average.

07:29 : USS Lapon completed her 6 hours in PZ E to complete the set. Her whole mission was under ice and relatively safe. At +375, it was now a Minor Victory.

07:51 : L Mendel Rivers reached the Cable Tap Zone. This scored no points and Rivers then had to search for the cable. I set-up a search pattern and crept along the bottom.

08:22 : Polk, after a nervy final approach in shallow water, reached the Debarkation Zone off the E coast of lonely Bear Island (apparently not garrisoned or used by the USSR). Deploying her SEALs and their kit was expected to take 6-8 hours. Polk waited and prayed hard. No points scored yet.

10:38 : Narwhal entered SIGINT Zone B for 50VP and resumed her former routine. Again, a patrol plane was soon sighted but, although it was nearer this time, it was still unable to detect the sub, which continued about its lengthy business.

13:35 : Augusta AGAIN detected a sonobuoy, this time 10nm to her NE. She headed away SW at Cruise and again evaded the search.

15:23 : Polk finished offloading and was ordered to return to Scotland for replenishment. This scored 100VP, taking the score over the 500-point Major Victory threshold. She steered into deep water to the SE of Bear Island before cruising towards base.

15:28 : Someone (probably a Russian) really didn’t like Augusta, which detected yet another buoy 9nm SW. She headed NNW at Cruise and made further course changes to evade a couple more buoys.

16:00 : Meanwhile, Rivers was getting nowhere with her search for the cable. In desperation, I switched-on her AN/BQS14 mine/obstacle avoidance active sonar.

17:54 : Suddenly and without warning, the much-persecuted Augusta’s luck ran-out and she was obliterated by a torpedo from an undetected Mail or May. A hundred points lost and, to be honest, I was surprised this hadn’t happened several times already.

19:51 : Rivers finally found the cable for 100VP. It was clearly a 12-hour timed event and all my efforts had been pointless. As tapping a cable at depth is a prolonged and involved business, she then had to stay motionless on the bottom for the rest of the scenario.

22:39 : Narwhal completed her second SIGINT task for 50 more VP, then withdrew under the ice pack.

I then ran-down the clock without further incident for a Major Victory, with a final score of +575. A Triumph would require taking no losses or pursuing a more aggressive and risky hunt for Soviet shipping. I noted that the enemy had used 7,794 sonobuoys, suggesting that they were either not very good or being sown in the wrong places.

Overall, a tense slow-burner, best played at 15x speed and not quite as scary as I’d feared. The next one looks very small and focused on land operations, so I might pair it with Scenario 18 in my next post.