**Northern Fury #18 – Anteater’s Revenge**

**AAR by fitzpatv, Dec 2021**

***[NOTE: I’ll include some of the discussion this AAR caused as it adds many helpful tips to winning this VERY difficult scenario]***

Following the USN’s efforts to erode Soviet fighter cover over Iceland, the USAF mounts a major strike that evening. This is aimed at crippling enemy air operations, command and control, supply and military government facilities. Just to complicate matters, the strike force and its supporting base elements then need to fly on to Lakenheath in Suffolk, England for later missions on the Central European Front.

To do this, you are given 40 F-111, 15 F-117, 10 F/A-18A, 21 F-16CJ and 12 F-15E strike aircraft, plus 19 Phantoms with HARMs and a couple of B-52s. This force is escorted by 29 F-15s with AMRAAMs and 27 F-15s and 16s with Sparrows and supported by 11 EF-111, two Prowler and two Hercules EW aircraft. There are also 4 Sentries, 56 tankers, 6 Orions, a Hercules Commando flying command post, a Dragon Lady high-altitude recon plane and a Rivet Joint ELINT aircraft.

To reduce the air-to-air refuelling burden on the player (a bit), there are three artificial ‘floating island’ staging areas where most attacking planes appear when ready, plus another to the W of the UK for receiving the transiting aircraft after their missions. These represent additional tanker aircraft. The briefing suggests that, as these aren’t real bases, you launch all aircraft there once they’ve completed their ready times, though there appears to be no penalty for not doing so.

Waiting for you are a still-potent force of Soviet fighters including all the old favourites and backed by Mainstays and EW planes. Behind these lurk a formidable array of SAM batteries, including Gargoyles, Grumbles and Gladiator/Giants, plus smaller types and AA guns. There are also a couple of Soviet warships (a Kresta and a Sovremenny), which can augment the SAM defences.

I began by writing-out a schedule of when my aircraft would be available. No air superiority missions would be possible for the first three hours, during which time you are restricted to Hornets with HARMs and TALDs, the recon planes and the tankers. After this, if you adhere to the spirit of the forward base concept, you’ll have to feed planes in every 15 minutes of game time or so, rapidly giving yourself an administrative headache.

Most of your strike planes have GBU-15, GBU-27 or Maverick weapons with ranges between eight and 15 nm. Sending these in against SAMs with an 80 nm range is suicidal unless, perhaps, you can make use of the rugged Icelandic terrain to stay hidden until the last moment, then pop-up and fire. A downside to the latter approach is that you don’t know where everything is and could easily be ambushed by inconveniently-located SAMs. Only the HARMs have enough range to give a decent chance of attacking and getting away without terrain masking and my experiences in Here Comes the Cavalry did not give me much confidence, even given jammers in close support. Of course, the F-117s are stealth aircraft and just might be able to get in close thereby – the proof would be in the eating.

Given that there were likely to be enough SAMs to stop any number of attacking missiles, it’s fair to say that I wasn’t optimistic. Indeed, had I been in command for real, I would have vetoed the mission and offered my resignation should this decision have been overruled.

Helpfully, all planes start with Auto Evade OFF. I set all fighter types to Winchester, specified one air-to-air missile per target and set EMCON to Active for all AEW, EW and maritime patrol planes. Warned that space at the Lakenheath ‘forward base’ could be tight, I set-up ferry missions from there to Lakenheath proper and nearby Mildenhall.

Needless to say, I got my rear end kicked but, as I don’t go back to the last save when things go wrong or pretend that defeats didn’t happen (after all, who does?), here’s the grisly tale…

22/2/94 16:00Z : I began by launching a Sentry and four tankers, the intention being to feed the latter in gradually at one or two per base per hour and learn from experience where the best refuelling points were. Early indications were that the Russians had a Gargoyle battery at Reykjavik and two more at the tips of the peninsula to NW and SW, all able to support each other. Predictably, the enemy radars were off, so no HARM strikes would be possible unless I could bait them into illuminating. There was a Mainstay airborne, plus a couple of EW planes and Foxhounds. It was clear that the Lakenheath ‘forward base’ was potentially vulnerable to enemy interdiction.

18:00 : Just to complicate things further, I was ordered to re-base my Orions, Sentries and two squadrons of tankers to Kangerssuaq in Greenland as they completed their missions – a bit of admin I could have done without.

As the Dragon Lady recon plane followed its pre-set path to the NW of Iceland, a Soviet fighter rose to 60,000’ and tried to intercept. Fortunately, moving away caused it to abandon the chase. Having read about Foxhounds downing satellites in the Northern Fury book, I wasn’t inclined to take chances. The Rivet Joint SE of Iceland also needed to be moved back for security, but both planes supplied useful intel on enemy air movements until the Sentry could arrive.

A briefing at 18:20 gave an update on residual Soviet strength. This was estimated at some 118 to 168 fighters. Even if half of these were down for maintenance, as suggested, clearing the airspace was looking like an impossible task.

At least I now had a fair idea about where it was safe to station the tankers. We also detected a couple of suspicious ships to the E of the Goose Bay and Gander ‘forward bases’, so I sent a couple of Orions to investigate further. There was a risk that they were SAM traps, so flight paths would have to be adjusted accordingly.

19:00 : The mission got the green light and I began launching planes as they became available. Things soon became close to unmanageable, with too many aircraft to juggle and engagements all over the map as Soviet CAP reacted. In early clashes, I downed two Fulcrums and two Flankers without loss, but was keenly feeling the absence of the Phoenix missiles which gave the USN an edge in earlier battles. Here, things were much more evenly balanced, with the AMRAAM’s fire and forget ability offset by the greater range of Soviet Amos and Alamo missiles. For now, loosing missiles and accelerating away at Afterburner was working. Sometimes, it was sufficient to keep radars dark but, on others, I needed to turn them on to get precise targeting. The Russians were being pretty canny, keeping their fighters well-spread so that I couldn’t fire at more than a couple at once (I did the same). Fencer EW planes proved impossible to attack, as before, due to their (over-?) powerful DECM. Enemy planes score 1 VP each. Tankers needed to be moved-in closer for more comfortable refuelling.

20:00 : The main aerial duels S of Iceland continued to go my way, with another two Flankers, three Fulcrums, five Floggers and two Fencer Es downed without loss. However, with my attention on this, some Floggers attacked a quartet of Phantom Wild Weasel planes that I’d left circling off NW Iceland in the hope that enemy radars might come-on. Before I knew it, all four were lost for an eye-watering 10VP each.

Meanwhile, the suspicious ships were tagged as AGIs. An Orion sank one, the Vishnya, with two Harpoons (5 VP), then moved on to the second, the Balzam, which got very lucky, as both weapons fired at her malfunctioned. I now had to wait for my second Orion to arrive.

21:00 : As word arrived that Poke in the Eye had gone better in this reality, with the Oscar sunk, the Russians mounted a big CAP surge with Foxhounds and Flankers. Things did not go well, with 7 Eagles lost for 10 Soviets. Even though the attack was broken-up, the VP balance was unsustainable. Meanwhile, a Flogger snuck-up on an EF-111 off Greenland while I wasn’t looking and shot it down for a fearsome 15 VP. I can only explain the contrast with my superior Eagles’ inability to engage Fencers and Cubs by suggesting that the latter have OECM/DECM and the EF-111 only has OECM.

By now, my first 'Winchester' plane had touched-down at the Lakenheath ‘forward base’, but this scores no points, making the whole transfer a burdensome overhead.

Unable to use HARMs, I couldn’t mount any meaningful strikes on Iceland, as any other planes would just have been crucified by the SAMs. Given the attention required on the aerial dogfighting against the aggressive Russian CAP, I couldn’t spare the time required for attacking with terrain masking and eventually decided to cut my losses and simply fly everything to Lakenheath.

The AI then hit a purple patch when almost every missile it fired scored (often on chances of 25% or so) and the fighter losses became unacceptable, with a 2-5 deficit in this phase. With the Russians constantly feeding more aircraft into the fray, securing air superiority just wasn’t going to be achievable.

To add insult to injury, the second Orion attacked the Balzam and needed three Harpoons to sink her. What are the chances of four successive Harpoons malfunctioning on the same weak target?

I quit at this point. It would probably have been possible to get most planes to the UK, keeping out of enemy CAP range, but this would have gained me nothing. So, a Major Defeat and not far short of a Disaster. I can hear Soren saying 'Told you so!'

Main Issues:

1. Too much to co-ordinate, so your back is always turned to something. This is probably the thing I like least about Command.

2. Feeling obliged to launch planes as they became available. Perhaps I shouldn’t have and this would have reduced Issue 1.

3. The Russian CAP is too strong and, what with its being fed-in gradually, this means it is impossible to get air superiority. Without this, it is very hard to focus on mounting strikes.

4. Soviet SAM radars being off by default makes HARMs useless unless one uses sacrificial targets. I considered using the B-52s and their AGM-67s for this, but they might not have gotten past CAP and I only had 16 of these weapons. I’ve found TALDs ineffective in the past (lack of range, ignored when radars are off).

5. Sheer strength of the SAM defences.

6. Total uncertainty about the effectiveness of SEAD aircraft, as one can’t see it from the enemy point-of-view.

7. Lack of visibility of the Russian positions. Perhaps the Dragon Lady could have gone closer with her long-distance cameras, but her early near-escape did not encourage.

8. The heavily-skewed VP schedule makes losses unaffordable. Who would bet on a close result when they’re offered odds of 1-5 ?

Overall, a chastening experience. Perhaps it was meant to be. I might experiment with Anteater’s Revenge a bit before moving on to Scenario 19 but, as matters stand, I have no confidence I could ever win it – though I’m sure there are people out there who have.

**My initial response**

A great report as always Vince.

This is a tough scenario, some of the best players out there have had difficulty with it, but it can be beaten.

In this [blog](http://northernfury.us/blog/post5/) I explain how I think through a group of scenarios: One scenario in ten should be almost overpowering, five out of ten should be difficult, three out of ten should be fairly manageable, and one should be quite easy.

This is that '1 in 10' scenario where it is almost overpowering - in a D&D event it could easily equate to a TPK (Total Party Kill).

You will read in Book 2 how it was handled by the Commanders in play... and might I say, be reassured.

I'll tackle your points in order:

1. Being overwhelmed. Yes, intentional

2. Scheduling your launches. You were on the right track with the schedule you mentioned. Scheduling gives you options and attention management

3. CAP - this is an attempt at making the enemy fight smart. It will also (over the next 4 scenarios) build a tension between you as the USN and you as the USAF. The results won't match yours, but the idea is *'The bloody Navy didn't kill enough Fighters*' and in the next scenario you will feel that *'The bloody Air Force didn't kill enough SAMs*'. This has a bit of a story goal which will develop over the next couple books.

4. Radars Off. The Soviets watched the Gulf War. The AGM-67 will draw a response, it may not be enough, or it may be too much but the Soviets do realize that they will destroy a target if not dealt with.

6. SAM strength. Yup

7. Uncertainty. Agree, I really like that in the game

8. VP imbalance. This is perhaps a fair point. In general, I use this to remind players that NATO losses are not so easily made up. It may be too steep in this scenario though and skew the game balance.

One of the key factors I wanted to drive home in this scenario was technology. The F-111 was a fantastic aircraft, although a bit of a hangar queen. The technologies that were fielded with this aircraft were cutting edge - when it became operational in the 1960s! Compare with the F-117 or F-15E. The same is evident in having both the F-4G and F-16 Blk50 Wild Weasel. The F-15A and F-15C. Technology matters. In some ways there was a need to dispense with teary eyed bemoaning of cancelation of some of these platforms - which were fantastic - in their day.

Technology on the Soviet part also plays a hand, one of the key lines of development in the NF storyline is Soviet missile evolution. You saw in the early days, improved SCUDs, ASATs and now SAMs which on a purely historic track record would be another decade in development through the mess that Russia was - but with stability (at whatever cost) these systems were on track for deployment in the mid 90's.

So I suppose in summary the scenario was (and is) meant as a bit of a chastening. But things do get better

Thanks again for the report.

**AndrewJ comments**: It's been a long time since I played an early version of this one, (the AAR is [here](http://northernfury.us/aar/nf/nfpart2/nf18/nf18_aj/)), and it's definitely a tough fight. I did reasonably well air-to-air and was able to make some progress against Reykjavik ground targets with extensive use of terrain masking and jamming (this was back when OECM was much more effective than the current model), but still lost a chunk of my F-117s. I made no significant progress in Keflavik, and the entire F-111 strike was waved off and sent to England rather than make a suicidal attack. All in all, a very interesting big scenario, but not easy. And that's okay. Sometimes I have to recognize that things just aren't going to work, accept the situation, and change course to the best possible alternative.

**Airborne Rifles comments**:

This is a brutal one, fitzpatv, but the nut can be cracked. I found this was the scenario that really forced me to use real-world tactic and apply some of the principles of war to succeed. It also highlights one issue with the database for the GBU-15 that if resolved, would totally change the balance of the scenario, I think.

On scenario mechanics, knocking out a sufficient number of Soviet EW radars will eventually cause them to light up every radar they have. making the SEAD fight much easier. Before that, though, your Wild Weasels need to get the radar to light up the old fashioned way - by exposing themselves and drawing fire! I would use my F-117s to go after the outlying EW radars and jammers.

On tactics, I found I needed to bring my SEAD in combined packages of Wild Weasels, EW, and escorting fighters. Don't try to fight the CAP separately, at least not completely. The southeast peninsula has a rugged mountain range on its southern edge that can mask a low-level approach, and the Snaefells peninsula north of Reykjavik is also great masking terrain. To the east the interior of Iceland is crisscrossed with rugged valleys and volcanoes that do a great job of masking low-level approaches. However, your SEAD packages in this scenario need to bring enough weight of missiles to get through the defenses. In at least the first few waves you'll need to launch 16+ to get one or two through with heavy jamming support. The Wild Weasels need to get close - really close when it comes to the Keflavik area (like around 10 miles to have a chance of missiles getting through). You can tie up the responding Soviet CAP with your escorting fighters long enough for the Wild Weasels to get in and get out. Bringing your jets in as packages also helps prevent you getting overwhelmed by things going on elsewhere. I found bringing my Wild weasels in like this this from the north, south, and east allowed me to wear down the SAMs and the CAP enough to give my F-111s a relatively free hand over the targets.

Unfortunately, I think this is a scenario that would really show the F-111 in its best light, but due to the limitations of the simulation it doesn't. The GBU-15s the Aardvarks are carrying were designed for just such a scenario. They are TV-guided and designed to be lobbed at heavily defended targets from behind masking terrain. CMO doesn't model lobbing, and the minimum drop altitude for the GBU-15 in the database is currently 10k'. I am hoping that in the future the floor gets lowered to 2k' as it has been for some other GBUs. I think this would allow the F-111s to approximate lobbing in this scenario by briefly rising to 2k' to drop the GBU-15s and then rapidly descending behind the masking terrain, leaving the bomb to glide to the target.

Regardless, you're going to have some hair-raising moments with Wild Weasels staring down incoming missiles to launch their HARMs!

**Fitzpatv’s 2nd run**

OK, so I've given it another go - not that it altered the outcome.

The main principles were to avoid duelling with Soviet CAP where possible, try to exploit a possible weak point at Akureyri and attempt to apply Joel's advice against the Gargoyle site at the tip of the Snaefellsjokull Peninsula. This meant concentrating my efforts in the NW, so I had to move fighters and F-117s round from Goose Bay and Gander forward bases to support the strategy. I also decided to launch planes from the forward bases when it suited me, not as soon as they became available - AndrewJ's AAR argument about later arrival of aircraft seemed legitimate enough.

As before, not much happened for the first 3-4 hours. I then disposed of the AGIs Vishnya and Balzam without the bad luck I'd had first time round.

Enemy fighters kept intruding into the crucial region NW of Iceland, so some aerial combat was unavoidable. Given reasonable luck, an Eagle can beat a Flanker and certainly a Flogger, so the opening duels saw five enemy downed without loss.

While this was going on, we found and disposed of a third AGI, the Mayak, off Greenland.

At 22:00, however, two Foxhounds made an aggressive sweep at the Northern tanker station and caused some havoc. We lost two tankers and F-15 for both MiG-31s and a Flanker, which left us in VP deficit. Another Foxhound then came-in over Greenland and was intercepted from behind by an Eagle. Everything then went wrong, as the F-15 couldn't get a shot in without turning its radars on and the MiG spun around as soon as it did so. I missed the enemy fighter three times (two AMRAAMs - fire and forget? - failing to lock-on) and was taken out with the first return missile. Another Eagle then needed several shots to take revenge. At least a Flanker that snuck-up on me while I wasn't looking was shot down by another F-15 without my intervention (this was the only such 'behind the back attack' the Russians managed in this playthrough). An Eagle then needed all four AMRAAMs to kill another Flanker. With the US fighters outnumbered at least 2:1 in this scenario, they really need to make better use of ammo and sorties, but you can't help the virtual dice.

While this was going on, I was making repeated attempts to probe Akureyri, but each met with a vigorous CAP response. More lousy virtual rolling cost me four fighters for the same number of Flankers - as in the first playthrough, the AI had a purple patch where it kept hitting first-time on 20-33% chances, while my shots were going wide on 50%+.

With little hope of winning, I decided to overwhelm the Akureyri defences with a mass attack. In an early setback, the TALD Hornets proved to have insufficient range and had to RTB (they tried to refuel from a tanker in the wrong direction). I used the Sparrow-armed F-15s from Thule FB to swamp the enemy CAP. This succeeded insofar as both sides took heavy losses and we temporarily gained air superiority over Central and NE Iceland, even penetrating to and downing three Mainstays. On the other hand, it cost me 13 F-15s (65VP) and the Mainstays only scored a point each.

However, the sweep opened the way for F-16 and F-117 attack planes to hit Akureyri. Surprisingly, there were no SAMs or even AAA and the Paveways and GBUs did some damage to the facilities and destroyed some parked Floggers. Taking-out the control tower scored no less than 6VP (!), but other facilities (like an ATC radar that needed FOUR missiles to hit) were worth a paltry 1VP each and, as usual, destroying things like hangars isn't easy. AGM-67s fired from a B-52 in support were all intercepted by enemy CAP.

As the planes pulled-out, more Soviet CAP arrived and we lost several planes on the way out, including four F-117s which, oddly, were only worth 5VP.

While this was going on, I had more F-117s with HARMs testing the Snaefellsjokull defences. There may indeed be a mountainous ridge along the crest of this peninsula, but there's also a Gargoyle site at the tip with a lovely field-of-fire and this has to be approached across about 50nm of bay in all directions. As I found, there are also radars dotted along the ridge. For all this, the F-117s proved their worth, avoiding missiles from the ever-present CAP while locating and destroying three radars (two messaged as important) and a jamming vehicle. They never precisely located the SA-20 battalion. It must be said that the trio of peninsulae in the far NW of Iceland WERE some use for terrain masking. All Night Hawks then got out OK. Damnably, though, none of the targets was worth more than 2 miserable VP, leaving me wondering where the big VP are in this scenario.

After this, I concentrated on getting everything to Lakenheath. This went efficiently enough apart from one incident where a Foxhound decided to probe Goose Bay FB and took-out two defending fighters, which AGAIN needed four missiles to kill it at odds of 60% or so.

So it ended in a Disaster, with a score of -143. NATO lost 2 tankers, 2 SEAD planes, 6 other bombers and 22 fighters (mostly Sparrow-armed), so 36 aircraft in all. The Russians lost 3 Mainstays, 8 Foxhounds, 13 Flankers, 19 Floggers (40 planes total), plus 3 AGI ships, 4 radars, a control tower, a jamming vehicle and an ammo pad, with damage to other installations. The great bulk of 27 TAW made it to England.

Significantly, the Soviets did not expend a SINGLE SAM all game, which is testimony to how potent their CAP is - they really don't need anything else to win the scenario.

The next scenario doesn't look a lot more encouraging, I'm afraid...