**Northern Fury – Shoulder to Shoulder**

**Playtest Report by AndrewJ Aug 2016**

Damn, that's a lot of stuff! Seven carriers of various shades and stripes, plus land-based air and a bunch of surface groups. My micro-manage-to-the-max policy's probably not going to work for this one!

This is going to be very interesting indeed, assuming I can set aside a week or two to play it!

I finally have some time to play this mighty scenario, so here goes!

For the most part my plans didn't involve major changes to the opening layout. I'm going to take half an hour for ELINT assets to spread out and get a better read on the situation, before making heavy fighter sweeps in the north. Once I've taken a chunk out of the enemy fighter cover, I'll try a coordinated TLAM strike to reduce the coastal airbases in the middle and north of the theatre. I suspect I'll be on the defensive in the south, and I'll try and grind down the enemy before raiding their southern airbases. Low cloud is going to complicate any LGB attacks, which means buddy lasing from well within the medium air defence envelope, which will definitely be dangerous. I'm moving TG Virginia due east, in a somewhat risky move, to bring them inshore as quickly as possible, in the hope that I can use their long-range SAMs to interfere with enemy air activity in that region. Other than that, no major changes.

So the battle commences, and it immediately becomes clear that the Russians aren't going to sit around politely while I take half an hour for sensor readings. Within minutes I've got an SSN close aboard TG20, and another near the Ike. ASW helicopters sink the two intruders, but it's very likely that the Russians have gotten a good read on at least one of my carriers. It only takes a few minutes before I'm getting reports of large numbers of attack aircraft launching and forming up over northern Norway, confirming my suspicions. Things are going to get warm at TG 20, and I start scrambling fighters to get ready to greet the attackers.

Down south the situation isn't any better, as swarms of Russian aircraft start pushing into southern Norway. My hasty response isn't well coordinated, and I fumble to bring in interceptors from various bases as the threat grows and grows. Before long I'm trying to fend off Mig-31s, and somehow get my short-ranged F-16's into the fight without losing them all. At first it seems like the Mig-31s are on a high-speed southern dash to nowhere, before I realize they're pointing right at my NATO AWACS. Flee AWACS, flee! Intervening fighters manage to get those Mig-31s, and I manage to destroy an incoming Mig-29 raid, after which I try to pull back and disengage while dealing with the remaining Su-27s and Mig-31s. The enemy is far enough south that they're in SAM range now, so I turn on the radars and start using long range Nike shots to try and force them to turn and break lock. I haven't hit anything that way, but I think the disruption is proving useful.

As all this is happening I realize that I've made a mistake about the northern strike. It's not headed for TG 20. It's headed south into Norway, and I haven't got a lot in position to intercept it. My Norwegian fighter defences are already seriously depleted, and I probably won't have time to re-arm (even on quick turnaround) before the attack arrives. My CVGNs are too far away for newly launched fighters to get there in time to intercept. I'm bringing in my Marine F-18s (who might make it in time) and the UK cap (who will probably have to refuel in Norway), and a few CAP F-14s that may be close enough to interfere. I suspect I'll be launching Norwegian-based aircraft with attack loadouts just to use their defensive missiles and keep them from being caught on the ground. (Will those crafty Russians be making SRBM attacks in coordination with the arrival of the Su-24s? Hmmm... Maybe I should launch sooner?)

About this time another SSN contact appears, this one close by TG De Ruyter - as if I don't have enough to do already. My helicopters are closing in, but they're all dipping sonar only, with no MAD, which means their prosecution rate is slooow. Hopefully they'll localize before the SSN can attack. Worse, if the SSN has radioed to the Oscar that's out there somewhere, then TG De Ruyter may be in deep trouble before long.

With the northern attack headed south, I have a large number of fighters in the air east of TG 20 with nothing to do. Since the Russians are sending most of an Su-27 squadron out to meet them, I decide to engage them rather than hang around uselessly. That exchange goes well, but as I start wrapping it up I get urgent ESM reports of Mig-31 radars over northern Norway, Not one or two of them, but 12 of them. A full squadron! With that much power something major's going on. This has to be the heavy aviation anti-carrier raid, and I've just used up most of my airborne Phoenixes! Perfect timing...

Finally, a chance to play again! I'm continuing with V1.1.

The southern push of the massive Soviet air strike into Norway continues, with what looks (at first) like an endless river flowing south. After a while, however, the discrete streams and groups start to become apparent. The largest attacks are focused on the Oslo area, and I use up most of my remaining long-range missiles engaging the Su-27s that precede the attack. Once those foes are gone (shot down or retiring with empty missile rails) all my AIM-9 carrying planes have a much better time of it, grievously wounding the incoming Su-24s and Mig-27s with missile and cannon fire. As each enemy falls my confidence grows, since I can deal with them before they reach the airbases, until some of the Su-24s remind me that they carry ARMs, and I lose a good surveillance radar and one of my Nike sites is put out of action. Even so, I manage to keep the Soviets out of my Oslo airbases (for now).

Over on the Bergen side the reinforcements flowing in from the carriers and the UK prove to be crucial. F-14s from the Ike and the Vinson make landfall between Sandane and Orland, half way up the coast, managing to push aside the Mig-23s there with their shorter range missiles, while sending Phoenixes up into the approaching Su-24s. Getting out again proves to be a bit more difficult than getting in, but the damage to the raid is worth it, and it gives my more southerly fighters a chance to arrive and form up. As this is happening some of my HARM shooters take on the surveillance radars near Sandal and Sondagne, with modest success, and then line up to use their AMRAAMs in the defence of Flesland. Good thing too, as those two airfields surge a swarm of Mig-23s which soak up many of my missiles before they are contained. Next to arrive are the remainder of the western Su-24s, fat and happy at medium altitude. I'm sure I can handle that, until they launch their Kazoos just before I can get to them, dammit, and yet more of my missiles get used up shooting their missiles, while most of the Su-24s turn about and head safely back north. After that comes the toughest target of all, a pack of indestructible Mig-29s, nimbly dodging, jamming, and chaffing every missile that heads their way, and then dropping to radar-elusive rock-hopping height, all the while flinging a cloud of AA-11s at me. I'm down to the bare bottom of the missile barrel, and I don't have room to fall back and regroup, because the enemy's nearly on top of their target. It's not until I wake up and figure out that I can go over the clouds while they go under, thus hiding from their IR AAMs, and then come down behind them that I manage to defeat the raid, but it's literally down to cannon fire for the last half dozen or so. (Through all of this the TG Virginia is still too far out to sea to contribute any SAM support.)

Another two eight-ship Mig-29 raids also appear in the Oslo area (possibly heading for my troops?), but they are isolated and don't have other fighter support, so I'm able to skirt their missile range and sweep around behind them and defeat them with my short-ranged missile planes.

So at the moment it looks like I've fought off the threat to the south, and I may have some breathing space there, which is good because I currently have four (4) planes ready with long-ranged missiles in all of allied Norway... AWACS tells me they're picking up an intermittent stream of Su-27s on course for the Bergen area. Another raid or a coincidence? Should I try and make a HARM sweep while the skies are mostly empty, or wait for my escorts to reform? Hmmm...

While all this is going on I've slowed most of my surface groups down to creep speed, listening intently, and I think this is saving my ships in this heavy sub-infested water. Several more Soviet subs are detected, mostly by towed arrays, and then prosecuted by helicopters and Alizes, bringing the total sunk up to 6, including one each by TG De Ruyter and TG Algonquin. The most alarming is when SSMs start erupting out of the water E of TG20, just as an air battle is heating up overhead. "OMG, Oscar, Oscar!" wails the admiral, until his bridge crew point out the missiles are too slow and too few. Some of the launching fighters dip down and neatly intercept the missiles before they get much further, and an S-3 is sent to deal with the Charlie.

The northern air battle is very interesting. I've got the indications of a large formation of Mig-31s forming up, but I've also got that arc of jammers stretching from Norway to Svalbard that's got me really nervous. What's lurking behind that electronic cloud-bank, while I'm distracted by looking at Norway? I've sent some F-14s with tanker support up to investigate, and they meet a pair of very dangerous recce Backfires heading my way. Fortunately, I manage to get those, and a few of the Badger jammers and ELINT planes too, before exchanging missiles with some Mig-31s and withdrawing. No signs of bombers up there - yet.

The main Mig-31 force that has me so alarmed now has a large number of extra contacts up very high, but remaining radar silent, which can only mean Mig-25s, as well as numerous high powered Badger surveillance radars. This isn't a raid, it's a heavy recce! If they can escort those recce Badgers in, or the Mig-25s dash past met, then I'll have no end of angry visitors. I'm launching plenty of F-14s and AMRAAM F-18s by this point, backed with jammers, and I'm able to meet the Mig-31s with a heavy barrage of Phoenixes. They shoot back, but the exchange is solidly in my favour, and while it's going on I'm able to put Sparrows and AMRAAMs into the Mig-25s, which are reasonably easy targets. Of course while all this is going on the Badgers are getting closer and closer, and by the time I'm able to deal with them the last of them has gotten close enough that it may have just gotten a contact on part of the task group. Hopefully the pair of jammers between the Badgers and TG20 were enough to fuzz the radar and prevent a clean hit.

I think my situation in TG20 is reasonably good for the moment. While I'm low on ready Phoenixes (8 planes) I have plenty of AMRAAM and Sparrow carriers ready to go. However, I'm seeing another raid building up over northern Norway, of half a dozen Mig-31s and a dozen Mig-25s (fighters this time, not Weasels, so they'll be shooting back now). Is this an actual bomber escort this time? Or a response to my provocations in the Svalbard gap? Maybe it's time to get more F-14s airborne...

Very interesting scenario this! I'm really enjoying the scope and scale of it, and I'm glad you haven't cut it up into segments. Despite the unit count it seems to run smoothly enough, even on my old machine, so no worries in that regard.