**Pacific Fury #1 – Bolt from the Blue**

**Playtest Report by CHM April 2021**

World War Three is half an hour old. So far - taking Andrew's experience as the 'best case' - events have gone rather well... with a few differences.

**Opening moves**

As the ominous warnings started flooding in I realised that the carrier would be the primary target before she slipped away in a day or two. Airbases weren't going anywhere. Independence turned south and the Leahy accelerated north, Indy's escorts closing formation in a tight huddle while calls were sent to the nearest JASDF base for support. Meanwhile, everything that could fly in the hangar was armed and fuelled. The usual flock of support aircraft and helicopters spread out around the carrier group. At the north and south ends of Japan, USAF and USMC ready fighter roared into the sky.

The turn south was not mirrored by the Soviet frigate close by, and she slowly vanished over the horizon. Unfortunately there was no hiding out here, and the number of Soviet recce aircraft doubled, then tripled. A wall of jammers blocked the AWACS from detecting just what was rapidly gathering over Vladivostok. A mountain of signals were being hoovered up by the ELINT platforms, however. The Independence collected the Leahy, and with her effective SAM defences doubled, swung north east along the coast of Japan and accelerated, active sonar and helicopters sweeping ahead.

War! The flash message was accompanied near simultaneously by the report of a light Japanese destroyer breaking apart from a close-range torpedo shot. With the carrier's route undoubtedly infested with submarines, P-3s based near Tokyo launched to supplement the carrier group's organic ASW screen. Then the call came in - Vampire, Vampire... but not from the AWACS circling over the carrier - from the Brewton, escorting a tanker hundreds of miles east of the mainland. Somehow, a Soviet SSGN laid astride her path. Cued by a Tu-16, the pair of missiles sped in at wavetop level, mercifully slowly. Not an Oscar, then. Brewton presented her flank and her 5-inch gun, miraculously, blew apart the first missile before the Phalanx destroyed the second. But then a second pair of missiles were detected.

Brewton's Phalanx performed heroically, spraying down them both. It clicked empty as the third pair of massive missiles sped in. Brewton's Seasprite crew watched helplessly as the tiny frigate simply disappeared underneath them. More worryingly, a fourth - and surely final - pair of ASMs launched, this time towards the defenceless, escortless, tanker. It seemed certain that she would die, and the Independence group deprived of vital fuel.

Meanwhile, the Indy had other concerns. A colossal barrage of supersonic ASMs were being tracked, launched simultaneously from two points and aimed squarely at the carrier. The JASDF fighters were first to react, speeding off to the north and north west. Their attacks, usually from the side, were worryingly ineffective - most missiles were outrun or simply missed the streams of Shipwrecks. The AWACS crew realised that they had to think of something new, and fast. The missiles were minutes away, and there was no guarantee that the SAM defences along would be adequate - and even if they were, would leave the carrier vulnerable in future engagements. The pilots of the USN would have to pull their weight.

Fortunately, they weren't alone. The concentration of defences over the carrier, decided an hour ago, bore fruit. USMC and USAF planes joined the Navy Tomcats and Hornets and nearly twenty aircraft, splitting into two formations, approached the missile streams from dead ahead - and at extremely low level. Phoenixes, Sparrows, AMRAAMs, all took their toll, but then the fighters were nearly inside the streams. Each pilot knew that once they had passed, there was no second chance. They lacked the speed to turn and chase down the supersonic missiles. Sidewinders from the leading aircraft proved extremely effective. The incoming targets did not buck or weave, and fell in droves. Winchester, the fighters sprayed cannon rounds as they flashed past, before turning and burning back to the Independence or their land bases.

The north western missile group was destroyed a few dozen miles out from the ships, but the northern group got closer. There was no room for mistakes, and no more fighters were available. The same tactic was used, with the Americans approaching from dead ahead, using their Sidewinders and cannon as they closed. When the last of the 20-something Shipwrecks nosed into the sea, twenty miles north of the leading frigate escort, everyone - even me - exhaled a sigh of relief. The Oscars were not unbeatable. They would creep back home, but the fighters could rearm a lot quicker. Navy and Marine aircraft began recovering as CVBG Independence, with full SAM magazines, cruised past the smouldering wrecks of the Soviet frigate and SSV, blown apart by Harpoons minutes after the first Soviet missiles were detected. Expensive sacrifices.