**Pacific Fury #3 – Caught Flat Footed**

**Playtest Report by AndrewJ May 2021**

**SITUATION**

As alarming indications of tension rise across the globe, my forces in the Philippines find themselves somewhat dispersed and in disarray. My American carrier group, centered on the USS Constellation, is normally a powerful concentrated fighting force, but at the moment it's dispersed, weakened, and running low on fuel. The Connie is currently escorted only by a Tico, a Leahy, and a Spruance. Our second Tico is hurrying to catch up from the east, our Perry is down south engaged in rescue activity, and roughly half our fighting aircraft are stuck ashore at Cubi Point on Subic Bay, temporarily grounded by fuel issues. I also have a pair of SSNs in the region, which are always welcome, although nobody ever knows what they're really up to.

Intel informs us that the Soviets have assembled a powerful surface group north-east of us, based around a core of a Kirov, a Kiev, and a Slava, plus numerous destroyer escorts. They far outperform us in terms of anti-shipping punch. Normally we would try to avoid getting this close to them, but they are already within range, according to our calculations, and the presence of a tattletale destroyer nearby and a Bear reconnaissance aircraft overhead mean they already know exactly where we are. Plus there are at least three Soviet subs in the region, probably more. All in all, not a pleasant situation to be in!

We've got another Spruance escorting a pair of oilers up the west coast of the Philippines, and we've been directed to meet up with them north of Luzon, and refuel and resupply as soon as we can. They're presumably safe from the heavy surface group, but the possibility of submarines in their path is very real. There's also the consideration of interference from the direction of Vietnam. The extensive Russian facilities at Cam Ranh Bay are about 660 miles away to the west, across the South China Sea. That's a bit of a long haul, but not impossible for bombers, so we can't entirely ignore the threat.

**ORDERS**

Ideally, I could just speed up and run west with the carrier, but that would leave my lone Tico, the Vincennes, all alone with the enemy group only a couple hundred miles away, and I'm reluctant to do that. A look at the charts tells me that I should just barely have enough time to form up into a single group and still make it to the rendezvous site. Therefore, the Connie is ordered to turn back east and rush towards the Vincennes, who will hurry to meet them as soon as it can. Further south, the Perry is ordered to wrap up rescue operations, and head NW to meet the carrier in the rendezvous zone. The Miguel Malvar will make a final rescue sweep when it arrives in the morning.

On the west coast, the replenishment group is ordered to head north along the coast, but only at creep speed at first, until P-3 patrols have a chance to proof the route ahead of them. A few of my carrier aircraft ashore at Cubi Point are already ready, but I'm hesitant to leave the replenishment group without any air cover (other than Filippino F-5s). Therefore, the first set of F-14s are ordered to set up a CAP offshore, until MPA can search the South China Sea and confirm there aren't any Soviet surprises loitering in the area. The coast-guard craft in the area is also ordered to head for harbour. If something does go wrong, it's better for them to be sheltered, rather than caught out at sea.

It'll take about a day for our forces to meet up and refuel. Hopefully the world won't collapse before then.

**BRIEF MOMENT OF PEACE**

AEW, ELINT, and MPA start heading out, and it doesn't take long before the detections start coming in. For the moment it doesn't look like there's anything off the west coast, which is a relief, although Subic Bay is full of assorted commercial traffic. The same can't be said about the Pacific, where we quickly find the Kanin shadowing us to the south while watching us with her helicopter, plus a pair of snooper ships further out, one west of us, and one NNE. The Soviet carrier group is on full display too, or, rather, its aircraft are. Our ES-3 rapidly reports contacts from their AEW and surface search helicopters, plus air search radars on their new Yak-141s. The Constellation group skirts around the Kanin, staying out of its gun range, and starts closing on the approaching Vincennes.

Things start going sour rapidly. Flash messages tell us the situation in Europe is on the point of war, and then there's a report that a suicide truck bomb has destroyed a number of Philippine attack aircraft at Basa. Orders go out to launch any of our aircraft as soon as they become ready, just to get them out of the reach of potential sabotage, and the Philippine F-5s at Cubi are put into the air.

While the big powers move, the little coast guard cutter Antonio Luna is headed into port to hide from the coming storm. Little do they know, that this is where the storm is about to begin.

**WAR IN THE PHILIPPINES**

"Sir, gunfire ahead!" yells the startled lookout, and the crew gapes at the sight of rockets and guns being fired at the nearby airbase from a civilian ship in the harbour. "Flank speed" blurts the captain, and the little ship surges forward, and starts firing as quickly as she can at the hostile vessels. The crew cheers as the closest enemy bursts into flames under a storm of autocannon fire, and move on to the next target. As fast as they can fire, they aren't fast enough, and flames rise from a burning hangar on shore. The captain can also see what looks like mortar fire walking across the base, and more fires spread amongst the parked aircraft.

Personnel on the base start hollering for help, radioing for any sort of air support to stem the indirect fire, which seems to come from the hills to the north. It's night, and the F-5s can barely make out anything on the ground, but they do their best to strafe in the vicinity of the brief mortar muzzle flashes until the mortar fire ends. Who knows whether they hit anything or not, but at least the enemy seem to have been driven away for the moment.

The pilots are feeling pleased with this, until there's a radio report of explosions at another airbase up north. Planes there were being held on the ground, in the hope that the attacks were only concentrated around Subic, but a burning F-5 soon points out that error, and the remainder are launched as quickly as possible. If they don't use their weapons they will land at alternate airfields, rather than back at home base, to try and disperse the assets until the situation stabilizes.

Back in harbour, a fishing boat trying to flee the chaos vanishes in a violent explosion, and the warning call goes out that the enemy has mined the harbour! The Antonio Luna is trapped in the kettle now. The crew stare wide-eyed over their gunsights, wondering which of the seemingly innocuous civilian vessels will try and betray them next.

**WAR AT SEA - HEAVY ASMs INBOUND**

For the carrier group, the first indication of hostilities is the urgent alert from the E-2. "Vampires inbound! SSGN!" There's an Oscar out there somewhere to the NNW, and he's fired a salvo directly at the carrier group. Moments later there are more missile warnings: a huge salvo from their ships at the lone Vincennes, a second salvo from them at our carrier, and even some shots from what must be a distant Juliett. Our response is swift, and two Harpoons are fired at the Kanin, sinking it a few minutes later, while a SAM takes down its helicopter. Every available plane is being shot off the carrier, and helicopters scramble from the escorts to get away from the targeted ships.

The carrier planes swoop down into the missile streams, and manage to do good work, thinning the herd of supersonic sea-skimmers enough that the cruisers Lake Erie and the Gridley can deal with the rest, with a little last-minute help from the Spruance. The crew of the lone Vincennes have no such help, and they can only stare grimly at their scopes as the missiles bore in. Fortunately, these are high-altitude Sandboxes, not the sea-skimming Shipwrecks from the Oscar or the Kirov, and they can engage at maximum range. The SAMs hit missile after missile, but there are so many that they keep getting closer and closer, and the last one is only 1 mile out when it explodes. There's a jubilant yell throughout the CIC. Then the Russians fire again.

A second salvo comes hurtling in from the surface group and the distant Oscar, and hearts sink. SAM inventories are low now. Can they really do this twice? Fortunately, there aren't as many missiles in this salvo, and with help from the last few fighters they manage to destroy the incoming weapons. The Vincennes is very low on SAMs now, but the cruisers of the carrier group are in reasonably good condition. Unless there's a major new threat (bombers from Cam Ranh Bay?) I think we are probably secure for the moment.

With the missile threat down, my carrier group continues to close on the Vincennes, hoping to form a single group soon.

**INCOMING AT SUBIC**

Over at Subic Bay, my F-14s which were scrambled from Cubi Point are orbiting offshore near my replenishment group when they start picking up a dispersed group of small sea-skimming subsonic contacts headed towards us. After a moment's puzzlement (Is an SSGN engaging my replenishment group? How the heck did they spot us?) I realize these must be cruise missiles, which implies there's either bombers out there, or possibly a Yankee Notch. MPA radar patrols still show no surface ships out there, so we know the missiles didn't come from a nearby ship. The F-14s kill a number of the missiles with guns, and F-5s get the rest.

The F-14s are sent to top up at the tanker, and then all four of them form up in a wide wall and head west, using their powerful radars to look for any sign of bombers. They don't see any, but they do find another wave of incoming missiles, and once again the F-5s knock them down. The P-3, which was patrolling ahead of the replenishment group, is sent west to hunt for a sub, but doesn't really have a good place to start, until the next wave of missiles is spotted radiating out from a central launch point. Then the hunt is on! The P-3 hurries in and quickly identifies and sinks a Yankee Notch near the predicted launch point, while the F-5s continue to pick off the last of the cruise missiles before they reach the shore.

Some of the F-5s also manage to get an air-to-air kill. That Bear which overflew our carrier earlier has escaped, since all my fighters were busy shooting incoming ASMs, so some of the F-5s are asked to lend a hand, and they catch it and shoot it down half an hour later.

**HUNTING OSCAR, FINDING JULIETT**

I'd also like to find that Oscar, although the location where I spotted it missiles is so far away that the odds of finding it there are poor. Nonetheless, a pair of S-3s are sent out to look for it. As the first one arrives on station, and drops a couple of buoys, it suddenly gets a radar hit on a small distant target much further west. It looks very like a periscope or a snorkel, and its right where the Juliett's missiles were first spotted.

Actual Juliett, or potential Oscar? Which to choose? I'd really like to find the Oscar, but I can't ignore a known target, and the S-3 is given orders to head west. It duly finds and sinks the snorkelling Juliett, before returning to the Oscar hunt.

My uncertainty about the Oscar's position is enormous by now, and I'm not even sure if it's heading home for reloads, or advancing to engage with torpedoes. I split the difference. One S-3 lays a line of sonobuoys 40 miles to the north, and one lays a line 40 miles to the south. They then climb to high altitude and loiter overhead, waiting and listening in case the Oscar passes through. A P-3 is also tasked to the hunt, but it will be some time before it can get there, so the S-3s continue to wait.

**HARASSING THE ENEMY**

The enemy carrier group is retiring north now, which is annoying. Now that they've used their heavy ASMs, I'd consider closing with my cruisers and making a combined Harpoon attack along with aircraft. But they're opening the range, instead of obligingly closing in, and I don't have a hope of catching them and making the rendezvous. Reluctantly, I have to admit they're going to break contact with my ships, and my subs won't be able to catch them either.

Still, I do have aircraft, and once they've reloaded I send a fighter sweep to hassle the Yak-141s. I do reasonably well at this, although the enemy SAMs give them a safe bastion, and my fighters even manage to kill one of their precious AEW helicopters. In the confusion I lose track of one of their Forgers, which almost bags the loitering P-3 that's been monitoring the group. Fortunately the Forgers have short legs, and the P-3 manages to get away by the narrowest of margins, eventually returning to loiter at a more discrete distance.

Just as I am completely confident that the enemy ships are not a threat, one of them starts firing more anti-shipping missiles! But these head south, not towards us, and hit a contact I had assumed was some sort of Russian snooper. Mayday calls reveal that it is actually a commercial tanker, and it's too far away for me to help it in any way. The retiring Russians hammer it until it sinks.

**SUB ACTIVITY**

In revenge, orders are give for the San Francisco to come to periscope depth, and she is passed the coordinates of the actual Soviet AGI out to my west. A single Harpoon sinks this watcher, and the San Francisco resumes patrol.

Well, the Russians can play the sub game too. The sonar-man on the Ingersoll, the Spruance located a few miles ahead of my carrier, suddenly starts yelling about incoming torpedoes! As all my ships turn to run, two ASROCs go roaring down range, and a minute later there's a thump followed by breakup noises. My ships continue to flee the incoming torpedoes at flank speed, knowing that they're effectively blind now, and completely vulnerable if they've bumped into a wolf-pack. Fortunately, the torpedoes run out of fuel without hitting anybody, and the carrier group re-organizes itself and gets back on course.

Finally, as their sonobuoys are gradually expiring, the S-3 on the northern barrier line gets a signal from a passive buoy. Could it be? Yes! Oscar!! He's heading north, going home for reloads, and now he's mine. The S-3s swoop in and a series of torpedoes pummel the big sub until it sinks.

**NEXT STEPS**

As the Russians retire, staff are trying to plan an effective way to hit them before they're out of reach. Three B-52s loaded with Harpoons are ready now, but the Russian SAM defences are so heavy that they alone won't be enough to break in. A few P-3s will be able to join them an hour or so later, but that probably won't be enough either. If I want the full power of an all-forces carrier attack I'm going to have to wait even longer. And that delay will probably mean a less effective daylight attack. Small night attack, or big day attack? Hmmm...

In the meantime, my ships will continue to head for the rendezvous. F-14s, now basing at one of the small airfields, will continue to watch over the replenishment group as it heads north up the coast of Luzon. My Perry is sprinting and drifting up from the south-east, the SSN San Francisco is headed in more quietly from the east, and the carrier group is thundering along, sonars blaring. Only the SSN Corpus Christi is still moving towards the Soviets, although catching them's a faint hope unless they turn back for some reason.

Will we be able to bloody the nose of the wily Russians? Time will tell.

Part two!

**REBELLION!**

As if a hostile Soviet Union isn't enough, it looks like they're fostering a rebellion in the southern Philippine islands too! There's an encampment down there somewhere, and government asks us for help finding the targets, so one of our maritime patrol P-3s is sent south to look around. Its long endurance and FLIR sensor make it ideal for this sort of work. After some scouting around it finds the rebel encampment in the mountains of Leyte, and descends for a closer look, hoping to remain invisible in the dark. The flash of an SA-7 launch proves this is a risky business, but fortunately the long-ranged shot misses, and the P-3 ascends to loiter at a safe altitude. It'll stay on-station for hours, until Philippine attack planes can arrive during the day. (This feels very like the Middle-East, where P-3s are being used exactly this way.)

**MOVEMENTS AT SEA**

My ships continue hurrying through the dark waters towards the rendezvous, slowing from time to time to listen for subs, when the Ingersoll suddenly gets a hard contact on active sonar. Moments later torpedoes are inbound on the carrier group again! It's the same drill as before, with ASROCs and Mk46s going downrange BOL, while the carrier group turns away and scatters. Helicopters come clattering in at low altitude, and manage to find and kill an SSN that's fleeing the area where the ASROC-dropped torpedo landed. The enemy's torpedoes, deprived of guidance, go rumbling through the center of my scattering ships, and fortunately don't hit anyone.

This second close-range ambush of my carrier group is alarming. I have to average 27 knots to make the rendezvous in time, which means I'm effectively blind for most of the time. The helicopters I have patrolling out front clearly aren't enough to reliably find the enemy. My S-3s and P-3s should theoretically do a good job, except most of them are being held on the ground. Instead of having them out aggressively hunting subs, they're loading Harpoons, and planning for an anti-shipping attack on the retiring Russians. I'm really starting to question the wisdom of that choice.

Speaking of the Russians, they've altered course NNE, and are moving about 18 knots now, which means the SSN Corpus Christi could conceivably catch them. She's been called to periscope depth, given new orders, and is closing at 25 knots. If we're lucky the Russians will turn even further, to improve our chance of cutting the corner. My pilots are continuing to harass them with fighter sweeps, and over the next few hours they bag a brace of Yaks of all types, a couple of ASW helicopters, and another AEW helicopter. That makes two, and hopefully they don't have a third. No AEW will make the upcoming strike a lot more effective.

**DAYLIGHT COUNTERINSURGENCY**

As daylight comes to the Philippines, a series of attack planes lift off from the airfields around Manila and head for the rebel encampment in the mountains of Leyte. First to arrive are the F-5s, dashing in to suppress the MANPADS groups with rockets. These turn out to be almost completely ineffective, but the nimble fighters are quick enough to get out of trouble before the tiny missiles can hit. A few more F-5s hit the central tent complex with 500lb bombs, which do significantly more damage.

Next to arrive are some of the little AS-211 Warriors, small jet trainers with light bomb-loads, and things go poorly for them. They're nowhere near as fast as the F-5s, and one goes down in flames, while another staggers away smoking, struggling to recover to the nearest airfield. Their little 250 lb bombs do almost nothing.

It turns out to be the propellor-driven OV-10s who do the bulk of the work. Guided by the loitering P-3, they come in from all points of the compass, simultaneously hitting the SA-7s with a storm of cannon-fire, rockets, and napalm. They wheel about, confident they've destroyed the main opposition, and proceed to strafe the remainder of the encampment mercilessly. That's when an un-spotted SA-7 gunner steps out from behind a tree and knocks the right engine off one of the diving planes. The others are far too slow to run away, so they turn desperately to attack, strafing the area hard. It seems to work, and no further missile fire comes their way.

More planes eventually arrive to complete the destruction of the camp, and the P-3 finally flies to the nearby airport to refuel before heading back to Guam. En-route, the startled sensor operator finds a rebel mortar unit near the airfield. These are the same sort of guys who bombarded Cubi Pt, but they've not been attacking. Are they sleeping in? Maybe they didn't get the memo that the war has started?? In any case, a few more planes are sent to take care of them, and that seems to be that.

(The P-3 has been essential here. Without its sustained spotting and surveillance by FLIR it would have been extremely difficult to spot and attack the rebels. Casualties to MANPADS would have been much higher.)

**HARPOON ATTACK**

Staff have been assessing options for attacking the retiring Russian task force, and after rejecting a few options for a series of hasty night attacks then day attacks, have settled on making one major attack in the afternoon. The advantage is that we will have as much firepower as we can muster. The disadvantage is that our planes have a long way to fly, and there won't be any chance of a second attack.

The Russians have continued heading NNE at 18 knots, and now they're actually closer to Iwo Jima than to my carrier. According to the watchful EP-3s which are shadowing them, the enemy formation is screened by destroyers: Udaloys in front and Sovremennys behind. I should have a clear shot at the heavies if I come in from the side. Therefore, the intention is to attack from the SE, on their right flank. The final strike package consists of three B-52s and five P-3s toting Harpoons from Guam, while the carrier sends a pair of S-3s and six of my F-18s with Harpoons, and the remaining eight of the F-18s with HARMs. We haven't seen any sign of airborne activity since the last fighter sweep, so we're reasonably confident that we won't need a large fighter escort. Two flights of F-14s accompany the strike, along with some EA-6 jammers. Most importantly, a formation of KC-135s set out to loiter south of the enemy, ready to refuel the planes and send them safely home.

The flight in is uneventful, although the sudden appearance of an ASW helicopter shows the enemy isn't completely passive. The Harpoon carriers drop to low altitude, below the horizon, and swing on to their attack bearings. The HARM carriers drop to medium altitude, ready to fire and evade low. Even the SSN USS Corpus Christi has come to periscope depth, ready to add its four missiles to the salvo. Each group fires at the designated time, and by 12:45 there are 64 Harpoons inbound, one third headed for the Kiev, and two thirds for the Kirov. How long before the Russians spot them?

Longer than I expected! The missiles are almost on top of them before they react, and by then it's too late. The Slava is in the path of the missiles headed for the Kirov, and vanishes immediately under multiple impacts. The bulk of the missiles fly on, and despite her best efforts the Kirov is overwhelmed too. There's just over half a dozen missiles left, and they head for the Udaloy I. Two of them get through, crippling her. Meanwhile HARMs are raining down all over the fleet, contributing to the chaos and soaking up SAMs. The Kiev is fighting for her life, and takes five Harpoon hits, plus a few HARMs. The last few missiles from the S-3s, who were a few miles out of position at the launch, home remorselessly on the Kiev, but her escorts and her CIWs manage to knock them down.

**INTERLUDE**

As the smoke settles, my carrier strike aircraft turn for home, tanking at the waiting KC-135s and proceeding at an economical cruise. They can see smoke on the horizon behind them, but most of them aren't sure how well they've done. Still, there haven't been any emergency beepers, so everyone is cautiously optimistic. The B-52s and most of the P-3s head back to Guam, but two are detached to head for the carrier to provide additional ASW screening. (They will land on Luzon to refuel, and fly back to Guam later.)

Meanwhile, radar operators on the orbiting EP-3 assess the situation in the enemy task group. The Slava and the Kirov are gone. One of the Udaloys is limping along at a sorry 6 knots, and the Kiev has drifted to a halt. It looks like one of the Sovremennys might be a little slowed too. And are they all coming to a stop, rallying around the striken Kiev, where my sub can pounce on them? Heck no! The rotters are buggering off, leaving the Kiev behind.

The Corpus Christi comes up to periscope depth for another update and then sets course, ignoring the Kiev for the moment, and hoping to catch up with the main body of the retiring task group. Meanwhile, flights of F-14s are sent to loiter in the nearby, along with the tankers and the watchful EP-3. The Kiev probably can't launch aircraft, but wouldn't it be embarassing if she did? Best to have somebody on guard...

Over in the west, the carrier group and replenishment group continue to close on the rendezvous area. My other SSN and the lone Perry are approaching from the east, sprinting and drifting as they hunt for subs, while bored F-14 pilots keep on the lookout for pop-up SSGN attacks (or the remote possibility of interference from Cam Ranh Bay). My helicopters are sweeping ahead of the carrier, as is an S-3, but I still don't have great ASW coverage. Since I'm forced to travel at 30 kts, my big fear is that I will run blindly over an SS. The arrival of those extra P-3s will be a big help.

**CORPUS CHRISTI**

The Corpus Christi is down below the layer heading north at full speed again, hoping to catch up with the main body of the task group, periodically coming to periscope depth to get course updates from the EP-3. I had hoped the enemy would slow down or turn, but that's not happening, and time is running out. The navigator and the captain confer, and agree that if they want to catch the task group and still have time to deal with the Kiev, then they will have to move faster. Courses are set, the sub descends, and accelerates to flank speed. Thirty-two knots, and deaf as a post! Lord help us if they've got a screening sub to cover their retreat.

An anxious hour goes by, and the captain gives the order. Cutting to creep, they ascend cautiously into the layer, and there's the expected sound signature. One Sovremenny almost two miles ahead, and another about seven miles ahead. Two Mk48s get fired at each ship, and then the Corpus Christi ducks back under the layer, cuts the wires, turns around, and accelerates away at full speed.

Up in the air, the loitering F-14s suddenly pick up airborne contacts, as multiple ASW helicopters spring into the air from the remaining ships. The fighters gleefully dive down to attack, and as they do they see a pair of violent explosions tear a ship in two. They manage to hit the ASW helicopters, despite some SAM fire, and climb to safe altitude again. Radar operators on the EP-3 track the other Sovremenny as it suddenly accelerates to full speed for a few minutes, and then suddenly stops, and then vanishes from their scopes.

The Corpus Christi clears the area for half an hour, before rising to get another update from the P-3. Chasing the remaining ships at high speed is getting increasingly risky, and seems unwise. Instead, she turns back south-west, first heading for the listing Udaloy, and then for the drifting Kiev. Both ships are torpedoed and sunk, and the Corpus Christi cheerfully slips away into the obscurity of the ocean.

**RENDEZVOUS**

Over at the rendezvous zone, my ships are reaching their destination. The P-3s have laid a comprehensive field of sonobuoys, the San Francisco and the Perry are creeping around being subtle, and helicopters are plunking their dipping sonar here and there around the ships.

The F-14s are basing back on the carrier now, and only one S-3, still undergoing maintenance, is left on shore. Hoses are pumping fuel to the thirsty ships, and replacement munitions are going across on slings. The EP-3s are still tracking the last surviving Kara and Udaloy, as they head north. The sailors' thoughts are turning northward too. They're to sail for Japan, into the teeth of the Soviet bomber force. They've done well here, but how well will they do there?

Time will tell.

Thanks again for another highly entertaining scenario.

**Impressions**

This is another challenging fight, with all sorts of interesting things to do, and a well-coordinated enemy attack to fend off. Having half the air-group out of place on-shore, and delayed by fuel problems was a very nice way to temporarily reduce the power of the carrier group. When things erupted on the ground and in the harbour it was suddenly a very tense situation, wondering if I was going to be able to get them all off the ground before they were destroyed by sabotage or enemy fire. (I lost 6 SF.260Ws to the truck bomb, then a KC-135, 2 F-5s, and 3 F-18s to the gunfire and mortars at Cubi, and another F-5 to the bomb up at Laoag.) I even started sending long-range planes like the C-141 back to Guam, just to get them away from potential danger of follow-on attacks.

Getting your carrier safely to the rendezvous is a bit of a trick, and even though things worked out in the end, I'm not sure I made the right choices. If I'd headed straight for the rendezvous I'd have needed to average 20 knots, which would have allowed modestly effective ASW screening in front of the carrier. Instead, I turned back to meet the Vincennes, and added about 160 miles to my trip. That suddenly meant I had to average nearly 30 knots throughout, and that meant almost no effective ship-based ASW screening at all. It also gave the subs more time to close on me. I then compounded this difficulty by sending most of my P-3s away to Guam to load Harpoons, keeping most of my S-3s on tanker or Harpoon duty, and keeping them all grounded until it was time to strike. It was thus pure luck that I survived the two sub attacks en-route.