**Baltic Fury 4, Ride of the Valkyries.**

**Playtest Report by AndrewJ Oct 2021**

**SITUATION**

Well, comrades, it’s come to this. Our brothers on the ground have pushed into Germany, all the way up to the Kiel Canal, shoving the enemy back into western Germany and up into Jutland. They won’t say they’ve stalled, but they’re taking a breath before the next big jump. That’s going to happen tomorrow, and we’re the ones who have to smash the enemy in Jutland, and give their air bases such a violent blow that they’re stunned and incapable of resisting.  
  
The enemy’s lined up in a north-south string of airbases along the length of Jutland, with what remains of their air-forces. Everything is consolidated there, from old F-104s and Drakens, to modern AMRAAM carrying F-16s. Intel says the Germans have abandoned their most northern bases, but Nordholz, at the base of the Jutland peninsula, is still packed with modern fighters.  
  
The Baltic is ours, at least on the surface, so we probably don’t need to worry about major surface units out at sea, but watch out for ships hidden in among the islands. Their SAMs can still have a nasty sting. We’re not specifically hunting ships, but we have been tasked to wreck three naval dockyards on Zealand, and one at the tip of Jutland. Maybe our navy boys aren’t quite as confident as they say!  
  
The SAM defences in Jutland are weak compared to ours, or at least they were until the Americans brought in another brigade in the last few days. Expect multiple I-HAWK batteries there. Fortunately, we shouldn’t be facing Patriots. As far as we know the closest one is probably in northern Holland, and that’s out of our AO.

Map

Description automatically generated

We must admit objectively, that our front-line air-forces have taken heavy casualties over the last few days. However, now that the Polish situation has stabilized, and our comrades have rejoined the Pact, we have concentrated a very respectable force in the region. Su-27s, Su-30s, and a force of reliable time-tested MiG-23s will form our fighter screen, while MiG-27s, MiG-23s, and Su-22s make a potent light-attack force at the Polish bases. We have every confidence that our brothers from the reserves remember their skills, and will serve with determination and vigour!  
  
Looking west, Kaliningrad is wall-to-wall Su-24s, and we have a force of Tu-22Ms waiting to support us in Belarus. Furthermore, I am pleased to announce that the Commander of the Baltic Front has offered us the support of the 132nd Heavy Bomber Aviation Regiment, which I have gratefully accepted in the spirit of socialist fraternity and dedication to our cause. This brings us thirty-eight additional heavy bombers, which is a powerful force, even if most of them are only being sent with iron bombs, and I am sure you will all join me in in thanking the Comrade General for his contribution.  
  
The weather staff assure me that the weather will be clear tomorrow, which means our laser-guided weaponry and electro-optical precision munitions should work with maximum efficiency. Review your objectives, intelligence documents, and maps, and have final plans to me no later than 2200 hours. Remember, no movement before 0300 hours tomorrow.  
  
I have every confidence in your skills and determination, comrades. Strike with vigour, and the world will fall before us!  
  
*(I find it helpful to plot out assets and objectives for big scenarios on a map, so I’ve made one based on the information in the side briefing, and put it in this post. It doesn’t include everything, but it should give the broad brush-strokes of the relative force distributions.)*

**PLAN**  
  
Planning staff have come up with a four-stage plan for the initial strike.  
  
Stage 1 – heavy fighter sweep, looking for a fight, plus ELINT recce, looking for SAM sites.  
  
The fighters will then RTB and reload as quickly as possible, while staff confirm final targeting. Then, at dawn, the main strike commences.  
  
Stage 2 – SEAD strike, hoping to eliminate HAWK batteries along Jutland.  
Stage 3 – airbase strike, primarily using Su-24s with heavy guided weapons.  
Stage 4 – port strike, using Su-24s with lighter guided weapons.  
  
After that there will be a fifth follow-up stage, using Floggers, Fitters, and other aircraft, to strike any targets which require further attention.  
  
  
**FIGHTER SWEEP – 0300Z to 0400Z**  
  
The operation begins at 0300Z with eighty percent of our heavy fighters (Su-27s and Su-30s) headed west; the most modern Su-30s head through Germany, while the older Su-27s head up through Sweden, where the opposition is likely to be lighter. A screen of MiG-23s follow behind in the center, ready to support where needed, and ELINT planes follow along discretely, listening for any SAM emissions.

Map

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We soon pick up the radar emissions of NATO’s fighters: packs of F-16s all over, some F-4s down in the south, and even some old F-104s in the center. There’s no sign of the modern AMRAAM carrying F-16s that are supposedly based in Vandel, nor the F-15s down south in the Netherlands, but we do see a number of Tornadoes. Those, with their long-ranged missiles, are the biggest threat so far.  
  
Our pilots head in, overflying Zealand, which seems to be free of SAM sites, and begin calmly engaging with the cold military-scientific objectivity befitting a Soviet fighter pilot. In the wild screaming melee which follows, the pilots try to remember their doctrine. Long-range shots only! Their extended-range AA-10-Cs and Ds (and even the As) give them a powerful range advantage over Sidewinders, and they are not to give in to the temptation to merge with the enemy. It works too, for the most part, and they start to get kill after kill on the lesser fighters, but no plan ever goes perfectly. Several of the pilots get careless, and have a chance to find out just how tough the big Sukhois are, when small Sidewinder warheads wreck engines, or tear chunks out of the tailfins.  
  
Our ELINT planes still aren’t hearing any SAM radars on land, although the German frigate Niedersachsen announces itself by taking a couple of Sea-Sparrow shots into the passing cloud of planes. It’s not until our pilots press the fight over Jutland itself that the HAWKs show up. There’s two, one on either side of Vandel, then two more north and south of those, and another up on the tip of Jutland. Interestingly, Nordholz, down in the south, seems unprotected. Fortunately, the SAM gunners seem to be firing at extreme range, and none of the shots seriously threaten us.  
  
At 0400Z the withdraw command is issued, and our heavy fighters fall back through the MiG-23 screen, which scrapes off a few pursuers before following in turn. Our fighters burner home at supersonic speeds whenever possible, and are soon pulling into their shelters and hard-stands, where ground crew are waiting with racks of missiles at the ready. They immediately begin the reloading process, and in less than an hour our fighters are ready to fly again.  
  
**INTERIM**  
  
As the reloading proceeds, our staff quickly review the ESM data and other reports. We’re still seeing heavy activity down around Nordholz, where F-4s and traitorous MiG-29s are flying, as well as some F-104 and Draken activity in mid Jutland, and F-16s up near Aalborg. There are even some Tornadoes active near Vandel, but those are currently trying to catch some of our recce Foxbats, which is a futile task against the high-flying Mach 3 planes.  
  
Recce Fitters have been sent out to try and get a look at ship contacts which were spotted by radar amidst the Danish islands, and in the light of dawn they start to report back. The ships seem to be civilian trawlers, and the like, and therefore are of no interest to us.  
  
Two more flights of Fitters are sent out to try and sneak-attack the OECM bunkers on Zealand, which are jamming us from the headlands on either side of Koge Bay. The Fitters come in low, but the EO seekers on their AS-14s don’t seem to be able to lock on to the tiny bunker entrances, or the jamming antennae. Frustrated, the pilots shoot their weapons at the nearby naval piers instead, until an alert Stinger gunner puts an end to that game, and the chastened Fitters head home.  
  
**SEAD STRIKE**  
  
Meanwhile, a cloud of Su-24s has been lifting off from bases in Kaliningrad and Latvia, and joining up with missile-carrying Backfires and MiG-25s to head for rendezvous points over the Baltic. When all our fighters are re-armed they take off too, proceeding ahead of the strike planes, and engaging the remaining NATO fighters with strong numerical advantage.  
  
At 0600Z the strike is closing on Zealand, and the dozen mighty Backfires unleash two dozen massive AS-4 cruise missiles. These supersonic monsters go screaming up into the stratosphere, before hurtling down on the airbase at Vandel. The HAWKs there try and engage, killing a missile or two, but most of them arrive with crushing blasts, cratering the runways and taxiways, and hopefully trapping the F-16CGs on the ground. Take that NATO! (Nothing is observed to lift off from Vandel for the remainder of the operation.)

A screenshot of a video game

Description automatically generated

The other planes in the strike are not idle. As each HAWK battery lights up, provoked by the incoming missiles or my nearby fighters, a MiG-25 salvoes four AS-11 ARMs at it. These high-speed missiles are tough targets, and although the HAWKs try to shoot some of them down, usually two or three get through. That’s enough to knock out both the crucial illuminator vehicles, which in turn allows a salvo of slower-moving AS-18s to wreck the remaining fire control and radar vehicles. Within minutes, the HAWKs are reduced to a few scattered launchers, incapable of providing any immediate resistance.  
  
Now that the HAWKs are down, the surveillance radars are taken down too, this time with Su-24-fired AS-17s. The frigate Niedersachsen also gets its share of the attention, and a salvo of AS-17s and AS-18s manages to overwhelm its good close-range defences and sink the vessel.  
  
**AIRBASE STRIKE**  
  
The Su-24 crews grit their teeth, and head for their assigned airbase targets, counting on the reports that the HAWKs are down. Staying above the ceiling of SHORADS and MANPADS, they begin to pummel the runways and taxiways with heavy 3000 lb guided weapons. Fortunately, the local enemy fighters have been supressed or eliminated by the double fighter sweep, and they begin to get good hits on the bases without any interference.  
  
That may not last long. At 0610Z the ESM planes started reporting fighter radars in the Netherlands. We’re seeing swarms of F-16s out of Leeuwarden, and it looks like F-15s from Soesterberg too. Maybe a dozen planes, total, and they’re headed our way, cutting across the North Sea west of Jutland.  
  
The last thing we need is to have F-15s breaking out into the ongoing airbase strikes. Our airborne fighter reserves are directed SW to counter this move, bringing Su-27s and Su-30s to bear on the enemy, and moving MiG-23s into a backstop position. Our last four Su-30s on the ground are also ordered into the air, to refresh our reserve.  
  
A massive tangle erupts in the air near Nordholz, and out over the nearby ocean. The F-15s have AMRAAMs and Sparrows, which keep forcing us to run away to save our lives, and making it difficult to come to grips with the F-16s. Then another SAM opens up, proving that at least one of the 9th ADA Brigade’s Patriot batteries is within range. *(Later on, ESM crews tell us that they were also tracking the signals of three more of them, further south.)*  
  
One advantage we do have, is numerical superiority in heavy fighters with long-ranged missiles, and that begins to move things in our favour. The F-16s get badly hurt first, and then we finally start to kill a few of the F-15s, while others RTB for more missiles. It’s not perfect, but it forces the enemy back for now, and the Su-24s complete their bomb runs.

Map

Description automatically generated

By 0650Z the attack planes are all withdrawing, screened by our fighters. To the best of our knowledge, all bases have been cratered and rendered unusable for at least a day. A salvo of our last AS-17 ARMs manages, barely, to kill the radar on the most northern Patriot, but we’re getting the signals of more F-15s taking off, so the enemy is not out of the fight yet.  
  
**PORT STRIKE**  
  
Our target list also included port facilities on Zealand and the tip of Jutland, as well some command bunkers and communications facilities. The destruction of these commences once the airfields and SAMs are down. We still have some 3,000lb PGMs left (the KAB1500 series) for a few targets, but most of the work is done by repeated pummelling with smaller weapons (the KAB500 series). The docks and bunkers take a continuous battering, and despite an appalling weapon malfunction rate, they are gradually broken down and destroyed.  
  
Not everything goes quite according to plan. With so many planes in the air there’s bound to be confusion, and the controllers are having problems. (“Group Red Three, attack!” “Who’s in Red Three?” “You are!” “No, we’re in Red Oh Three! Dmitry’s got Red Three..”) Some planes get sent to the wrong site, or accidentally return to their loiter points before attacking, blending in with returning fighters and getting forgotten. (“Hey control, we’ve still got three bombs, remember us?”) Yes, it’s a fine Soviet mess, but at least you can laugh about it a bit. Until it’s not funny, that is.  
  
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\*\*\*REDACTED\*\*\* (*spoilers in this section)*

*Planes headed in to bomb the Korsor naval base, on the west side of Zealand, suddenly get a strange signal on their RWR, moments before an unidentified SAM rips the lead plane in two. Shouts of alarm flash between the other aircraft, caught too high to evade low, and their only hope is to press on. Bombs drop towards the newly spotted threat, but two more planes are hit before the bombs arrive and smash the SAM site. High level attacks work great when you’ve eliminated all high-altitude SAMs. Not so much when you haven’t…  
  
ESM analysts, shuffling through their databases, eventually come to the conclusion that the Danes dismounted one of their Sea Sparrow missile systems, and improvised a shore-based mount for it. Well, if the Argentinians can do it with Exocets, why not Danes with Sea Sparrows? It’s a nasty surprise, but fortunately it seems to be the only one they have.*  
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By 0730 the last of the Fencers are out of munitions and headed for home. There is still some ongoing skirmishing with F-15s, but major resistance seems to be over.  
  
**OBJECTIVE COMPLETE**  
  
At this point, the commander and staff confer, and agree that the mission is substantially complete. Fitters will be sent to make follow-up attacks on airbase infrastructure, but that can be left to the staff to coordinate. The commander wraps up his paperwork, and heads off gleefully to report to high command. If things don’t go well after this, then that’s the Army’s fault!  
  
Thanks for the scenario! It’s always nice to get some games from the Red Horde side of the map.

**Play Observations**  
  
It’s always nice to operate as the Red Horde, but I think in this case the player has too much horde!  
  
In my case I was able to accomplish the objective using primarily the Su-24s (a few of which I lost track of and forgot to use), plus the missile-carrying Backfires and the ARM-carrying MiG-25s. I also used four of the Fitters to try and sneak-attack the ECM bunkers. The rest of the Fitters, and all the MiG-27s and bomb-carrying MiG-23s were never used, nor were any of the bomb-carrying Backfires or Badgers.  
  
In terms of fighters, NATO has 159 of them, but only 64 of them have long-range missiles of any description, and 37 of those are constrained by the Backstop CAP event. So that initially leaves 27 planes with long-ranged missiles. Against this, the player has 41 modern fighters and 62 older ones, all 103 of which have long-ranged missiles, so the player advantage here is pronounced.  
  
I was quite happy to pay the 150 points for the four extra missile-carrying Backfires, since I really wanted to be able to shut down Vandel, and its AMRAAM carrying F-16s, in a single salvo. The other extra bombers were not a big selling point. I made no effort to engage the 2ATAF HQ down in the red zone near Soesterberg, and in retrospect I’m glad I didn’t. The Patriots would probably have stopped the missiles without any difficulty at all.  
  
Nice surprise down by Korsor! It’s always interesting when the unexpected crops up. I went Googling to learn more about the system. The only thing I could find was a single forum post of yours when you invented the system in 2018. You’ve been keeping this surprise in your pocket for a while now, I guess. 