**Northern Fury #8 – Plug the Gap**

**AAR by bladesinger79, Sep 2022**

This was a challenge. One sub. One fighter squadron of Tornadoes with the other planes worth little more than missile bait. Limited munitions available. 2nd grade equipment across the OOB. Going up against not one but TWO Russian carrier groups and an unknown number of subs prowling around. I said "Bring it!'

This time I didn't conduct any personal editing due to several readers who gave their disapproval of my elimination of units destroyed or sunk in prior missions. I knew I was in for a nasty fight.

It was.

Started off with enemy bombers firing cruise missiles at me from very long range. Thankfully, I was able to shoot down the missiles. In retaliation, I did my usual tactic of "bomber hunting" which paid off, shot down a number of them deep behind enemy areas. They never sent any more at me again. OWNED!

Now the real fight was dealing with enemy Flankers using Tornadoes and the obsolete Phantom IIs. No matter how much I tried, most of the enemy fighters didn't bite into chasing me into my SAM network from TG Invincible. Ended up taking casualties. The performance of the Phantoms left much to be desired, their best efforts were against enemy helicopters. I had to stop trying to pick off Flankers, as the Tornadoes had to keep their targets in front so the enemy ended up returning fire before the Sky Flash missiles impacted (sometimes). After losing about four Tornadoes and equal amount of Phantoms, I left them alone. My Harriers ended up doing a lot of shooting in the mission, no kills. LOSERS!!!

Enemy subs were successful in killing a commercial liner. WAR CRIMES! Other than that, I did a masterful job at sub hunting. My Nimrods dropped so many sonobuoys, a man could walk from Scotland to the Faroe Islands without getting his feet wet. This led to the destruction of all enemy subs in that gap. No problems there.

The enemy Freestyles were incredibly lucky. One managed to fire a single missile at TG De Ruyters before getting destroyed by my fighters. That lone missile struck the Willem Bloys van Treslong, causing a fire and flooding. Luckily, it survived but was out of the fight.

Later in the night, the enemy tried an amphibious landing with hovercrafts. Very risky, I ended up sinking them with ease using my Buccaneers. Not sure what they were thinking, the area was fully under my control.

The hero of the battle was the HMS Turbulent. By lying in wait for well over ten hours, it managed to slip past the enemy helos and sonobuoys in front of TG Kuznetsov. Once the formation sailed PAST the sub, we attacked the aft of the carrier. With four Spearfish torpedoes, the carrier was stuck and destroyed...but for a price. A torpedo caused damage to the sub, while narrowly avoiding two others. The Turbulent limped away with head high.

Once the enemy lost their fighter cover, the advantage was all mine. But it was frustrating as all hell. By the time the mission was over, I had used up every single missile to destroy the TG Baku. All that was left were four Harpoon missiles aboard the Turbulent which was too far to be of any use. That's right, I fired EVERY damned missile available. The Buccaneers did well, but the Jaguars were pathetic. Even the Lynx helicopters did better than the Jaguars!!! In the end, the enemy TG was destroyed or had ships burning and sinking in the ocean. My saving grace was that the TG Kuznetsov-now-Kirov sailed for Iceland instead of aiming for my forces. Had they continued south, very certain I would have lost.

This one had me sweating a bit. I had nothing but bombs left for my surviving fighters in the end. The enemy still had fight left in them. What surprised me was there were plenty of Backfires that did not continue to press the attack with their cruise missiles later in the game. Had they been more aggressive, I would have suffered far more casualties. But I'm not complaining, just glad I didn't get into a gun battle against the Kirov.

I won, but it feels like I just survived out of scenario design. With the Buccaneers and Jaguars going into the fray with only the loadouts they started out with, I truly had to be picky on choosing my targets.

Praise goes out to the ships De Ruyter, Brandenberg, and Niels Juel. With what weapons they had, they put a major hurt on the Baku group despite losing a ship. A pair of Tornado pilots registered six kills on the day (yeah, I actually keep track of that stuff on Excel). The Nimrod crews made all the sub kills but one. Finally, I can't stress enough on the heroic efforts by the HMS Turbulent.

**Pre-mission actions**:

* I unassigned the lone Nimrod in the air and had it loitered in the air until some fighter support was close by.
* I decided to combine the two task groups together to optimize firepower and protection. The De Ruyter TG would have been wiped out against any real attack. The two groups will meet between the Orkney and Shetland Islands.
* I rearranged most of the aircraft loadouts before starting the mission. Emphasis was for as much air superiority as possible. The Buccaneers were for surface missions loaded with ASMs, while the Jaquars were going to me nothing more than missile bait. All Nimrods would be changed with ASW loadouts.

Zulu 0020: Three clusters of bogeys spotted heading for the islands. Two of them appears to be Yak-141s, the other is unknown but are moving at military speed. I send the BARCAP flight to intercept in afterburner. A recon plane, Tu-95 Bear D has been identified, but it’s not a priority for the moment.

Zulu 0030: Enemy flight of bombers launches a missile almost 300nm from land, thinking cruise missile. Anticipating these to be the formidable Backfires, I continue to push the BARCAP flight to intercept while fuel allowed. The two clusters of contacts east of the BARCAP continues south without veering off to intercept my fighters. They appeared to be heading for the De Ruyter group. I have other fighters to deal with them later.

Zulu 0032: BARCAP attacks enemy bombers. Turns out to be Backfire Cs, both shot down. The cruise missile was fired at the Saxa Vord radar site. I had six total fighters sent to shoot it down somehow: 2 jaguars, 2 tornadoes, and 2 phantom 2s. They are successful after two Sky Flash shots. I turn them on the Freestyles flying south.

Zulu 0035: BARCAP flight shot down the recon plane and pursues the enemy Freestyles.

Zulu 0037: A sub sank a commercial ferry boat 5nm east of Foula Island. WAR CRIME!!! I send my two airborne Nimrods to eliminate.

Zulu 0043: Big air battle east of Shetland Islands. 8 total Freestyles against 10 of my fighters. Ended up losing 56 Sqn #1, #2, and 6 Sqn #10. 6 Sqn #12 was damaged. The enemy managed to fire 8 total missiles at the surface group. Half were sea-skimmers, the other half flew high. I had no more fighters available to help intercept them, the De Ruyter was on their own.

Zulu 0050: The frigate F824 Willem Bloys van Treslong, was hit by one missile. 56% damage with minor fire and minor flooding. I disengage it from the group.

Zulu 0052: Nimrod #1 of 210 Sqn attacks Goblin contact. It is destroyed. Foxtrot-class.

Zulu 0115: Situation with the Willem Bloys is deteriorating. Damage increased slowly, as had the fire and flooding levels. It’s not looking good.

Zulu 0126: Goblin contact 48nm NE of TG Invincibly detected by sonobuoys. Three fleet HAS.3s were immediately dispatched from patrols to prosecute. At 0131, contact sunk by NAS #2 from HMS Monmouth and NAS #2 from HMS London. (Improved Aluka-class)

Zulu 0145: I attempt to break the enemy CAP to attack the circling group of Backfire bombers sitting in between the enemy surface groups. Four Tornadoes and Four Harriers are involved if possible. My pilots failed to score any kills.

Zulu 0200: I received this special event:

Your N2 wakes you from a short nap in your day cabin. “Apologies sir – I thought you would want to know that it appears as though the Soviets are making their big push toward Iceland. There has been a significant parachute drop east of Reykjavik. It’s probably the 76th Guards Airborne Division. If that’s the case, our assessment is that the Soviet will continue to conduct strikes in our area, but we will not be facing their main effort. I think we have dodged a bullet sir!”

Somehow, I doubt it. But that does not diminish the current threat WE are facing. I remain vigilant.

Zulu 0201: Goblin contact nearly behind the Invincible TG formation. Scary as hell. Three helos are sent immediately to terminate. Turned out to be a false contact (DAMNED SHARKS!)

Zulu 0215: Another event happened:

“This is a strange one sir. We have some radio intercepts of a conversation between two civilian ships. The transmissions were in clear and in heavily accented Hungarian. There were three transmissions then a fourth in Russian and very abrupt, this was a very strong signal. The lads are still working on it, but our initial cut is as follows:

* Ship 1: (~63 2N 04 3W) … in position for delivery, are you?
* Ship 2: (~62 2N 01 2W) One …. other soon.
* Ship 1: Good, flooding … good riddance.
* In Russian: (~67N 02W) Terminate all transitions immediately.

“We are not sure what to make of this yet but thought you would like to know.”

From experience, this means there are two neutral ships that are harboring Spetznas or worse. I send air units to investigate all known vessels in the region.

Not a moment later, this happened:

“OK, we’re starting to make sense of those radio signals. An MDK has been detected – this is a Soviet high-speed hovercraft with a speed of 55 Knots. They were probably towed or carried by those civilian ships as their range is limited to about 300 NM. This could be very bad news for the Para’s, these craft can carry tanks and armored vehicles.”

Yep. Change of plans. I send TG De Ruyters north to intercept, they will have to fight on their own. I use several Buccaneers and Jaguars loaded with ASMs and bombs to help.

Zulu 0227: 11 Sqn #9, #10 of Flight Saint52 picks on a pair of Forgers who flew past the blanket of their friendly SAM range while stalking another recon bomber. All three enemies are shot down despite incredible spoofing rolls.

Zulu 0240: A second group of unfriendly vessels spotted NE of Faroe Islands. I send fighters armed with Sea Eagles to deal with them as well.

Zulu 0255: 6 Sqn RAF #2 dropped bombs on an MDK, it sinks. Ten minutes later, it is shot down by an SA-N-5 launched from its partner MDK. Go figure.

Zulu 0312: The remaining three MDKs have been destroyed by Buccaneers from 12 Sqn RAF. Took 8 total missiles to do the job, as enemy AAA gunners proved to be quite skilled. The outlying islands are safe for now.

Zulu 0347: The big fight against the Flankers. Vicious, went 10-for-10 in aircraft. Lost 2 Harriers, 4 Phantoms, 4 Tornadoes to their 10 Flankers. Not good. Long lull in the battle for a while, seems like both sides licking their wounds. The Kortenaer is getting worse, pretty sure it will sink.

Zulu 0530: 56 Sqn #5, #6 picked off 2 Forgers who stray too far from the protective SAM umbrella of the Kiev TG.

Zulu 0535: The Willem Bloys had controlled the fire and flooding. 59.8% damage, it stays out of the fight.

Zulu 0553: This event occurred:

“Commodore!

We’ve just received a message from FLEET: 1 Para has successfully dropped just north of RAF Sumburgh in the Shetland’s. They should be ready to defend within the hour and the RAF will inform us when they intend to send in Hurcs to reinforce and re-supply them. The Army has requested that we send a liaison team to expedite communications: FLEET concurs.

Your Senior Air Officer reports that he can have a Sea King HAR.3 reconfigured from SAR to Ferry in 30 min. You tell him to do so and ask the Invincible's Captain to assign a suitable Lieutenant, some signallers and some Royal Marines for the task.”

Note: VP’s will be assigned for stationing a Sea King HAR.3 in the Sumburgh area for 5 minutes.

Zulu 0600: My losses are 2 Jaguars, 6 Phantoms, 2 Sea Harriers, and 4 Tornadoes.

Enemy air losses: 9 Flankers, 1 Badger L, 2 Blinders, 1 Bear G, 8 Freestyles, and 12 Forgers.

If my count is correct, the Kiev-class TG has no planes to defend itself, while the Kuznetsov TG lost about 50% of its planes. If I can avoid a head-to-head surface battle, I have a good chance to win this.

Zulu 0647: Goblin contact 55nm ENE of TG Invincible by passive sonobuoy. Two helos sent to investigate.

More whales.

Several Tornadoes and Phantoms were transferred to Sumburgh airfield and would be used only if reloads were not needed.

Zulu 0718: Dawn arrives. Goblin contact 73nm ENE of TG Invincible by passive sonobuoy. Even more whales.

Zulu 0750: Managed to sneak a flight of Tornadoes into the rear area to attack the Backfire bombers circling behind the TGs. 11 Sqn #10-#11 begins their attack. Took every missile they had to shoot down 4 Backfire bombers.

Zulu 0800: TG Kuznetsov launches 3 total Flankers heading south, perhaps to attack TG Invincible. 11Sqn #1 kills one at 0807. At 0836, a second Flanker was trapped into a pocket of fighters, shot down by 800NAS #13. The third fled away.

Zulu 0840: TG Kuznetsov identified as CV Varyag by HMS Turbulent who waited silently in the direct path of the TG. 0855, Turbulent manages to slip past forward Sovremenny class destroyers, within 15nm of a frontal and suicidal attack on the CV.

Zulu 0908: HMS Turbulent identifies the Kirov, Adm. Lobov (Slava), Adm. Basitsty (Udaloy-I), DM Kharmalov Udaloy, and the Sovremenny class destroyers Ukrylennyy and Buzuderzhnyy.

Zulu 0942: HMS Turbulent unloads five Spearfish torpedoes at the Varyag, Kirov, and the Lobov. Turbulent was hit by a torpedo, suffered 52% damage but still rolling on. At 0944, the Varyag is hit by five spearfish torpedoes (two were supposed to target the Kirov, but the sub had to turn away to avoid enemy torpedoes). A sixth torpedo finished off the carrier.

Zulu 1000: TG Kiev turns west for Faroe Islands. Two Tornadoes and two Phantom IIs are launched to intercept a new group of enemy bombers located 230nm behind the enemy TGs. The last four Flanker-Ds are heading for Russia.

With the enemy fighter protection gone, it’s hunting season.

Zulu 1030: Massive land-based air strike. 14 Buccaneers and all available Jaguars were sent to attack TG Kiev.

Zulu 1052: Turned TG De Ruyter NE to attack the enemy surface group. TG Invincible follows roughly 40nm behind them.

Zulu 1053: 11Sqn #8, #9 begins slaughtering enemy bombers. Six are shot down.

Zulu 1108: The air strikes on TG Kiev begins. Four Martels from 12 Sqn #12 at a Krivak-class. Three of four Martels are shot down, one hits the Krivak, Ryavnyy. Suffers major fire and extreme flooding.

Zulu 1123: 12 Sqn #1, #2 fires four Martels each at the Udaloy-class and the CVHG. 12 Sqn #8, #8 fires four Sea Eagles at the same Udaloy-class ship in anticipation of heavy anti-missile defenses. No hits.

Zulu 1127: 12 Sqn #10, #16 fires last four Sea Eagles at the Kresta-class ship. 12 Sqn #4 fires its load of Sea Eagles at the Udaloy-class, while 12 Sqn #12,#13 fires last six Martels at the Udaloy. The remaining missiles are launched at the Kresta, the Udaloy, and a Modified Kashin ship.

The Kresta is hit by two Sea Eagles, sinks as Zulu 1133.

Zulu 1148: 1 Sqn #6, #7, #8 attempts to bomb the Udaloy. All three are shot down. I send the rest of the Jaguars home, never to be used again for anything other than missile bait.

Zulu 1212: Sea Eagle launched from Sea Harriers struck the other Stroyny (Kashin-class). This and the burning Krivak are dead in the water.

Zulu 1233: Frigate De Ruyter fires its 8 Harpoon-1C missiles at the nearest Udaloy destroyer, the Adm. Levchenko. Zulu 1241, it is struck by four of five missiles and sinks. The remaining Harpoons target the carrier, they are shot down. The enemy is down to the CVHG Baku (Gorshkov-class), a Udaloy destroyer, and two Krivak frigates.

Zulu 1259: The Niels Juel fires all 8 Harpoon IP missiles. None make it past the enemy SAMs.

Zulu 1419: The HMS Monmouth and HMS Campbeltown unload their supply of 8 Harpoons each at the Udaloy and CVHG Baku. Udaloy is hit twice. BDA reports minor fire, medium flooding, and heavy damages. The Baku fires up a beehive of missiles and escaped unharmed. All I have left for missiles at my disposal is 12 Exocets, 8 Sea Eagles mounting on Harriers, about 14 Sea Skuas mounting on helos, and a bunch of worthless Jaguars with bombs and rockets. This may come down to a gunfight. I combine the two TGs to maximize firepower.

Zulu 1611: 8 Exocet missiles are fired at the Baku, the last four fired at the Udaloy, now identified at the Adm. Kukalov. One hits the Baku. Three hit the Kukalov, and it dies.

Zulu 1630: 815 NAS #2 from Sheffield slams four Sea Skuas into the Leningradski Komsomolets (Krivak-IV). Medium damage, medium flooding.

Zulu 1639: Three Harriers fired last 6 Sea Eagles at the Baku. No hits.

Zulu 1642: The De ruyters fired every round it had from its 120mm/Bofors gun at the Baku. The Brandenburg and Campletown follows.

Final Score: 476

Losses: NATO

* 1x Commercial Ferry [1,900t DWT]
* 7x Jaguar GR.1A
* 1x Lynx HAS.3(GM)
* 6x Phantom II FGR.2
* 2x Sea Harrier FA.2
* 4x Tornado F.3

Losses: WP

* 1x BPK Kresta II [Pr.1134A Berkut A]
* 2x BPK Udaloy I [Pr.1155 Fregat]
* 2x Ka-25Ts Hormone B
* 11x Ka-27PL Helix A
* 5x Ka-27PL Helix A
* 2x Ka-27PS Helix D
* 1x Ka-27PS Helix D
* 5x Ka-29RLD Helix
* 4x MDK Pomornik [Pr.1232.2 Zubr]
* 1x PL-641 Foxtrot
* 1x PLA-971 Akula I Improved [Shchuka-B]
* 1x SKR Krivak I [Pr.1135 Burevestnik]
* 1x SKR Krivak II [Pr.1135M Burevestnik-M]
* 24x Su-33 Flanker D
* 1x TAKR Admiral Gorshkov [Pr.1143.4 Krechyet]
* 1x TAKR Admiral Kuznetsov [Pr.1143.5]
* 1x Tu-16P Badger L
* 2x Tu-22KPD Blinder B
* 9x Tu-22M-3 Backfire C
* 1x Tu-95RT Bear D
* 8x Yak-141 Freestyle
* 12x Yak-38M Forger A