**Northern Fury – Half Time Review**

**Summary by fitzpatv, Jun 2022**

***Now that I’ve finished the first two phases of Northern Fury, time for reflection:***  
  
1. H Hour: Superb, epic scenario, setting the stage for what follows. Inflicted disproportionate losses on the Soviets for a Major Victory.  
  
2. X-Ray Station: Above-average submarines-only game, though luck is a major factor in what happens. Got lucky and sank two capital ships for a Minor Victory.  
  
3. Dagger to the Heart: More of a plot-based role-playing exercise than a standard wargame. Unusual. No official victory levels.  
  
4. A Cold and Lonely Place: Small skirmish with bigger consequences. NATO faces impossible odds, but this is balanced by the scoring system and I did enough to sneak a Minor Victory.  
  
5. Bardufoss Blues: Exciting and, at times, desperate defensive battle. Marred by strangely-passive Soviet surface ships and the lack of any defined Victory Levels. Did pretty well under the circumstances and wrecked the enemy amphibious move on Trondheim.  
  
6. Trondheim Express: Another exciting scenario, but it is too similar to Bardufoss Blues and both could not have happened in the same timeline. It would have been better to have combined them by introducing STANAVFORLANT into Bardufoss Blues. Again, issues with passive Russian surface ships and a lack of Victory Levels. Similar result to Bardufoss Blues.  
  
7. Keflavik Capers: Plot-focused game, in which you are doomed to lose Iceland, but can still ‘win’ by saving your units. Works well and I managed a Triumph.  
  
8. Plug the Gap: Another excellent and exciting scenario, with special relevance for us Brits! Came away with a Triumph.  
  
9. Hold the Line: This one was an absolute thriller, with many anxious moments before I scored another Triumph.  
  
10. Eisenhower Moves North: More gripping stuff and another excellent, challenging but balanced game. Continued my run of Triumphs.  
  
11. Changing of the Guard: A nail-biting struggle for survival under heavy attack and very enjoyable in a scary way. Did very well, though there were no official Victory Levels.  
  
12. Command at Sea: Small, but interesting game despite a lack of clarity about how to land troops on Corvo (judging from my visit to the area this March, it’s as well there are no detailed weather rules or it would have been impossible). Came away with a Major Victory.  
  
***Perhaps I’m biased because I generally managed to win, but I thought this opening phase of the campaign was quite superb and justified all the plaudits bestowed on it elsewhere. It was constantly challenging without ever being unfair.***  
  
13. Cutting the Tether: Small, unusual scenario which gave the land units a chance to shine, Managed a Minor Victory.  
  
14. Here Comes the Cavalry: This opening round of the Icelandic saga involved suppressing the Soviet fighters on the island. No specified Victory Levels but, on the whole, I did a very effective job of this after another exciting contest. Frustratingly, the Russians didn’t stay dead…  
  
15. Stab in the Dark: A small, single-sub scenario and, like most of that ilk, rather dependent on not being unlucky. On this occasion, my luck was in and I scored a rather fortunate Triumph.  
  
16. Sub Surge: Really enjoyed this one. Having lots of subs spread my liabilities and it was possible to win by playing cautiously, with attention to detail. Scored a Major Victory.  
  
17. Poke in the Eye: This is playable in the blink of an eye and is almost no challenge once the crippling bug that made the Oscar nigh-invulnerable was sorted-out. Mainly there for the plot features and it helps if you’ve read the book. Minor Victory with the bug, Triumph without. Shame it wasn’t the only Oscar...as a matter of interest, how many were built?.  
  
18. Ant Eater’s Revenge: For me, this is where things started to go a little astray, both personally and for the quality of the campaign. Simply put, it is too hard, at least for most players. I don’t claim to be an expert, but I’m not bad (see results above from blind playthroughs) and I still don’t have a clue how to beat this. Perhaps there’s a case for some scenarios that only the best can win, but it’s not very inclusive. Maybe you could have ‘par’ and ‘expert’ Victory Levels?.  
  
It’s a suicide mission that no sane NATO commander would have authorised. It would have worked better, I think, if the Russian fighter strength had been based on the results of a playtest of Here Comes the Cavalry, so that there was continuity. As it is, there are far too many of them and you can’t concentrate on attacking the SAMs, which is what it should have been about.  
  
Fewer fighters might have meant fewer later scenarios but, to be honest, this would have been no bad thing, as Iceland drags on to the point where you get tired of seeing the place. Even with the same number of scenarios, the scoring could have been adjusted to balance the level of challenge, given fewer opposing fighters. Points scoring is also unduly harsh on the player. Two playthroughs, two Disasters.  
  
19. Decapitation: Similar, but not as severe. Some foreknowledge is needed to avoid punishment from the initial ambush. Too many fighters, miserly Victory Conditions. Possible candidate for removal to shorten the Iceland phase of the Campaign. Managed an Average result after my first try was abandoned early due to losses.  
  
20. BUFF Stampede: Different NATO aircraft provided much-needed variety here. Anomalous situation whereby the Russian fighters continue to be a thorn in the player’s side, but the SAMs have mysteriously been neutered. Perhaps they ran out of ammo (and the fighters didn’t)?. Scoring system still makes it very hard to win. Managed an Average outcome.  
  
21. Sweep Up: Not quite Groundhog Day, as the Vestmannaeyjar airmobile operation adds interest. Either there were two Oscars (three, counting the one sunk in Poke in the Eye) or the same one somehow got a full reload after Decapitation. Battled through for my first Triumph in a while.  
  
22. Vagar Vengeance: A very tricky scenario until you work-out how to think outside the box, disregard orders and beat it. Satisfying in the end. No official Victory Levels, but I got what I regarded as a good win at the third attempt after a bad defeat and a seriously Pyrrhic victory.  
  
23. Swift, Silent and Deadly: Difficult scenario, but not unbeatable. Still way too many fighters at this advanced stage. Scored a Minor Victory at the second attempt, following a Minor Defeat first-time. Possible candidate for omission to shorten the Iceland saga, especially as such a risky operation should not have been attempted.  
  
24. Battlewagons to War!: More Groundhog Day, with the presence of the battleships the only really distinctive feature. Iceland tends to blur into one continuum while, Bardufoss Blues/Trondheim Express apart, the Phase 1 scenarios are crisply distinctive and memorable. Still too many fighters, right to the end. No Victory Levels set, but I managed a respectable performance. Given that the battleships feature in the next one, this could have been omitted.  
  
25. Jar Heads on Ice: Unwieldy scenario, badly degraded by the absence of any points for landing troops after all the admin involved in doing so. Despite the bloodless landings, suffered a Minor Defeat for losing the Wisconsin, largely due to a lack of foreknowledge of the scenario’s quirks.  
  
26. Land of Fire and Ice!: Another risky operation which is probably more enjoyable in the book than in the game. Tough without foreknowledge and not easy with it. I really wasn’t clear about the Victory Conditions and the map graphics make some important information difficult to see. Suffered a Major Defeat.  
  
27. Out on a Limb: Certainly not dull!. Without the old-style OECM rules/settings, this is really difficult to win in meaningful terms (by saving the Eisenhower). Scored a false ‘Minor Victory’, but derived no satisfaction from it.  
  
I’m sure folks will have varying opinions on this, but it should be apparent that I found the Iceland phase of the campaign rather less enjoyable than the ‘NATO on the Defensive’ series. In my view, it was too long, somewhat repetitive (though not always), didn’t flow believably from one game to the next and suffered from significant scoring and play balance issues. While Phase 1 flowed plausibly as a campaign, Phase 2 seemed like a set of separate scenarios, each one in a parallel reality where previous events were different.  
  
Having said this, I still think that Northern Fury is a splendid, epic campaign and am very grateful to Bart for all the hard work he has poured into it (as well as his good-natured toleration of what I intend as constructive criticism). I am still looking forward to playing the next phase back in Norway (not to mention the other modules) and reading the next book.  
  
It is also fair to say that, to an extent, my struggles in Iceland reflect my shortcomings as a player. Other players may well have coped rather better with what I faced (and might be able to write more perceptive and analytical AARs). What worries me is that I’m not sure how much I’ve really learned and still don’t think I’d do much better with some of the scenarios if I played them again.