**Northern Fury #19 – Decapitation**

**AAR by fitzpatv, Jan 2022**

First of all, may I wish you all a happier New Year than the last two and, indeed, the fictitious one described in these AARs!!

In the latest instalment, the USN attempts to strike Soviet Headquarters and communications centres in Iceland – hence the title. To do this, they have the Eisenhower and Vinson task groups, less a number of ships which have been detached for re-supply or repair. The latter are under AI control, but can in practice be safely left to their own devices, as no harm will come to them.

What remains consists of two carriers, four cruisers, five destroyers and frigates, five more of the latter in a separate group to the SW of Iceland and the SSNs Scranton and San Juan. There are also some Hornets, Sentries and tankers based in Greenland and a Dragon Lady flying out of Goose Bay.

Quite a lot of aircraft are available, but the first strike can carry a maximum of 12 HARMs, 18 AGM-84s, 22 Paveways, 52 Mk82 iron bombs and 24 TALDs. As sending planes with Paveways or conventional bombs against Gargoyle sites is suicide, your options are distinctly limited. There are also severe constraints on re-loads for any second attempt. Supplies of air-to-air missiles are also somewhat limited, though you do have adequate numbers of the all-important Phoenixes. Happily, you are authorised to use up to 40 TLAMs but, as you find-out just after the game has started, these have to come from your surface ships, not your subs.

The Soviets are not quite as formidable as they were but, in theory at least, there are plenty of SAM sites and, as before, their CAP never stops coming. They also have a squadron of surface warships in Faxafloi Bay, W of Reykjavik and there are a few SSNs on the prowl to keep your ASW units honest.

I did a lot of thinking and planning before starting the scenario and came-up with a co-ordinated strike, aimed at having the AGM-84s and TLAMs arrive at much the same time, preceded by a volley of HARMs and with some TALDs released to create confusion. I set-up a reference point just out-of-range of the Keflavik Gargoyles and the idea was for my strike Hornets to come-in low at 300’, accelerating to Afterburner as they passed this point for minimum exposure to danger as they closed to the 55nm range of the SLAMs. A selection of targets is marked on the map and I decided to split my munitions between the 76th Guards Airborne HQ, Military Government HQ, GRU HQ and HQ Staff Quarters, all around Keflavik. An old adage comes to mind…

First contact with the enemy. As my Phoenix fighters were taking-off to clear the airspace, followed by several SEAD Prowlers, three aggressive Foxhounds made a run at the exposed group of light warships headed by the Canadian frigate Algonquin. Before CAP could intervene, they had destroyed all four of that force’s ASW choppers, putting me 20VP down. Phoenixes flew, but the first several missed as the Russians got lucky and continued, wading into other vulnerable support aircraft. After all my considered thought, this was a real kick in the teeth and, contrary to my normal practice, I conceded defeat and started again. This is how the re-match went…

04:00Z 23/2/94 : This time, I immediately moved all at-risk planes out of the way. Even forewarned, I still lost a Seasprite to the MiGs. My fighters had better luck than hitherto and destroyed the Foxhounds, a Flanker and a Fulcrum without further loss, but these five fighters somehow counted for no more than the chopper in the VP stakes (5-1 again).

The Algonquin group’s woes were far from over and, indeed, they had really been hung out to dry. As my strike assembled, an Oscar II unleashed its 24 Shipwrecks at the hapless ships, which were hurrying back towards the Vinson at Flank. I sent-in every available fighter on Afterburner and, together with the SAMs, managed to down 21 of the missiles, but the other three got through and sank the American frigate De Wert, the Canadian Toronto and the seemingly cursed Spanish Numancia, which never survives a scenario. So I lost 20 more VP for choppers, anyway, though the ships themselves were worth nothing?!. Judging by the Message Log, I wasn’t especially unlucky here – there were just too many Shipwrecks for the defences to handle. I heard later that the frigates had been detached to intercept Soviet supply ships W of Iceland, but that wasn’t going to happen now.

Grimly, I sent the strike in. More Russian fighters intervened, but were engaged by the escort and two Foxhounds, a Flanker and two Fulcrums were downed for one Hornet – again even. The four HARM Hornets from Vinson managed to take-out a Big Back radar and a Big Cap jamming vehicle, but these scored no points. The AGM-84 strike was a fiasco, with the planes going Bingo Fuel just before they could fire, mainly because they had gone-in too low at Afterburner. Having two Viking tankers in support made little difference, though they did help the attack planes get home. Meanwhile, some Tomcats released a flock of TALDs from just outside Gargoyle range but, as usual, this was a waste of time as they were ignored and petered-out. Thankfully, the TLAMs from the fleet saved the day, surprisingly overloading the defences and wrecking the 76th Guards Airborne HQ for 15VP and the Military Government building for 10 (not the most generous of awards). Oddly, they were only opposed by Grisom SAMs and ZSU-23s and I could probably have used them to destroy several other targets as well – but I wasn’t to know.

Ironically, a briefing then appeared, detailing what the Priority Targets were. I’d forgotten that I was supposed to wait until 06:00, not that it really made any difference.

05:00 : A Sierra I SSN appeared N of the destroyer Ray in the Eisenhower group and was sunk by a Sea King from the carrier for a welcome 15VP.

Another briefing suggested that Keflavik’s runway was at least temporarily out-of-action and that the Soviets were running low on jamming aircraft. It seemed that Anteater’s Revenge had gone rather better in this reality. Rumour had it that the Soviet carriers Kuznetsov and Kiev had been sunk, the former presumably by USS Enterprise and the latter by British subs, but this was unconfirmed.

06:00 : We were faced with a wait until noon before a second strike with HARMs and the unused AGM-84s would be possible. In the interim, two Flogger Ks made a run at us from the NE and were downed by Sparrow Tomcats. The VP schedule made this a nervy fight.

07:00 : A pair of Foxhounds tried an incursion and caused alarm before being lured into the arms of the Eisenhower group’s SAMs. I hate those things!.

09:00 : Another Foxhound tried its considerable luck. It took four Phoenixes to deal with it. Hornafjordur then sent four more Floggers at us and, this time, luck was on our side, with an AMRAAM Hornet getting the lot with five shots.

10:00 : A rescue beacon was detected WSW of the Vestmannaeyjar. Sending a rescue chopper seemed very risky, but I reasoned that fighters could clear the airspace ahead of her and that I could abort at will, so I sent an SH-60, two Tomcats and a Prowler.

11:00 : Inevitably, this prompted a furious response from the Soviets. My leading Tomcat only managed to kill one of an existing pair of Fulcrums near the islands. The other hit three Flankers and Floggers, but more were coming, so we had to feed-in reinforcements. Another five Russian fighters were shot down, including a Flanker that survived 3-4 shots and kept coming in that fearless AI way. The score was now Average at +38. I resumed my push at the surviving Soviet CAP while covering the rescue bid, downing another four Fulcrums without loss.

Meanwhile, I had a pair of HARM Hornets attack the Kresta-class cruiser Admiral Isachenkov and the Sovremenny Vdumchyy in Faxafloi. We scored a couple of hits and made the ships use-up a lot of SAMs.

12:00 : Tired of just watching, the SSN Scranton put four Harpoons into a Soviet freighter, the Brava, leaving her dead in the water. This was, no doubt, the ship the Algonquin group was meant to intercept. A second pair of HARM Hornets then scored another hit on the cruiser.

Another two Flankers and two Fulcrums tried to interrupt the rescue and paid the price. After a lot of fiddling about, the Seahawk completed her pick-up and scored 10VP for the cause before getting home with cover from the fighters. This was despite two Foxhounds showing-up. Both of these, along with a trailing Flanker, were downed for the loss of an AMRAAM Hornet, the Su-27 needing four missiles. This skirmish was notable for a rare case of TALDs coming-in useful. I’d moved-up a couple of TALD Tomcats in support and one actually distracted a Foxhound’s missiles.

I then had a message asking me to decide what to do with the Algonquin group. Under the circumstances, it was a no-brainer – they hid under Vinson’s skirts!.

13:00 : The AGM-84 Hornets returned to the attack in a succession of single sorties. The Keflavik GRU HQ and Comms Centre (15VP each) were dismantled as the enemy SAMs remained mysteriously silent. Had they really run out of missiles?.

Switching targets to Hafnarfjordur, we then eliminated the 23rd Air Assault Regiment HQ for another 15VP. Two Floggers took-off from Keflavik just as I was about to fire, so I delayed and the escorting Tomcat cleared them away. The score of +101 was still only Average.

Another downed pilot was reported in an impractical location in Faxafloi Bay.

14:00 : A Victor III appeared NE of the Vinson group and proceeded to be very elusive. While I was busy supervising the hunt, a lone Flanker crept-up on a SLAM Hornet making for Reykjavik and destroyed her. Restoring order from chaos, I took revenge, but it was annoying. The Victor’s luck eventually ran-out and we scored another 15VP.

Three more SLAM Hornets then hit Reykjavik and took-out the local Comms Centre for 15 more VP. One plane was emboldened to fire at the capital’s Military Government building, but the Russians had Grisoms nearby and the attempt failed.

15:00 : No more strikes were feasible unless I wanted to risk Paveways and bombs, so the only ways to score were to sink ships and subs, down planes and rescue pilots. I organised a chopper with Phoenix, Prowler and tanker support to attempt the Faxafloi rescue.

Unbelievably, we then heard about another downed pilot just SE of Hornafjordur. As I’d converted Eisenhower’s ferry choppers to ASW, I had to send Vinson’s first SH-60 out for another mission, with Phoenix support. The Tomcat only managed to kill one of the Floggers over Hornafjordur and a pair of Flankers gave chase, being culled with some difficulty by CAP. I aborted the SAR mission.

A Sierra II then popped-up N of the Vinson group, to be fairly easily sunk by the destroyer Foster’s Seahawk.

16:00 : Absurdly, the Russians blasted the poor soul floating in Faxafloi with a Styx!!. So much for that rescue mission!. At least it cost no points…

Needing more points, I sent Tomcats to cull Russian aircraft, clobbering a Fulcrum and three Flankers towards Hornafjordur, then a Flogger over the airfield.

17:00 : Scranton closed-with and sank the crippled MV Brava with torpedoes for 10 more VP as we cleared the airspace for the USAF, but the final score of +160 was still just Average.

In total, NATO lost three frigates, three Hornets and five choppers. The USSR lost 3 SSNs, a freighter, 4 headquarters, two Comms Centres, a radar, a jammer, 10 Foxhounds, 17 Flankers, 11 Fulcrums and 12 Flogger Ks. Overall, I wasn’t too dissatisfied with my efforts in this game, but I’m still mystified by the Soviet SAMs’ behaviour. Were they out of missiles or what??!...