**Northern Fury #21 – Sweep Up**

**AAR by fitzpatv, Feb 2022**

As the briefing says, another busy day in the North Atlantic. The USN mounts a third day of air operations against Soviet-occupied Iceland. This centres on covering an airmobile assault on the Vestmannaeyjar, an island group off the SW coast (where I had an enjoyable day-trip from Reykjavik back in 1987 and can therefore visualise well). Meanwhile, you have to destroy 28 bridges across mainland Iceland to support a Marine Corps plan to divide Soviet ground forces and defeat them in detail. As if this isn’t enough, there are logistical and command/control targets left over from earlier scenarios, plus requirements to sweep the Denmark Straits of Soviet subs and mount a crippling air strike on Jan Mayen Island. Complicated – and made more so by the need to divide your forces and deal with logistical issues. Oh, yes...and the Soviets could also throw a spanner in the works.

To do all this, you have the Vinson and Eisenhower CVBGs, the latter some distance E of the former and making for Jan Mayen. Supplies of munitions fall short of copious and much of what you have for strikes consists of iron bombs and short-range Paveways and Mavericks. There are a couple of squadrons based in Greenland, but they will need tanker support, lack quality fighters and a fair proportion are armed with cluster and incendiary bombs, which are better against soft targets.

Down in Goose Bay are a squadron each of Tomcats with Phoenixes and Intruders armed with Skipper laser-guided bombs, which have half-decent range but also have targetting issues in poor light conditions.

Whether to bring these up is influenced by capacity issues on the Vinson. The carrier has to act as a staging point for the airmobile force and is also being visited on a regular basis by a stream of Greyhound supply planes. According to the database, she can hold 110 large aircraft, but this might not be enough and, at 5VP per loss, you can’t afford to have planes ditching in the ocean.

The move on Heimaey, chief island of the Vestmannaeyjar, is to be undertaken by a fleet of 18 Sea Stallions, big choppers initially based on the Wasp task group. This consists of two helicopter carriers (Wasp and Iwo Jima) and three support ships, escorted by two destroyers and two frigates and is coming up from the SW as the vanguard of the main amphibious force. Also needing to be staged on the Vinson are a dozen Sea Knight helicopters carrying supplies, plus four Super Cobras and four Harriers, which will re-base to Heimaey once it has been secured. You can also bring-up some SAR choppers, but I opted not to. Essentially, the Stallions and Sea Knights need to move from Wasp to Vinson, refuel, then carry-out the assault, whereupon the Stallions return to Wasp and the Knights to Vinson. It is possible to use Hercules tankers from Iceland to refuel the Stallions, but not the Knights. Needless to say, having a few Foxhounds loose in this particular chicken-coop doesn’t bear thinking about…

Having somehow emerged unscathed from Decapitation, the Algonquin task group are still SW of Iceland and must share the Denmark Strait operation with Orions from Greenland

The SSNs Scranton and San Juan are available, W and E of Iceland respectively, but they and your surface ships are rationed to a total maximum of 10 TLAMs for this scenario, though this doesn’t seem to be enforced in any way.

As for the Soviets, their SAMs have, by now, been reduced to point-defence weapons which cannot engage high-flying targets, but there are still not far short of 100 combat aircraft based on Iceland and Jan Mayen, despite the battering they have taken in earlier scenarios. To balance the restoration of the Algonquin group, there is still an Oscar out there with a full magazine of Shipwrecks, as well as other subs. At least you don’t have to worry about surface ships or long-ranged Backfires.

To begin with, I did some fuel calculations and concluded that the helicopters could reach Vinson without difficulty, especially if I altered her course ESE across their path. I also wrote-out a schedule of my air squadrons and assigned reserve loadout planes a mixture of Phoenixes, AGM-84s, AMRAAMs and HARMs, all of which are in limited supply. A few Hornets in Greenland were assigned iron bombs and the recon Orion there was re-equipped for ASW. I also drew-up a table of the various munition types for quick reference and strike planning. Ferry missions had to be created for the moves to Vinson and back to Wasp, setting Doctrine to ensure that choppers didn’t go haring-off to refuel from distant tankers (this led to a lot of irritating ‘Doctrine Conflict’ messages during the game, which could be safely dismissed). I also scrapped all the pre-set missions and created my own, simpler structure.

Following my painful experience in Decapitation, I feared that the Russians would try the same Foxhound-Oscar move against the Algonquin group. Accordingly, I RTB’d all choppers immediately, sent Phoenix fighters to guard against the MiGs and Sparrow-armed planes to engage the Shipwrecks. The SAG was then ordered to scatter at Flank in a 180 degree fan, so as to present a less compact target to the Oscar. I reasoned that they could also cover more ocean spread-out, especially once Orions arrived in support.

This is how it played out:

24/2/94 0600Z : Navy SEALs ashore on Heimaey and Jan Mayen supplied some intel, identifying an artillery unit, a radar and three squads of Soviet paras on the the main objective. At least one Flogger K was spotted on the island airport tarmac.

Six Paveway Hornets from Eisenhower went against Heimaey, with escort., while a TARPS pod Tomcat checked-out the adjacent mainland. The latter spotted units around Bakkaflugvollur airstrip, including numerous Hind and Hip choppers but, strangely, no sign of the PT-76 tanks reported to be in the vicinity of Selfoss, ESE of Reykjavik. It was then destroyed by Flankers scrambling from Reykjavik while I was focused on the strike. A general melee developed, with Vinson’s and Eisenhower’s fighters downing 5 Flankers and 5 Floggers for two Tomcats. The strike planes took-out the 120mm SP mortar and a Grouse MANPAD, but failed to damage any aircraft on the ground despite multiple hits on the runways. One was then destroyed by a Flogger which popped-up from Heimaey while I wasn’t looking. With the usual 5-1 VP split, it wasn’t going very well.

Meanwhile, a dozen Fencer D attack planes launched from Keflavik and went after the Algonquin group, while the Oscar unleashed its Shipwrecks from the N. The first I knew about the latter was when the Numancia (yet again!!) was blown apart. Scattering the task group did serve to confuse the sub a little and she split her onslaught into three salvoes, with the first two missiles going for the Spaniard and the rest for Algonquin and USS De Wert. HMS Beaver and HMCS Toronto were probably not detected. The Fencers did as badly as usual, with none getting into strike range and only one escaping back to base.

The four Harriers from Wasp ferried safely to Vinson, where they stayed for the rest of the game, as did the Super Cobras later.

07:00 : Concerned about capacity, I began transferring as many planes as I could spare from Vinson to Eisenhower, having them conduct strikes en route where appropriate. Tankers were moved into position to support aircraft near the carrier for extended periods. I decided that I needed the eight Intruders from Goose Bay more than the Phoenix Tomcats and flew a pair to the S tip of Greenland and a waiting Hercules as a ‘proof of concept’ mission, with the plan being to re-base them at Nuuk, not on the carrier, after their strikes.

As this unfolded, the Oscar’s remaining shoal of missiles arrived and, to my relief, was annihilated by CAP and SAMs. The Algonquin group then went to Cruise, avoiding cavitation and commencing individual ASW missions, with the Orions covering a wider area of the Denmark Straits. Unfortunately, just as I was organising a second strike on Heimaey and a group of bridges, a Victor III appeared and sank the Algonquin with torpedoes. My aircraft couldn’t get there in time and she temporarily vanished again. All I could do was create an intensive search mission near her last-reported location and wait.

Instead, I concentrated on the strike, using GBU-15 Tomcats to destroy all four bridges on the mainland opposite Heimaey. Bridges are key to victory, as they score 10VP each. Unfortunately, the Russians had somehow thought to station a Grouse team on the hills inland and one plane got too close as it pulled-out, with fatal consequences.

A second TARPS plane, on its way between carriers, similarly failed to spot any tanks near Selfoss. Maybe I needed to use the Dragon Lady, but its vulnerability to attack dissuaded me. Again, this provoked a furious reaction from the Soviets and four Flankers rose to intercept. This time, I was ready and destroyed three, with the other turning tail.

08:00 : An Orion found and sank the Victor III but, like Numancia and Algonquin, it was worth no VP. Clearly, the Denmark Strait operation was a distraction. I just didn’t realise then how much of a distraction!.

A Hornet from Eisenhower wrecked Bridges 106 and 107, E of Akureyri, with AGM-84s. These 55nm ranged weapons almost guarantee a busted bridge, but you have very few of them. This made the score Average at +49.

Vinson struck at Heimaey, accounting for two radars and six infantry elements, but scoring no points. An attempt to hit Bakkaflugvollur failed because Mavericks couldn’t acquire the targets.

09:00 : Four Fulcrums scrambled from Reykjavik and were disposed of by CAP.

10:00 : Two of Vinson’s transferrees were Vikings armed with bombs. These stopped-off at Heimaey en route, finishing-off an infantry unit and inflicting further damage on the runways. No more planes took-off from the island all game, but I never found-out if there were any there, SEAL data having become outdated.

I was taking an ‘extreme prejudice’ policy towards any Russian fighters and sent Tomcats with Sparrows against Flogger G CAP over Akureyri. Two were destroyed, but one got lucky and took an F-14 with it. Floggers are usually flying VP, but there’s not much you can do about missing three times and then being totalled by the first reply. Flankers rose in support of the Floggers and a Tomcat nailed two of them. However, with the bad timing characteristic of the playthrough so far, several Russians then scrambled from Hornafjordur and took the F-14 down, first-time on a 31% chance.

11:00 : The Hornafjordur bandits made quite a nuisance of themselves. Another Tomcat missed a Flanker three times with Phoenixes and was, again, downed by the first return shot. In the end, three of the Su-27s were destroyed, but they scored a net gain for the USSR. In ongoing skirmishes, two more Floggers were shot down over Central and NE Iceland.

A Hornet hit a bridge in the NW, near Saudarkrokur, with Mavericks but failed to destroy it. Not the best choice of weapon, but I had nothing else to use it on and needed to move the plane to Eisenhower.

By now, all choppers were aboard Vinson, which steered straight for Heimaey, full to capacity.

12:00 : A large swarm of Soviet fighters, including Foxhounds, Flankers and Floggers, lifted-off from the Reykjavik area. Had this coincided with the airmobile attack, as was no doubt intended, it could have been very nasty indeed. CAP engaged and things went very well for the USA this time. About a dozen Russians were eliminated, including four MiG-31s, as against one Sparrow fighter which had a run of bad luck against a Flogger. At this point, we had downed 52 Russian aircraft for 9 of our own plus two ASW choppers (lost with their ships) which actually left us three points down.

14:00 : Nursed-in by tankers, the two Intruders took down the four bridges near Saudarkrokur and also damaged a nearby depot. The hype about their bombing power in the briefing is justified, but targetting with Skippers is best left to the AI and I got very frustrated before switching to Auto Engage orders.

AGM-84 Hornets then blasted four of the bridges E of Akureyri, then re-based to Eisenhower.

15:00 : Six Russian fighters, including two Foxhounds, took-off from Isafjordur in NW Iceland, so I took urgent action and downed the lot without loss, helped by them having radars off. The last MiG-31 was outrageously lucky and needed FIVE Phoenixes to kill.

Complete chaos then ensued as the choppers reached Heimaey. There were no clear instructions, so I aimed organisationally-based groups at what I took to be the correct landing zones, sending them to Minimum Altitude and Hover once they arrived. With helicopters in groups, I needed Unit View and, even then, it was like herding cats. Mixing-up Landing Zones A and B (which are East and West, respectively) didn’t help and neither did real-world time pressure, which caused an adjournment. To add to the anxiety, several previously-undetected Soviet ground units popped-up. Fortunately, they offered no active opposition. I was also relieved that there was no immediate reaction from the enemy choppers on the mainland, though CAP would have made it lethal for them.

Intruders wrecked supply depots at Saudarkrokur and N of Reykjavik for 6VP each. Even with tankers, their range precluded sending them against the remaining bridges.

16:00 : Judging that sufficient Marines were now ashore, I RTB’d the Super Stallions to the Vinson. It seemed simpler to do this than mess around with tankers to get them directly to the Wasp. The following Sea Knights arrived and unloaded ammo, while the Marines rapidly exterminated the passive Soviet defenders and captured the island (though the airport didn’t change ownership). Oddly, given the centrality of this operation, it scored no VP whatsoever, so you can win without attempting it??!

Three Fulcrums and a Foxhound launched from Egilsstadir in E Iceland. Unusually allowing myself two AMRAAMs per target as a hedge against misfortune, I efficiently disposed of them without loss.

17:00 : An AGM-84 plane destroyed another bridge, but its second weapon malfunctioned. At +168, it was now a Minor Victory.

By now, I had organised a strike against Jan Mayen, using 2 HARM, 7 Paveway and two AMRAAM aircraft with support from San Juan, a Viking tanker and five Stratotankers sent-up from Mildenhall, which was also backing-up the permanent CAP screening the Heimaey operation. They arrived to find a squadron of Flogger Gs waiting for them and I had to call-up three more fighters with Sparrows, while being patient and using the tankers to refuel as needed.

Just as this began, with six Floggers blasted by the escorts, THREE Soviet SSNs popped-up and attacked the Vinson group, which was in the process of recovering choppers. It was now evident that the whole Denmark Strait operation was a red herring!. Nice one, Bart!. A Victor III got close enough to torpedo and sink the cruiser Arkansas, which must be the most serious naval loss I’ve sustained in the campaign so far. Retribution was swiftly visited on the culprit and a nearby Sierra I, but the third sub was the infamous Sierra III, Mars, which had already been sunk twice in earlier scenarios and her elite crew proved somewhat elusive at first. I dropped the contact, set-up an intense search and eventually found and terminated her. I’ve a feeling that it won’t be the last time. Neither side scored any points at all.

18:00 : Losing a seventh Flogger, the Jan Mayen CAP subsided. A lone TLAM from San Juan failed to provoke any radars into lighting-up, but did the job anyway by crippling the island’s Goa site. Attack planes finished refuelling and prepared to go in.

19:00 : I decided that it would pay better to use San Juan’s remaining nine TLAMs against bridges and leave the Jan Mayen raid to the strike planes. All nine hit their targets and put me in control with another 90VP.

As the Jan Mayen attack went in, two more Floggers scrambled into a Sparrow ‘no fly zone’ and paid the penalty. Three attack planes wrecked an AvGas tank for 3VP and a pipeline for 10, as well as an AA gun. Targetting was difficult due to the shortcomings of Paveways, but I didn’t have many other options. Three more Floggers rose in pursuit and were destroyed, but one benefitted from being missed twice to kill a Hornet.

By now, all the Sea Knights were back on Vinson and the Stallions were en route for Wasp, having refuelled on the carrier.

20:00 : As it seemed futile using laser-guided Paveways at night, I called-off the rest of the moderately successful Jan Mayen strike.

Two Tomcats with bombs got another bridge E of Akureyri, while another pair chalked-off two more. This took me over +300 and into Triumph territory.

21:00 : The Super Stallions returned safely to Wasp. Intruders wrecked two depots E of Reykjavik, while a Tomcat failed to get the last bridge, but did nail a Fencer E, diverting without orders to do so.

22:00 : A Tomcat got the final bridge, despite a couple of ‘no strike’ bridges nearby (don’t quite see the logic of the Marine Corps strategy, I must admit). I also had the rare satisfaction of shooting down a Fencer F jammer, using a Sparrow at 18nm range.

23:00 : In a final flourish, my last pair of Intruders whacked two annoying jammer trucks, then blasted the Bakkaflugvollur landing zone, massacring 18 Soviet choppers for a late rash of VP.

So it ended in a Triumph, with a score of +349. NATO lost a cruiser, destroyer, frigate, 10 MRCAs and 2 ASW choppers. Soviet losses came to 4 SSNs, 61 fighters, 13 Fencers, 18 choppers, all 28 bridges, two radars, 4 depots, a pipeline, 2 jammer trucks, an AvGas tank, 36 ground elements, a SAM mount with its radar, 5 MANPAD elements and two of AA guns. Oh, and we liberated Vestmannaeyjar.

Overall, a very complex scenario which required a lot of thought and improvisation and was never dull. Next time, we get a break from Iceland and switch to Anglo-French efforts in the Faroes.