**Northern Fury #22 – Vagar Vengeance**

**AAR by fitzpatv, Feb 2022**

It would seem that, despite our successful defence of the Faroes in Plug the Gap, the Soviets had since managed to capture them, so an Anglo-French operation is mounted to retake the islands.

To do this, you have two carrier groups, centred on the British Invincible and the French Clemenceau. The former has all of four Sea Harrier fighters with a miserable two AMRAAMs each for air defence, plus seven more with a variety of strike loadouts and some ASW, AEW and SAR choppers. The French task force is obsolete in almost every sense and relies on antique US-made Crusaders with 8nm ranged (not-so) MAGIC missiles for fighter cover and Super Etendards for strikes.

At RAF Lossiemouth in Scotland, you have a squadron each of Tornado, Jaguar and Buccaneer attack planes, with elderly Phantoms for escort. The latter have a mix of Sky Flash SARH and Sidewinder missiles and, as I found to my cost, no reloads. There are three Nimrods for ASW and ELINT and a pair each of VC.10 tankers, Sentries and Compass Call EW planes.

As for ordnance, you possess some Martel A.37 and ALARM ARMs with ranges up to 40nm, but nothing else stretches beyond 15nm and most aircraft are stuck with Paveways, bombs and rockets. The briefing warns that the Lossiemouth planes will struggle to operate at night and must therefore attack near the start and the end of the 21-hour scenario.

Elsewhere, you have a convoy of amphibious ships, lightly escorted by a few British destroyers and frigates, which will deliver troops by chopper or boat. Sweeping ahead of them are two more surface forces, one comprising three weak British frigates and the French destroyer Primauguet with almost no air defence worthy of the name and the De Ruyter Group, consisting of five European destroyers and frigates – some with slightly more encouraging capabilities. Rather too many ASW aircraft lack sonobuoys and choppers are in limited supply away from the carriers.

Two diesel subs are near the Faroes, with the British Upholder tasked with inserting SBS teams in the W of the chain and the Danish Narhvalen given a watching brief to the SE.

Several teams of Special Forces are already ashore to provide some intel and targetting.

Against this, the Russians can muster a sobering amount of firepower. They have no less than three SSGNs (an Oscar II, Echo II and Charlie) with 40 anti-shipping missiles between them. A squadron each of MiG-27s and Frogfoots are at Vagar airport for close-range strikes, escorted by another of Flogger Ks. Also on the islands are a number of ASW, AEW and strike choppers. Lurking in Norway are Badgers with Kingfish anti-shipping missiles, potentially escorted by Foxhounds and EW planes and supported by tankers. Needless to say, there are robust SAM defences around Vagar, centred on a Gladiator site with a theoretical range of 45nm and an estimated 36 shots. In the surrounding ocean, there are several ASW patrol craft, a Sierra SSN and at least two diesel subs.

My preliminary analysis of the scenario gave me little confidence that I could win it. There are no victory thresholds set and with good reason. Matters are made worse by an inflexible schedule of AI-controlled Hercules transports flying in towards Vagar to deliver paratroops and 105mm guns. You are warned that losing any of these will cost lots of points.

I opted to keep radars dark wherever possible to delay being detected as far as I could, though this seemed hopeless when there was no choice but to approach the islands. I created ASW Missions for each task group and sent my one initially available Nimrod to screen the convoy first, then help the Invincible group once enough buoys were in place. Balancing the need for speed with the submarine threat, I had my ships move as fast as they could without cavitating. Recon of ground targets was hard without much in the way of suitable aircraft and Soviet CAP needed to be cleared away first in any case.

25/2/94 15:00 : Quickly located a Grisha and three Pauk patrol boats off the S and W coasts of the Faroes, plus three radars (all off) and an HQ bunker ashore. I sent my two Sea Eagle-equipped Harriers after the former, with two fighters for escort, while a pair of Buccaneers with 15nm ranged Martel A.168s and a Tornado with ALARMs went for the radars. Two Phantoms, a VC.10 and a Compass Call provided support.

The Russians launched large numbers of Frogfoots, MiG-27s, Floggers and some choppers and mounted strikes against the Primauguet and De Ruyter groups. The resultant air battle saw us lose two Harriers, one to a 9% shot from the Gladiator site at extreme range, but we downed two Floggers, 11 MiG-27s and 6 Frogfoots, at least half falling to the escorts’ SAMs. NATO air losses mostly score 5VP, while Soviet ones are worth 3. In the course of this, the Grisha and a Pauk thwarted the Sea Eagle strike with their Gecko SAMs.

Meanwhile, a Sierra I was detected by the French destroyer Montcalm and sunk by ASW planes for 10VP.

The Oscar and Echo then opened-up on the De Ruyter group from NE of the islands…

16:00 : Used a Tornado with ALARMs to tease the Gladiator site into wasting ammo, edging in and out of its maximum range, but had to withdraw when more Floggers arrived. It was impossible to get close enough to fire back without taking silly risks.

Meanwhile, a Buccaneer tried a low-level approach from the W and got into range to launch 3 A.168s at a Pauk, radar and Gauntlet site, but all were intercepted by SAMs and the bomber was destroyed on the way out.

The SSGN attack sank the Danish frigate Niels Juel and the Dutch Karel Doorman. This cost me 20VP per ship, plus 10 more for two ASW choppers.

A Flogger made a deep raid into our airspace before being shot down by the destroyer Birmingham, escorting the convoy.

A lone Frogfoot attacked the Primauguet group and sank the frigate Arrow and its chopper before being terminated.

A late-arriving Shipwreck from the Oscar failed to harm De Ruyter, but two more struck telling blows, sinking the British frigate Amazon and the Portuguese corvette Afonso Cerqueira in the Primauguet group. It was proving very hard to attack when being forced to defend all the time.

With the lack of reloads for the Phantoms, I was now left with three of these (one already aloft), three lightly-armed Harriers and the makeweight French Crusaders for air cover, the latter being way off to the W.

17:00 : The airborne Phantom was then hit by a 30% shot from the Gladiator when I was sure it was over 45nm S of the Faroes. I probed the SAM site with another ALARM Tornado and this tended to confirm this impression. The Gladiator was definitely being economical with the rules and, to make things worse, hit the Tornado on a 23% chance. I’ve seen this kind of thing before in other scenarios and it seems there’s a bug here that needs addressing. Maybe the AI works on the basis of the SAM site being an imprecise target from the player’s perspective and takes its best case, but that’s just a guess.

Two Buccaneers attacked the patrol boats with Sea Eagles. The first missile was downed by a Gecko on a 46% shot, the second was jammed on 8% and the third and fourth also failed to get through.

While I was watching this, the Echo fired its last six Sandboxes at the De Ruyter group, thankfully failing to score any hits. Just the Charlie and the Badger strike left.

I then received a warning that the first high-level paradrops were due at 18:30 and 19:00. Fairly sure they’d start from Leuchars instead of just appearing, I put-up two re-armed Harriers in support. On cue, four more Floggers launched. All three Harriers got drawn-in, splashing three MiGs for one of Primauguet’s choppers, which got in the way. The last Flogger was missed by my final pair of AMRAAMs on 56 and 78%, so I had to lure it onto the Invincible group’s SAMs. Even then, it needed two shots to kill.

18:00 : A Hercules duly lifted-off from Leuchars, preceded by one of my two remaining Phantom sorties.

Upholder reached her debarkation zone W of Vagar, which left her needing to wait 10-15 minutes at periscope depth and turn-off her Dive When Threat is Detected setting. She managed to survive, despite the proximity of a couple of Helixes and patrol boats and the SBS men went ashore for 25VP. I moved two of the three human-controlled teams inland to do some damage to radars and SAMs. Upholder, her escape route to the W hazarded by the Grisha and Pauk, aimed instead to slip away to the S.

To help, Primauguet tore-in at Flank and fired four single Exocet shots at the Grisha. Two were downed by SAMs, the third malfunctioned and the last one fell foul of two more Floggers which took-off at the wrong moment. Out of missiles, the destroyer attempted to close with the coast and bombard some SAM sites.

19:00 : Primauguet’s boldness earned her the attention of the Charlie, which sank her with six of its eight Siren missiles. Harshly and without justification, she was classified as a Medium-Value ship and, with her remaining chopper, cost me 45VP. Again, you only find out these things the hard way.

The Phantom running interference for the Hercules disposed of one of the two Floggers currently on patrol, but was left with Sidewinders.

Another ALARM Tornado had been taunting the Gladiator site, but eventually fell to another probably illegal shot and on a 17% chance at that. The SAM site still had 12 of its 36 missiles – more than enough for any Hercules drops. To make it worse, even had I been able to risk getting close enough to fire my ALARMs, the Gladiator was an imprecise target.

Left with three Harriers, all needing to land and re-arm if they weren’t to risk fighting with Sidewinders, plus one Phantom and the Crusaders in reserve, I could see no way to win the scenario. The incoming Hercules was doomed. Going on invited further punishment, so I took an executive decision and aborted the mission.

Maybe I missed something. Maybe NATO isn’t meant to win this scenario. Maybe a bad workman blames his tools. Regardless, I can’t see any way to do better here. Like other scenarios in this series, it may have been designed at a point where jamming and SEAD were a lot more effective than they are now (except for Fencer Fs) and has been unbalanced by rules changes. As it stands, you need lots of weapons that outrange the SAMs or you aren’t going to break them. Low flying was of limited value here, as most loadouts didn’t support it. My inescapable conclusion is that the NATO force simply doesn’t have the wherewithal to do the job.