**Northern Fury #27 – Out on a Limb**

**AAR by fitzpatv, Jun 2022**

Screening the Iceland landings to the SW of Jan Mayen Island, the Eisenhower CVBG is in an exposed and vulnerable position, within striking distance of Soviet Long Range Aviation bases in Norway and the Kola Isthmus. In this scenario, it is your job to see that she survives.  
  
Eisenhower is escorted by the cruisers San Jacinto and Vicksburg and the destroyers Arleigh Burke and David R Ray. Her air group is ready for action and includes three squadrons of Tomcats and one of Hornets (nineteen planes have Phoenixes, four AMRAAMs, five Sparrows and eight attack loadouts). Stocks of missiles are limited to one reload or so and SAMs are at about 75%.  
  
Away to the SE of Iceland is the Detroit replenishment group, with the AOE warded by the cruiser Virginia and the frigates Halyburton and Corte Real. They have extra A2A missiles for re-supplying the carrier.  
  
Otherwise, the SSN Phoenix is NE of Jan Mayen (and played little part in my playthrough), there are two Orions based in Greenland and a U-2 spy plane orbiting over the Pole.  
  
As for the Soviets, they have no surface combat ships or carriers available, relying on several SSGNs and SSNs and a great wealth of land-based aircraft of all types. These include a couple that haven’t featured so far in the campaign, such as Foxbat fighters and SEAD models and elderly Yakovlev Brewer bombers converted into maritime patrol aircraft.  
  
Judging from Scenario Platforms, I estimated that I was facing about 60 fighters and 96-160 bombers, plus at least 32 submarine-launched Shipwrecks and Sirens. That might have been on the optimistic side...  
  
As with the previous scenario, there was a lack of clarity about the Victory Conditions. Eisenhower has a designated patrol zone, but the briefing says you have latitude as to when to enter it, if at all. You are not told whether doing so scores you any points, whether you have to stay there for a given period of time or whether there is a penalty for not doing so.  
  
You are also ordered to ‘crush Jan Mayen like a bug’ but, again, it is unclear which targets score points if you try. Are you penalised for not making the attempt?  
  
Also, what is the balance of risk between scoring (if you do) for destroying enemy planes and subs and losing your own units?. At the outset, you don’t know. Not having this information hinders decision-making. I guess that, in real life, commanders don’t always know in advance how their superiors (and the media) will view their actions, but this is, after all, a game and it’s good to know the rules.  
  
Other things to consider include the old chestnut about keeping ships’ radars on or off. I decided that stealth was paramount and kept mine off as long as possible while seeing how things developed. This despite the briefing strongly implying that you’ve already been located at the beginning. One definite advantage to ‘radars off’ is that enemy ARMs won’t work for the duration – and they seem to have plenty available, including an improved version of the Kilter, carried by Foxbats and having a 130nm range.  
  
I also needed to decide whether to scramble my CAP in one go to face the supposedly impending onslaught or wait and see what actually happened, feeding them in as necessary. I opted for the latter course, which turned-out to be the correct choice.  
  
Another issue was targetting. Given that each bomber destroyed before launching its missiles meant 1-2 less of the things to fend-off, there was a case for forbidding fighters to engage enemy escorts using WRA. In the event, I experimented with this but didn’t make it universal. Clearly, catching the bombers before they could attack was highly desirable, but practically awkward when a Kitchen has a 215nm range and tackling them this far out puts your fighters in Foxhound and Flanker country.  
  
This is what happened:  
  
28/2/94 09:00Z : Despite the briefing, there was no sign of any Russian subs, though the nagging feeling remained that one could detect me at any time.  
We quickly picked-up three Badger J recon/jammers to the NE, E and SE, but all were some way out of their detection range for now.  
  
I decided that I might as well use my 54 TLAMs while I still had them, in an effort to crush the Jan Mayen bug and maybe hit the Soviet airfields in occupied North Norway. The latter might disrupt the enemy’s fighter screen, keeping them busy instead of escorting bombers. The former seemed feasible.  
  
David Ray’s TLAM strike did considerable damage to Jan Mayen, taking the defenders unawares and destroying 5 Floggers, a Mail, 4 AvGas bladders, an AvGas tank, an ammo pad and an office building. This pretty much put the outpost out of commission for the rest of the scenario and (I found) scored me 2 points per plane and one for each other target. Bug crushed in 20 minutes.  
  
Next, ‘kill the eyes’!. I sent a pair of Phoenix Tomcats after each Badger J. The central one needed a Phoenix and 4 Sparrows to kill (former went blind and Sparrows missed on 32, 59 and 70 – did anyone tell the dice I was short of ammo?). To the NE, my F-14s avoided eight Foxhounds, then disposed of two Badger K recon planes. All Russian recon or bomber aircraft are considered ‘High Value’ and score 4VP. Meanwhile, my Southern pair bagged themselves a Fencer E, Badger J and Badger K, plus a Flanker that tried to intervene.  
  
Things took a turn for the worse when the Foxhound pack caught-up with my central pair and, despite much Afterburning, turning and diving, destroyed them both for a loss of 6VP total. My Northern pair retaliated against the MiG-31s without much success, but managed to get one of them. The issue was range and the agility of the targets. Maybe I shouldn’t have bothered. They had time to evade and then bag another Badger J, despite Sparrows missing it on 48 and 79.  
  
For now, at least, the eyes had been blinded, giving us time to get away to the West. There was the choice of going South, but West seemed to take me more directly and rapidly away from Norway. Also, with Detroit pulling back around Iceland into its Southern lee, it split my liabilities. No way was I going into that patrol zone, which probably had SSGNs zeroed-into it.  
  
Meanwhile, the TLAM swarm kept the plentiful Soviet CAP busy W of Norway, as planned. Not all of them, however. For some reason best known to themselves, two Flankers barrelled W at Afterburner, drawing-in three Tomcats to engage them. Looney Tunes bad luck ensued, with the Russian pair being missed repeatedly at 40-ish odds, giving them a chance to kill an F-14 with their first answering shot at similar chances. Both were then shot down for a net gain of a point, but I didn’t deserve to lose a plane, use so many precious missiles or have my attention distracted for so long.  
  
10:00 : Remarkably, some TLAMs got past the Soviet CAP and hit Bodo before the SAMs woke-up, destroying 4 Flankers, a Fencer D and 3 hangars for 12VP. No other TLAMs scored any hits.  
  
Two Tomcats evaded a pair of Foxhounds and knocked-down a Fencer E in the N sector.  
  
All of a sudden, while I was occupied elsewhere, the U-2 wandered S at 85k’ and was ambushed by a Foxhound, which cost me 13VP. I should really have RTB’d it at the outset, as it was just an accident waiting to happen.  
  
As another Fencer E was downed in the N, a massive force of recon planes, escorted by plenty of Flankers and Floggers, swarmed W towards the CVBG. I couldn’t ignore them, even though they were obviously designed to exhaust my CAP and SAMs, as failing to do so would expose the carrier to attack. To make sure of this, the number of recon planes was ridiculous – at least 40!. I had to use every available plane to stop them. We lost three fighters to the escorts, but inflicted utter carnage on the Soviets, downing 17 Brewers, 18 Foxbat Ds, several Fencers and Flankers and a Flogger, most of these planes being worth 4VP. At +208, the score was now ‘Average’. Again, what the hell did I have to do to win?!.  
  
Eisenhower was speeding W at Flank, apparently undetected, not having exposed radars for more than the second it took me to cancel it and with an Orion scouring the waters ahead for subs. So far, so good, but we were almost out of CAP for the next couple of hours and just had to hope…  
  
11:00 : Worryingly, there was a recon-model Backfire NE of Jan Mayen within its 240nm sensor range of the CVBG. Altered course away and sent a Tomcat after the Tupolev. Unfortunately, four Foxhounds were desperate to stop me, shooting down the interceptor. One then bore-in towards the CVBG in that persistent, suicidal way of theirs and, before I woke to the danger, shot down an out-of-position Hawkeye for 13VP and then a Seahawk, which had just launched automatically on a Mission. My one remaining AMRAAM-capable Hornet engaged and endured the ‘sail past’ effect – I manually allocated two of the things to make sure, but both failed to lock-on and just flew past the MiG without attacking. I don’t know why this sometimes happens with AMRAAMs – could anyone enlighten me and suggest a way of preventing it?. A third AMRAAM nailed the Foxhound – I HATE those things!!  
  
The Soviets kept probing at the task force. A Flanker was eventually shot down for coming too close after multiple misses. Several more Soviet recon planes were downed as two Tomcats became available once more but, inevitably, one finally got close enough to trigger a message to say we’d been detected. I did my best.  
  
12:00 : Kept running W at Flank and put-up three Prowlers (previously one) in the fond hope that their jamming would blur our location. Encouragingly, the enemy recon planes seemed to be retiring Eastward – perhaps they’d lose the scent?. Also boosting morale was the arrival of eight AMRAAM Hornets from Heimaey, backed-up by two Greenland-based tankers. These unexpected reinforcements were most welcome, but started with some pathological Doctrine settings, including Weapons Hold??!!. Corrected this individually and tried to compensate for their limited endurance by establishing two shifts, rotating to the tankers, which kept as close as they dared.  
  
At 12:53, Event Tally Ho was fired. It could only mean that the strike was coming.  
  
13:00 : Another run of shocking luck as my picket F-14 to the East needed 4 missiles to kill a Fencer E, two Sparrows being jammed on 15% chances and a Sidewinder then missing on 50. The Backfire recon then re-appeared near Jan Mayen and wasn’t so lucky this time, as a Tomcat actually hit it with the first Phoenix – quite a rarity!.  
  
At 13:39, Event Tally Ho 2 was fired. I guessed that planes from different bases were launching at different times so that they all arrived at once. At +249, it was a Minor Victory, wonder of wonders!. I was, by now, fairly sure that any SSGNs were grouped around the Eisenhower Patrol Zone and that I’d moved well out of their reach, as they’d otherwise have fired as soon as I was detected earlier. It looked hopeful. The Russians seemed fixated on the Patrol Zone, they couldn’t have had a recent position fix on me and I was beginning to think I’d get away with it.  
  
Every air contact was being checked to see what it was. Suddenly, at 13:55, several Bears were spotted 380nm to the E. Not good, but did they know where I was?.  
  
14:00 : They did. When the strike came-in, it was overwhelming and unstoppable. Backfires led the way in appalling numbers and, with their 240nm search strike radar, there was no avoiding them. I got every available fighter airborne, had jamming aircraft aloft as well as the ships’ OECM, intercepted as far E as I could (but still not quite far enough – one Backfire was downed before it launched, but not the others) and fired every SAM I could. It made no difference. There were just too many Backfires, Badgers and Bears for any task force of this size to handle. We were swamped and the CVBG was completely wiped-out, only the Eisenhower needing as many as two hits to sink. This cost 350VP plus more for the planes lost aboard. I guess I could have mitigated the latter by flying-off all non-vital planes to Greenland, but hindsight is a fine thing. Very few losses were taken by the fighters on CAP, as there weren’t that many escorts. Some consolation was to be had in that all of these were automatically re-based to Heimaey. They even exacted a degree of retribution when yet more Backfires and Badgers poured-in and allowed themselves to be cut to ribbons, even though we were down to Sidewinders or even cannon by now. There were too many to kill them all, or anything like it and my survivors mostly made it back to Vestmannaeyjar. Even after all was done, a big wave of Fencers showed-up, just to make sure, but found no targets and left.  
  
18:00 : I could have quit, but saw it out, with surprising results. Not all of the fugitives were able to land at Heimaey due to capacity issues and a good dozen had to divert to Greenland. Using my hard-working tankers, I managed to save almost all of them.  
  
Meanwhile, the AI managed to crash-land an unbelievable number of returning Russian bombers and, at 4VP a time, this began to transform the scorecard.  
  
21:00 : I encouraged this process by mounting some fighter sorties from Heimaey, which harvested at least half-a-dozen enemy recon planes – the numbers were mind-boggling. Once this took the score into ‘Minor Victory’ territory, I shut-up shop.  
  
In theory, then, a ‘Minor Victory’, with a score of +257. In truth, it was a disaster. NATO lost a carrier, two cruisers, two destroyers, 4 Hawkeyes, 3 Prowlers, 7 Vikings, a U-2, 39 fighters and attack planes and 11 choppers. The USSR lost 30 fighters, 125 (!) bombers, 86 (!) recon/jammer planes, a flying boat, 3 hangars, an ammo pad, 5 AvGas installations and an office building.  
  
A considerable proportion of the Soviet losses were ‘operational’ in nature and I can’t claim any credit for them. This keeps happening in Northern Fury and I don’t know why. The AI can’t be messing-up its fuel or base capacity calculations that badly, can it?. It is possible that it deliberately ‘suicided’ its planes in order to reach the CVBG, in which case it got what it deserved.  
  
I’m not sure that there was any way to save the Eisenhower. It is a plot event and, judging from the briefing for the next scenario, will feature in the books. Perhaps the player is simply required to do their best and is compensated with the rather false cascade of VP for enemy crash-landings. Such is the nature of Northern Fury and, sometimes, you just have to accept it and move on. After all, regardless of what happens here, you’ll be without Eisenhower for the rest of the campaign