

NORTHERN INFERNO, EPISODE 2: GOBLIN ON THE DOORSTEP

North Channel off HMNB Clyde (Faslane), 14 August 1975, 2200Z (2200L)

Moderate Clouds 7-16000 ft, Heavy Rain, Sea State 5

SIDE BRIEFING

HMS Revenge has departed Faslane Naval Base to take up her patrol station. Soviet Submarines previously reported in the area still remain unaccounted for. Additional ASW forces have been deployed to protect HMS Revenge's transit to her patrol station.

Enemy Forces

Intelligence and sighting by fishing boats indicate a number of Soviet SSK and SSN's are in and around northern Scotland. Their intention is likely to intercept and sink the Revenge.

Friendly Forces

HMS Revenge SSBN

HMS Leander FFH (1 Wasp HAS.1)

HMS Plymouth FFH (1 Wasp HAS.1)

HMS Matapan Aux FF (1 Wessex HAS.3)

RAF Kinloss

- 333 Sqdn (5 Nimrod MR.1)

RNAS Prestwick

- 814 Sqdn (8 Sea King HAS.1)
- 201 Sqn Det (4 Nimrod MR.1)

Mission

Protect HMS Revenge at all costs. All other assigned forces are expendable.

Execution

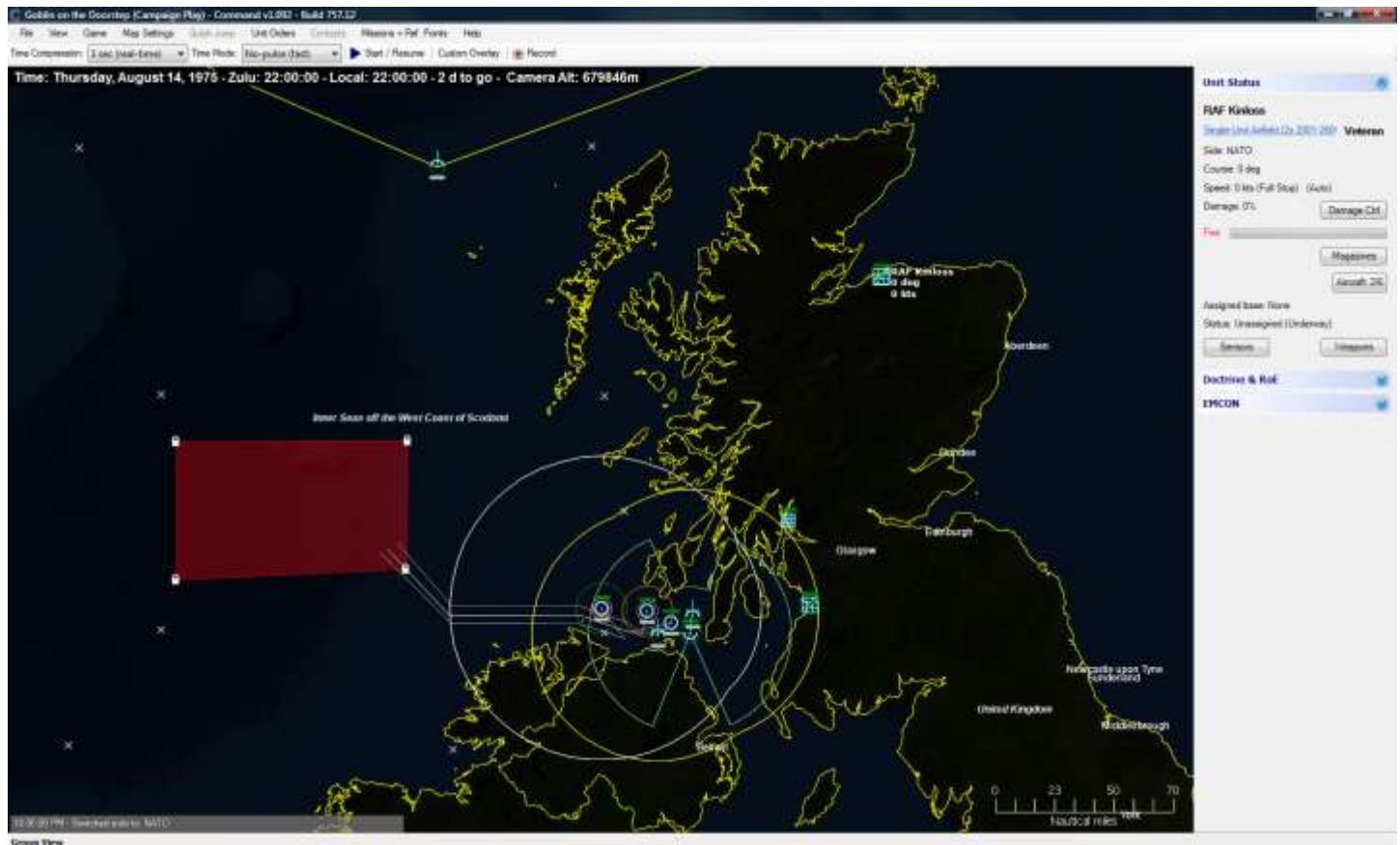
1. Using Nimrod MPAs, conduct barrier operations around patrol area.
2. SeaKing ASW Helos to dip ahead of HMS Revenge and sanitise the area using active/passive sensors.

Command & EMCON

Command: HQ Northwood

EMCON: Alpha-Limited Emissions

FIRST IMPRESSIONS AND SETUP



My task is to move one of the stealthiest underwater vehicles on the planet, from Scotland/Ireland's inland seas to the deep waters off shore. And I've got the help of two Frigates (HMS Leander with a decent VDS and Ikara, and HMS Plymouth with... well... a helicopter), one unarmed sonar testbed auxillary (HMS Matapan, which also has a helicopter) and the shore-based aircraft from Kinloss and Prestwick. I'm a little shorter on Nimrods than I'd prefer, but this is going to be another cakewalk. Right?

My setup is pretty straightforward. HMS Revenge is set on an indirect course to the patrol area, hugging the north coast of Ireland at 10 knots and max depth. Once the waters get deeper, I'll put her in the middle of the layer. Revenge is also my best sonar platform, so 10 knots is chosen to compromise between sonar performance, and moving the proceedings along. I set Revenge to passive emissions only, since there's zero value in advertising.

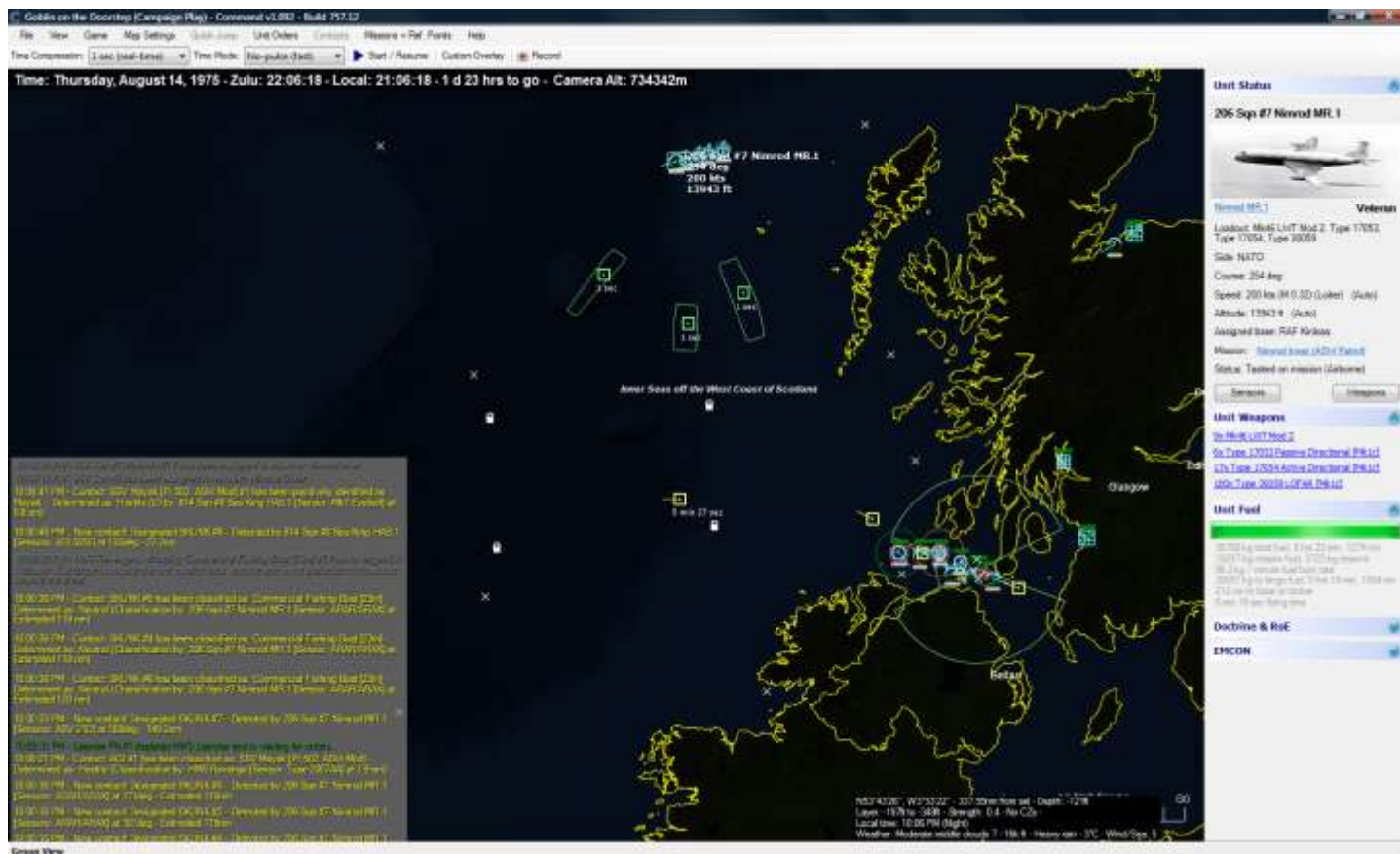
The surface ships will cut a path on and to either side of Revenge's route, clearing for subs and whatever else is out there. They're set to active emissions and I'm going to manually control them to sprint/drift and cover for one another. Leander is a decently capable ASW platform, it'll lead the pack. All three surface ships have helicopters on board, two Wasp and one Wessex. Oddly, one of the Wasps is armed with AS.12 missiles, but I'll worry about that later.

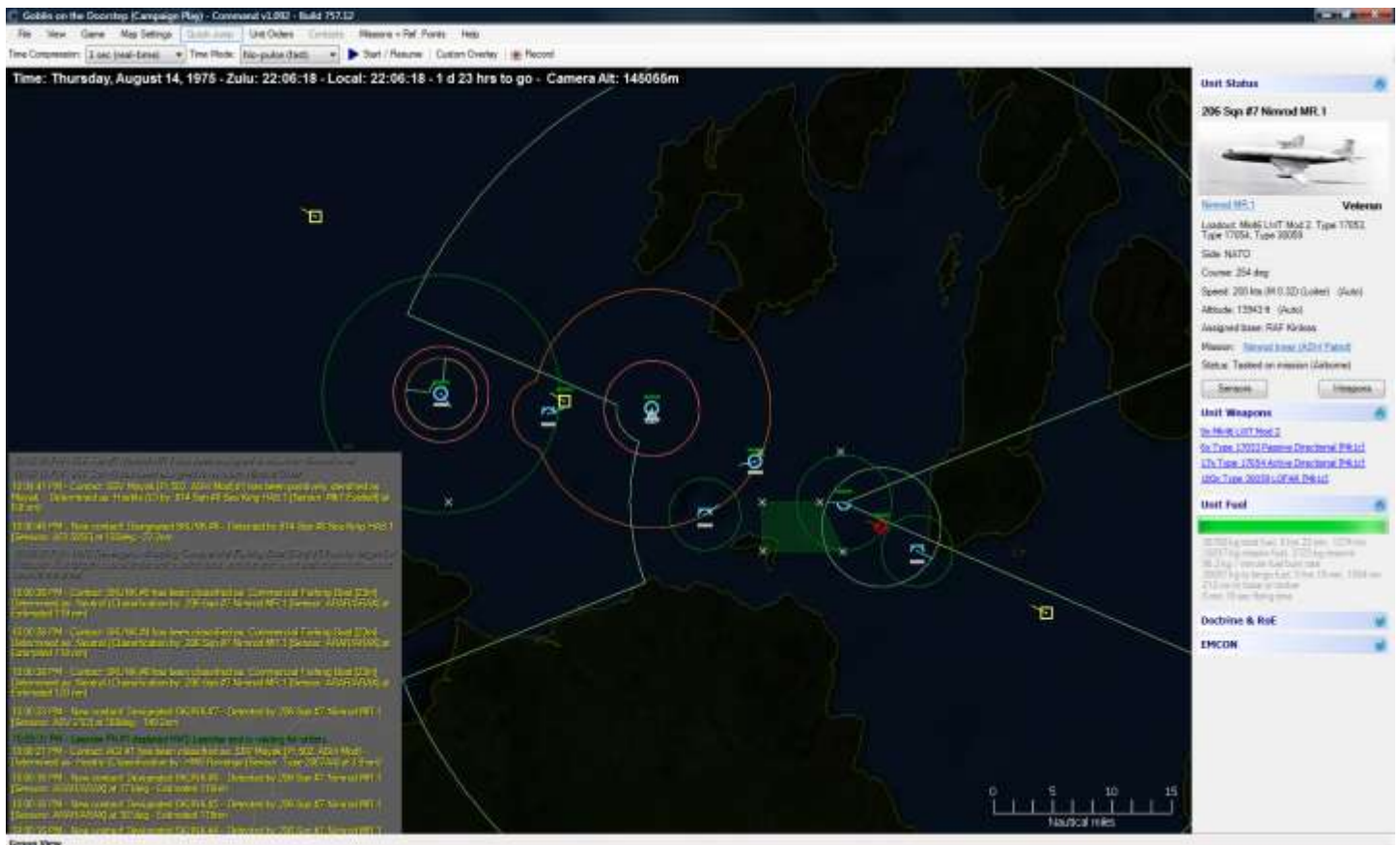
For the land-based air I set up four patrol zones. Two are Sea King ASW patrols with 4 helicopters each, one to the left and one to the right of Revenge's path, and extending from 3 to 15 nm ahead of the SSBN. The helicopters will use their 8 active sonobuoys and their dipping sonar to scour the seas ahead of the sub. The other two are MPA patrol zones. I set one up as "Outer" (2 Nimrods) and one as "Inner" (3 Nimrods). Reference points can be seen in the picture above; Inner completely contains the SSBN patrol area, Outer contains Inner. Similar to my approach in Opening Moves, I intend to have a couple Nimrods available nearby at all times, to prosecute any contacts that are picked up.

That's it, time to start the clock.

THE ACTION

Just like in Opening Moves, the screen floods with contacts... surface contacts this time, for the most part picked up by the ELINT/ESM sets on the airborne Nimrod MPA. Several of them are quickly identified as commercial fishing boats and are filtered out. One is immediately (and terrifyingly) identified as a hostile, approximately 3nm away from HMS Revenge. "What the hell is a Mayak?" Turns out it's an intelligence trawler, with an added RBU-2500. Pretty rudimentary ASW platform, but dangerous for its ability to mix with the commercial fishing fleet.

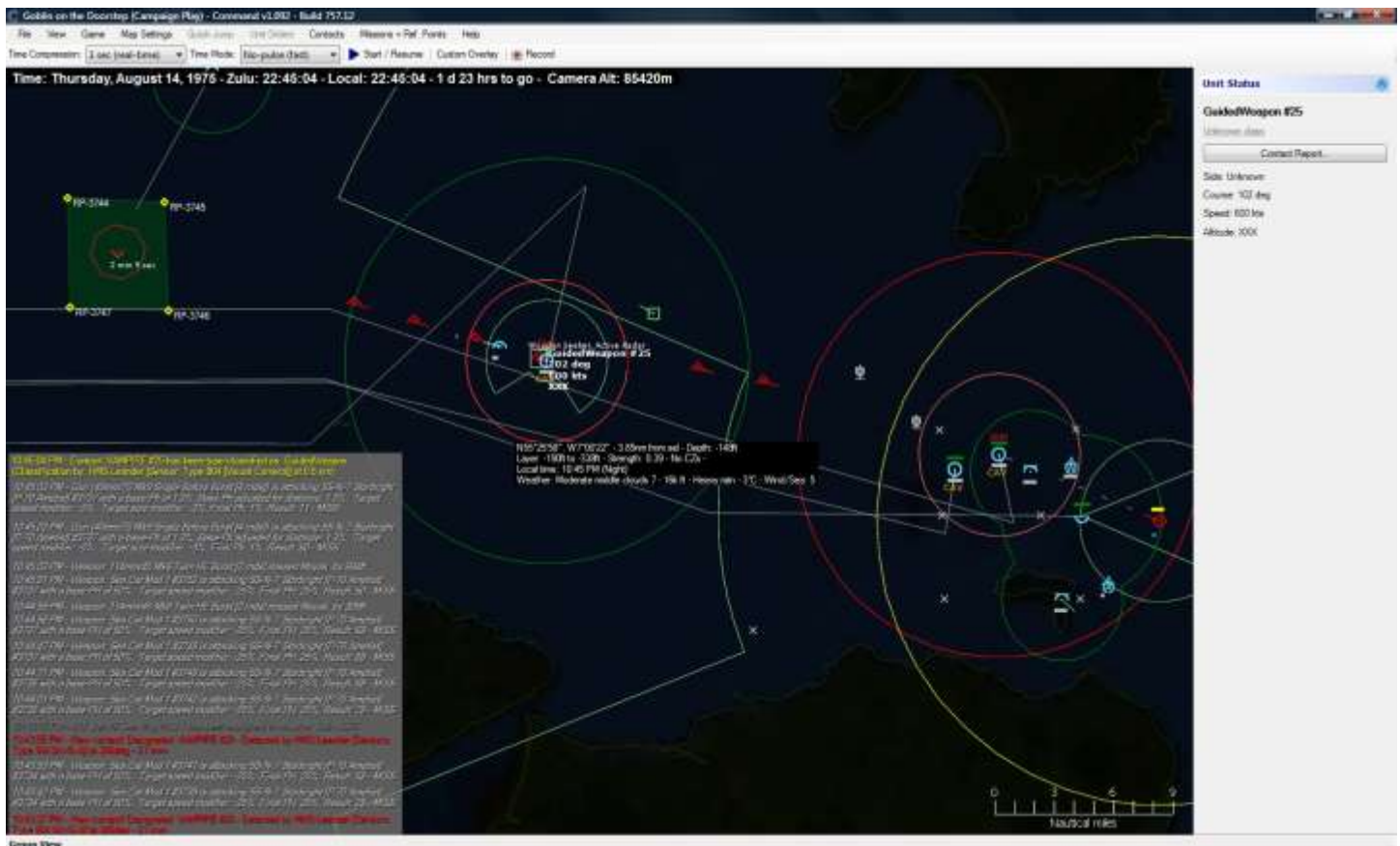




To heck with that, I'm the Royal bloody Navy... no Sov intel boat is operating in my backyard. I launch the ready Wasp on Leander, armed with AS.12s (it makes sense now!) and send him in to attack. He can be seen in the above picture between the two RN frigates, investigating another surface contact on the way to strike. Net result: two AS.12s launched, one hit, one malfunction; one Mayak AGI lightly damaged and slowed to 8 kts.

Well... a frigate should be able to make short of an upstart fishing trawler. I redirect HMS Plymouth to intercept, and open fire with the 114-mm gun at 2240Z. Results are mixed, firing at long range and missing wildly, so I continue to close at full speed while firing.

Very quickly I have much bigger concerns. Those AGIs are meant to provide intelligence to... someone. At 2242 the first Vampire warning comes in, two missiles on a course for HMS Plymouth.



Leander and Plymouth both light all radars, and Leander begins engaging the Vampires with Sea Cat SAMs... which are completely ineffective. I score zero hits on the two missiles crossing near Leander, which continue on toward Plymouth. The next volley of Vampires are directed at Leander; with the Sea Cats that Leander spent on the missiles headed for Plymouth, not many are left for the missiles inbound toward Leander. They fire their ready missiles then start the lengthy reload process. The picture above shows the Leander about to die, with a missile moments from hitting and completely unscathed by the Sea Cats or the Bofors 40-mm. That first AshM malfunctioned, the second obliterated the Leander. She was hit, destroyed, and gone in less than a minute, at 2245Z on 14 August.

Leander's last act was to detect the launching sub, a few dozen miles to the west. Based on the volume of missiles and their 350-foot flight profile I suspect it's a Charlie class SSGN who's been slinging SS-N-7s my way and I set up a patrol area to hunt it down. An airborne Sea King that had been investigating surface contacts, and one of the airborne Nimrods, are assigned to seek vengeance.

The remaining Vampires continue unabated toward Plymouth, whos own Sea Cats are equally useless against the low-flying Starbrights. Fortunately the missiles were launched at the very fringes of effective range, and the incoming shots fall harmlessly into the ocean within 2 nm of the Plymouth.



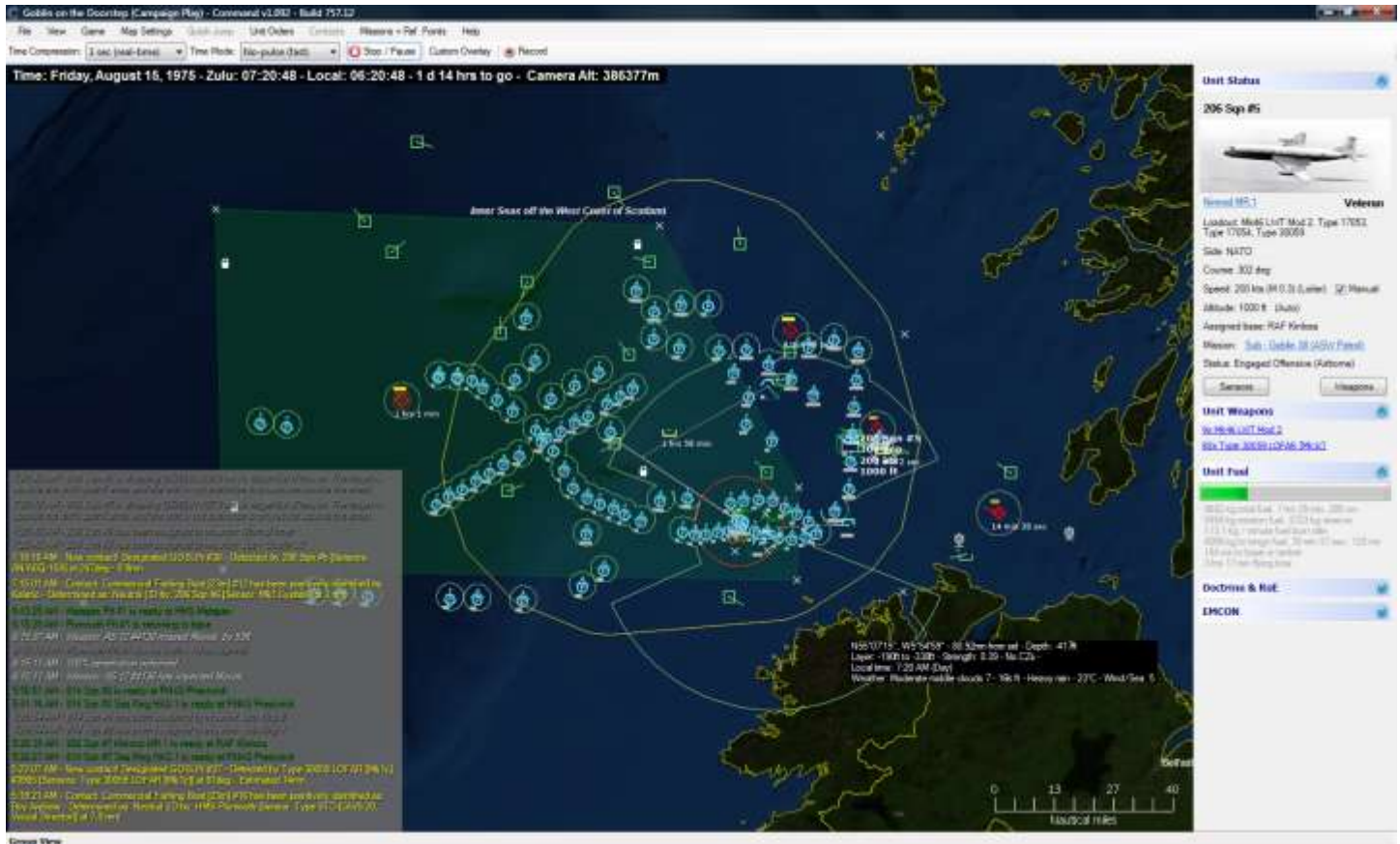
The Sea King dropped a Mk. 44 on the target, still relatively uncertain, and watched the torpedo circle without ever acquiring. It did prompt a response from the sub, which kicked up revs and started broadcasting a lot more noise. With the target now localized and firmly classified as a Whiskey SS, the Sea King dropped another Mk. 44. This one also failed to acquire the diesel boat. The Nimrod arrived on scene, and after dropping four torpedoes finally scored a hit. Fortunately a single hit was all it took, and the Whiskey settled to the bottom in the shallow water.

While this action was ongoing another Goblin appeared close aboard, prompting a course change and a lot of consternation, but it was eventually classified as a Biological.

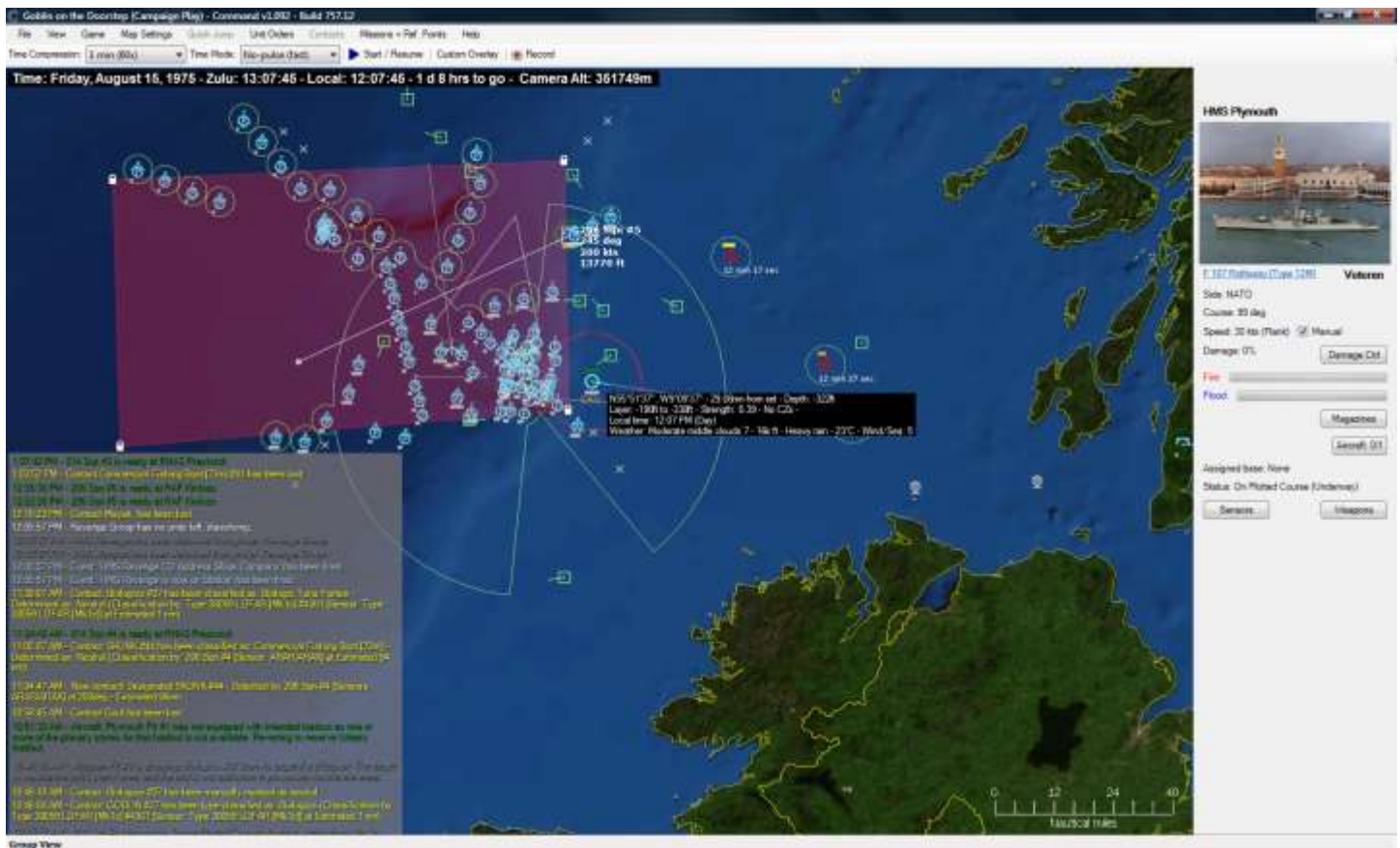
At 0337Z, another round of panic. This time it was a low-frequency sonar that gave away a new underwater contact, and very few schools of mackerel carry those. This one was very close, less than 3nm from HMS Revenge, and actively searching. I turned Revenge away from the contact, sprinted in with HMS Plymouth, and dispatched both Sea Kings to chase it. It was localized in about 10 minutes and the Sea King dropped a Mk.44. The older model torpedo performed better in this case, scoring a hit and a damage on the first shot. The second missed, but the other Sea King followed up with a pair of Mk.11 depth charges, finishing the job. I never classified the target, but the post game report showed this one to be a Tango-class SS. Sneaky bastard, getting inside torpedo range before I ever knew he was there.

I had also closed enough at this point to launch HMS Plymouth's Wasp to strike the last undamaged AGI, hitting it with one AS.12 at 0615Z. Unfortunately the other missile failed and the AGI was still operable, and still inside the SSBN's patrol box.

The tactical picture at 0720Z is shown below. There are four variously damaged Soviet AGIs scattered around the Area of Operations, my three-ship convoy (HMS Revenge and two surface escorts) is approaching the patrol box, and the Nimrods are continuing to lay a sonobuoy carpet.



At 0855 yet another Goblin was detected by the wandering Nimrods, and localized at 0902 in the northwest part of Revenge's patrol area. The Nimrod took a shot with a Mk.46, which missed. I ordered a double-drop on the next pass as the sub accelerated and dove. It was classified as a Victor II, and two more torpedoes were dropped at 0905. Shockingly, both passed directly over the target... the Victor was at 1312 feet, and the Mk.46s were circling impotently at their max depth, 1214 feet. Another strike against NATO's primary air-dropped ASW weapon... it can't dive as deep as it's intended prey!



RESULTS AND IMPRESSIONS

The scenario closed with a Triumph, with HMS Revenge safely in her deep-water patrol area and six less Soviet submarines that NATO had to worry about. The loss of the Leander hurt, and made for a couple nervous moments. I would really liked to have had the Ikara available when that Tango popped up inside torpedo range!

My impressions:

- The Mk.46 continued its marginal performance, and notched another point in the “this thing is crap” column, being unable to engage a Victor at max depth. I suppose that answers the question from my previous AAR about what it would do against an Alfa or Sierra... absolutely nothing.
- Mk.44s are worse, needing to circle for a while and acquire the target after being dropped. While I actually had a larger hit percentage with the Mk.44 than the Mk.46 in this scenario, I suspect that’s more a result of a small data-set, than better weapon performance.
- Hoooo boy, did shipboard point defenses suck in this time period. Sea Cat was very limited by it’s four ready rounds and poor kinetic performance, and the lack of a CIWS was brutal. HMS Leander had essentially zero chance against a multi-missile sea-skimmer attack. I haven’t seen what a mid-70s AAW destroyer or cruiser could do against a similar attack, I’m hoping there are much more capable systems out there.
- Sub-hunting is all about patrol zones and patience. Fun in its own way, and another good scenario, but I’m looking forward to getting into some ASuW or air-warfare work.

