

NORTHERN INFERNO, EPISODE 3: THE FAST AND THE FURIOUS

Norwegian Sea off Finnmark, 20 August 1975, 0500Z (0700L)

Light Clouds 20-23000 ft, Light Rain, Sea State 3

SIDE BRIEFING

An attack on Norway is imminent. Two Soviet amphibious groups believed to be carrying the Northern Fleet's Naval Infantry Brigade and a complete Soviet mechanized division are heading toward the Norwegian coast.

In addition, Soviet missile boat groups are reported to be heading into your patrol area. The submarine threat is unknown. No hostile air units are expected in the patrol area.

Enemy Forces

1. At least a dozen Soviet Osa I and Osa II missile boats are believed to be operating in the area, armed with SS-N-2 Styx missiles.
2. Amphibious units with heavy escort are heading towards Banak.

Friendly Forces

1st Frigate Sqdn: HNoMS Trondheim FF, HNoMS Sleipner FFL

21st MTB Squadron det: HNoMS Snøgg, HNoMS Rapp, HNoMS Snar FAC-M

22nd MTB Squadron det: HNoMS Arg, HNoMS Blink, HNoMS Brann FAC-M

24th MTB Squadron Det: HNoMS Teist, HNoMS Tjeid, HNoMS Skarv FAC-T

Banak Air Base

- 718 Sqdn (6 F-5A Freedom Fighter)
- 717 Sqdn (2 RF-5A Freedom Fighter)
- 330 Sqdn Det (2 Sea King Mk.54)

Mission

1. Seek out and destroy the amphibious units before they reach Banak. The amphibious units are your highest priority targets.
2. Destroy the enemy missile boats.
3. This is a prelude to an invasion, so make your missile shots count.

Execution

Engage all Soviet units encountered. Torpedoes are largely ineffective against small boats, so you may have to rely on missiles and guns to counter smaller enemy warships.

Several neutral fishing boats may be in the area so be careful on target identification.

Command & EMCON

Command: HNoMS Trondheim

EMCON: alpha-limited emissions

The East and the West (Campaign Play) - Console v1.000 - Build 75713

File View Game Map Settings Unit Orders Controls Missions + Ref. Points Help

Time Compression: 1 (AC (M41-64)) Time Mode: No-pulse (AC) Start / Resume Custom Overlay Record

Time: Wednesday, August 20, 1975 - Zulu: 06:00:00 - Local: 08:00:00 - 1 d 12 hrs to go - Camera Alt: 1177694m

Clear Island

British Sea

British (Discretionary Air Base)

0 deg
0 km

56°48'N 010°47'W - 280 Miles from sea - Depth: 458
Layer: 1316 to 2306 - Strength: 0.37 - No C2
Level time: 0.00 AM (0 sec)
Weather: Light high clouds 20-25 ft - Light sea - 17°C - Wind: Sea 3

0 40 80 120
Nautical miles

Unit Status

British (Discretionary Air Base)

Infantry (14 units)

Group Composition (select for DB info)

- 1x AC Harrier (No Large Aircraft)
- 2x AC Tornado (No Very Large Air)
- 3x Armo. Bunker (Surface)
- 1x ArSea Bunker (700k (No Tank)
- 1x Building (Control Tower)
- 1x Runway (2000m)
- 2x Runway (300m)
- 2x Runway Access Point (Large Aircraft)
- 1x Runway-Grade Taxiway (2000m)

NATO

Counter: 0 deg

Speed: 0 kts (Full Stop) (Auto)

Group level up slow down (group return)

Magazine

Aircraft 3/10

Status: Unassigned

Service

Doctrine & Role

EMCON

0:00:00 AM - Switched cycle to NATO

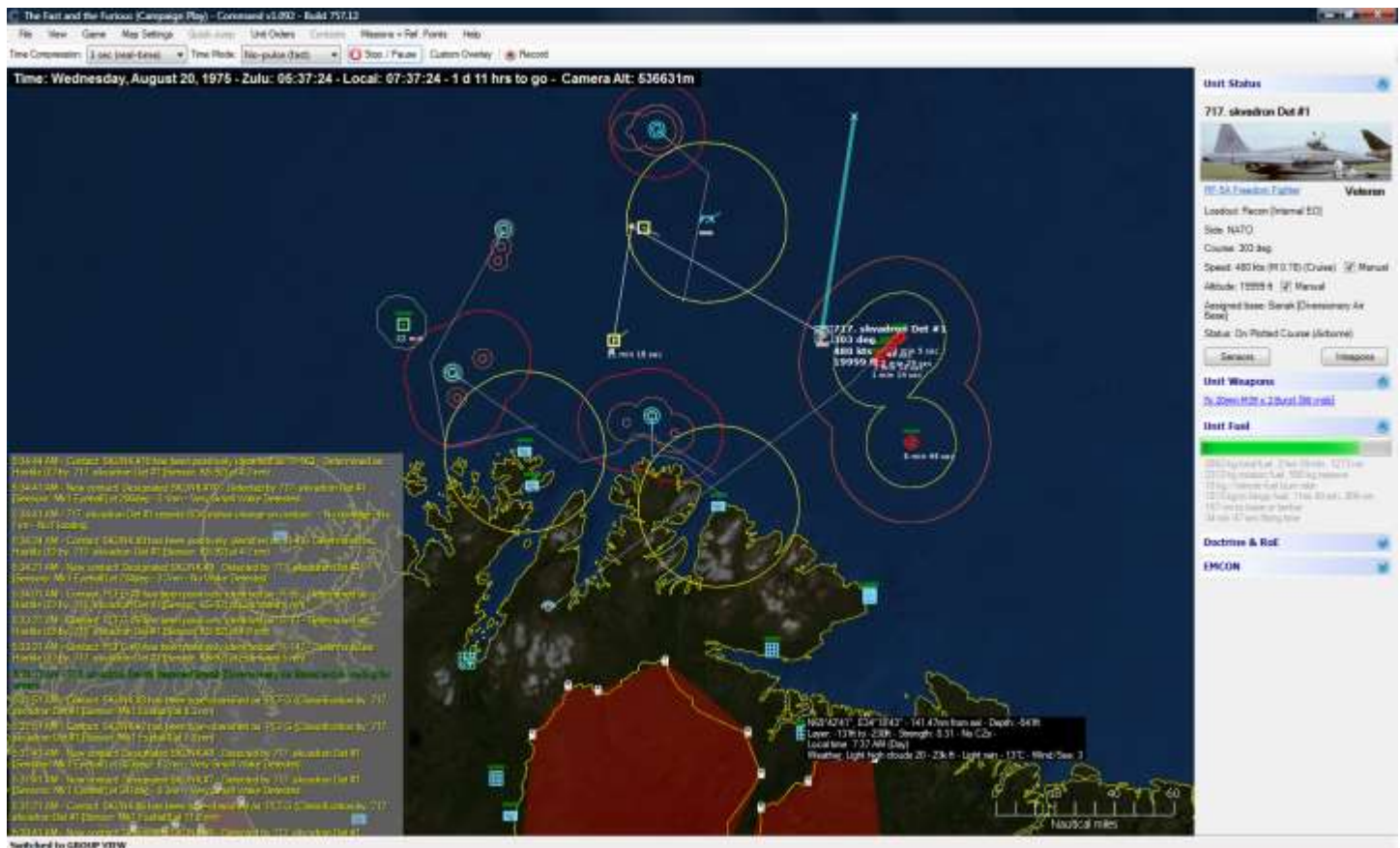
Switched side to NATO

After two scenarios of ASW ops, it's time for some surface and air warfare... aerial reconnaissance, light forces zooming about, guns blazing, bombs and missiles flying, Let's do this!

I've got three groups of missile and/or torpedo fast-attack boats, two heavier frigates including the relatively advanced HnoMS Trondheim, an Oslo class ship packing Penguin ASHMs and Sea Sparrow SAMs. I've also got a decent, though not spectacular, airborne element, with a half dozen F-5As and a couple recce assets.

The unknown submarine threat concerns me, since I have no ASW assets worth a damn. I also have no shipboard helicopters, no area air defense capability, and not a single thing airborne that carries an ELINT or ESM set. There's going to be a lot of blindly snooping around with the aircraft... in fact I intend to use my air assets to find and fix the enemy, and preferably whittle them down, prior to committing any of my surface units. In particular I want to find and eliminate any opposition missile boats, allowing my own to concentrate on the amphibious unit(s).

I set up a Support mission for the Sea King and its disappointingly short-ranged surface search radar, and I get an RF-5A airborne. There's a cloud deck at 20000 feet, so I set him for a cruise altitude of 19999 and start looking for bad guys. I set the three FAC squadrons on courses to bring them inshore, ideally to keep them hidden amongst Finnmark's islands and fjords until their time comes. The frigate squadron is also not terribly aggressive, setting more or less on a course to back up the Sea King's patrol mission. All my surface ships are set to radar-/sonar-passive, to keep them as hidden as possible.



I launch a pair of Rockeye-armed F-5As to start picking at the Osas. By the time they arrive on-scene the RF-5 has queued up a half-dozen or so targets, and they go to work. During this action a hostile helicopter is also spotted by the recce jet, slightly to the north of the main missile boat concentration. The F-5s are effective in tackling that threat with 20-mm cannon fire, downing an Mi-24 (which should have been a clue to the whereabouts of the 'phibs), but less obviously effective against the Osas. The pair drops a total of 4 Rockeyes on 5 boats, and strafes until empty, with very little to show for it... four of the Russians show up lightly damaged. 30 minutes into the action I've resolved to leave the Rockeyes back at the base for the rest of the scenario. At 0554 I launched a pair of Mk.82 armed F-5As for a follow up strike. I've also got a pair armed with AGM-12 Bullpups sitting on the runway, but I'm holding onto them in case the 'phibs suddenly appear.



The LDGP F-5s fare better than the Rockeye F-5s, sinking 1 Osa, heavily damaging another (which sinks shortly), and leaving three still lightly damaged. Worryingly, I still haven't detected a hint of the 'Phibs but it's time to knock out some more of the missile-boat screen. I launch the last pair of ready F-5s, armed with 4 AGM-12 Bullpup air-to-surface missiles between them. The command-guided weapons and their 250-lb warheads are extremely effective, sinking four Osa/Osa II boats with four shots, without exposing either fighter to return fire.

At approximately 0700, a Vampire warning screams for attention, at the same time a new helicopter contact is spotted by HNoMS Trondheim inside 2 miles. It's another Mi-24, presumably from the Soviet Amphibious squadron, that has managed to evade the Trondheim and the Sleipner's air-search radars.

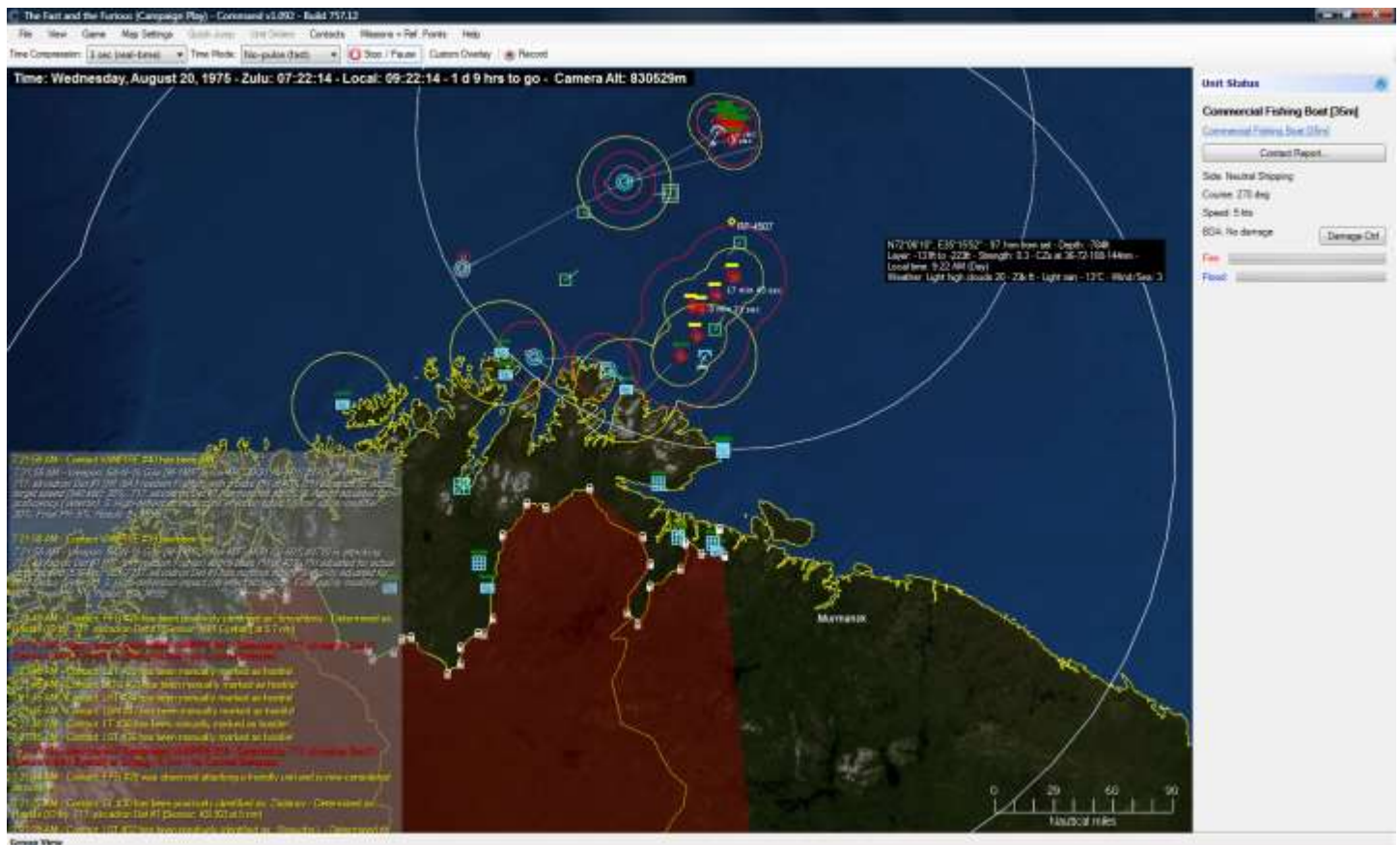
Entirely because they've been cruising blind, with their radars off.

This is definitely a black mark on the entire command structure, and I start casting about for someone to blame.

As the Mi-24 lobbs AT-2 ATGMs and S-5K FFARs (I assume) at the Trondheim, the Frigate squadron finally wakes up and starts acting like a naval unit. The Trondheim takes multiple hits before finally downing the Mi-24 with a couple Sea Sparrow shots. While there was some fire and minor flooding, more worrying was the loss of an air-search radar and one of the ship's short-range 20-mm cannon.

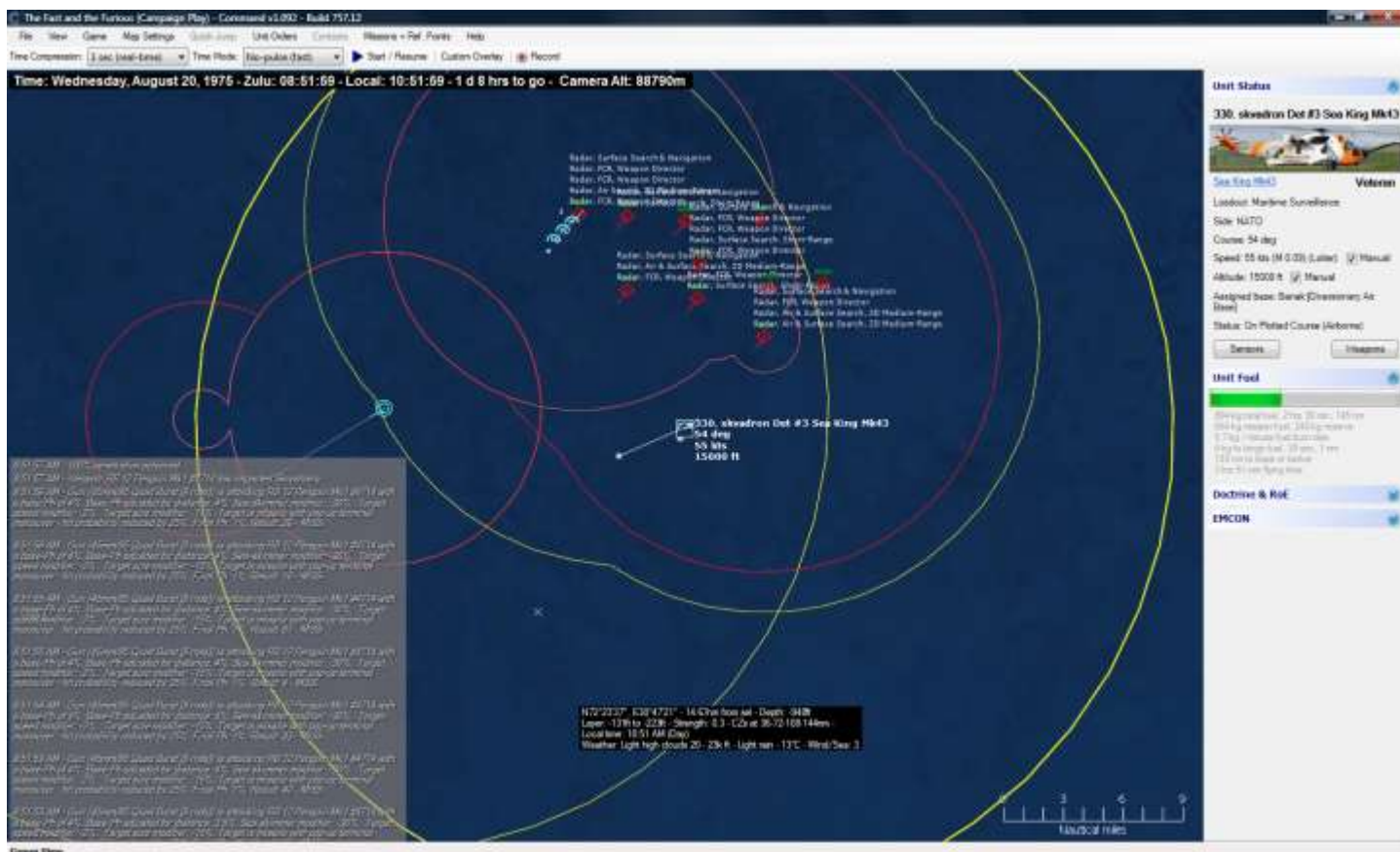
About 10 minutes later, the RF-5A spots a tightly-packed group of surface contacts, and closes to get a confirmation that it's the prize. While identifying the makeup of the task group (6 Phibs, 1 CL, and 4 escorting destroyers and frigates) the pilot wanders within the engagement envelope of a SAM Kotlin class DDG, and is chased off by two SA-N-1 Goa SAMs. Fortunately neither strikes home, and the pilot has learned to be a bit more aware of standoff distance.

So to this point in the action, about 2 ½ hours into the scenario, my naval leadership is heavily in question. I was ambushed and surprised by a tank-killing helicopter that had no business getting within 20 miles of the frigates undetected. I've found the amphibious unit, but my ready fighters are all back at base having struck the Osas with varying degrees of success. I almost lost half of my aerial reconnaissance force, blundering too close to the Soviet task group. Six of the Russian missile boats still remain, strung out in a roughly north-south line, sweeping to the west looking for my forces. And finally, most of my own fast-attack boats are now close in-shore and making their way directly toward contact with the Osas, rather than having swept around them to meet the much more critical amphibious force.



However, all is not lost. Redemption begins at 0815, when another Mi-24 Hind shows up on a beeline for the Trondheim. The frigate has learned her lesson and this time the helicopter was detected long before becoming a real threat. A pair of Sea Sparrows dispatches the oncoming helicopter with little fanfare.

The Norwegian frigate group has been charging directly toward the oncoming Soviet force for over an hour, and once inside firing range, HNoMS Trondheim ripples all four RB.12 Penguin anti-ship missiles as the SAM Kotlin class DDG on the northwest corner of the Russian formation. It's the only identified ship with a decent area air-defense capability, limited though the SA-N-1 may be. I decide to remove that threat prior to any air attacks on the main body.



The IR-guided missiles cover the 15 miles to the Russian destroyer in just about 2 minutes, and they hit home with savage effect. Three of the four missiles strike the targeted ship and detonate, leaving her dead in the water and burning. Within the hour she slips beneath the waves, leaving the Soviets with a greatly reduced SAM umbrella.



I say reduced, because while trying to provide a post-strike damage assessment my Sea King is fired on by the other air defense ship hiding amongst the escorts, this one identified as more capable Kashin class DDG, Stroiyny. So much for the renewed brilliance of the command staff. The Sea King also escapes harm.

At this point I've been shadowing the Soviet amphibious group long enough to see their course and speed of advance. I set reference points at their expected 2-, 3-, 4-, and 5-hour locations, and I check the status of my fighters at Banak. They're expected to be ready to launch in about 3:30, four armed with Mk. 82 LDGP bombs, and two with RB.12 Bullpups.

I set each of the four surface groups on a path to converge at the four-hour mark, from multiple directions, with the intention of striking by air immediately before closing to gun range. I'll hit the Osas with Penguins from my own missile boats as they close from the south. Once I do close to engage I'm expecting the cruiser and her 6-inch main battery to be the big tough customer. I'll focus on that ship with the remaining ASHMs and my air strike, to allow my surface units to close within range of their own 76-mm mounts. I'll use my Sea Kings and RF-5As to keep tabs on the Osas, maintain surveillance on the known Soviet group, and keep looking around in case another enemy unit is lurking.

As my missile boats begin to move toward the planned rendezvous, the Soviet Osas come within range. One by one I figure a single RB.12 at each. I get exceedingly lucky with my first three shots, sinking three Russian missile boats in succession, without them firing back. I assume they haven't identified my ships as hostile.

Break in the narrative: I left the computer for a couple hours, thinking I'd paused the game. Instead I'd set the time compression to 1x, but never hit pause. When I got back that evening, I found a couple interesting things:

- The Osas had essentially wrecked the missile boats coming from the south.
- The planned convergence had worked exactly as intended, and all of my remaining ships were within gun range, in fact practically within fistfight range ("Away boarders!!!") of the Soviet task group.
- The Russians hadn't fired a shot. Not the feared cruiser, not the escorts with their 130-mm guns, not the phibs... no one had fired a thing.

I thought about that for a little while, and I decided that I wanted to make a couple tweaks before playing things out. I opened my most recent save in the editor, and made two changes:

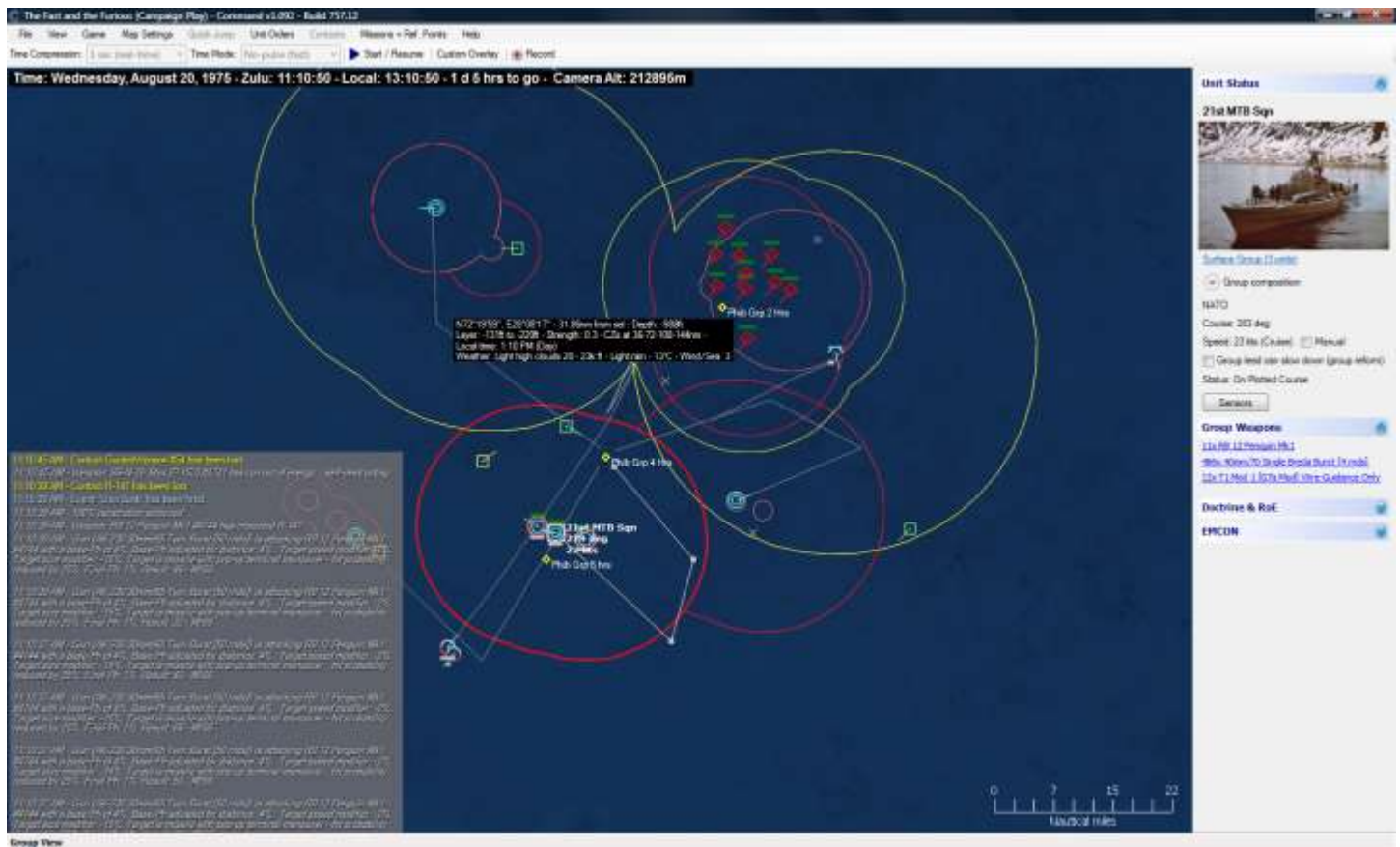
- Set the Soviet amphibious task group to Engage Opportunity Targets
- Set the same group's WRA to not use the Phib's artillery rockets against ships

I reloaded the game and I'll pick up the narrative from there

At 1045Z I remember that the patrolling RF-5A is armed, and I send it to identify and engage the loitering Russian helicopter. This it utterly fails to do, somehow missing with every burst. I do identify it as a Ka-25 'Hormone' patrol helicopter, which means it's not a direct threat, but is very likely to pass identification and targeting information to the various enemy surface ships.



I've spread out the two MTB Sqdns as they approach the remaining Soviet missile screen. Assuming that as soon as my boats launch missiles the helicopter will identify them as hostile, I choose one unlucky winner. I split HNoMS Brann from the MTB Sqdn 22 formation and at 1106Z she fires three RB.12 Penguin missiles at three targets. She is, as expected, targeted by return fire. I'm micromanaging to an extreme degree, and I'm able to see the results of the first launches before the big SS-N-2s arrive; and I fire Brann's last ASHM at the Osa R-147, which was missed by a malfunctioning Penguin. That missile struck home, eliminating the last remnant of the Russian screen. The cost was the loss of the Brann, which was utterly obliterated by a Styx.

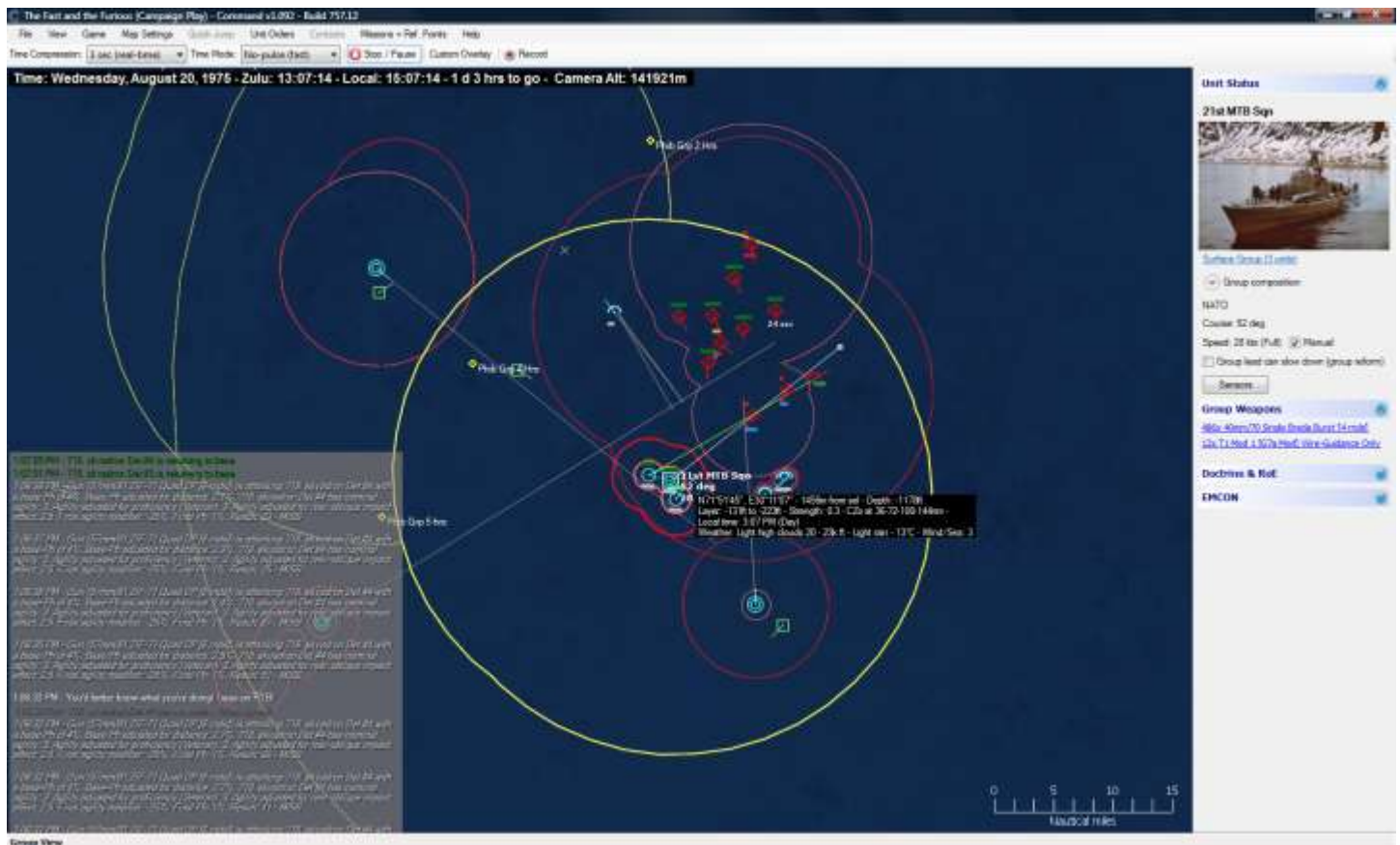


A bit before noon I notice that the Otmenny, a Soviet Mod Skoryy class frigate, has moved well ahead of the rest of the group in her sprint-drift screening role. I send the remaining two ships of MTB Squadron 22, Arg and Blink, on a sprint to close within missile range. The first Russian within range is the Otmenny, the target of two RB12s at 1144Z. One hits, doing heavy damage, and the other malfunctions. The Otmenny receives a follow-up shot, hoping to finish her off; the group's last two missiles are slated for the Kashin-class DDG Stroiny, intended to eliminate the last SAM-equipped ship in the task force. Otmenny appears to be living a charmed life, as yet another RB12 malfunctions, while Stroiny absorbs both hits. She is slowed and burning to some extent, but still alive.

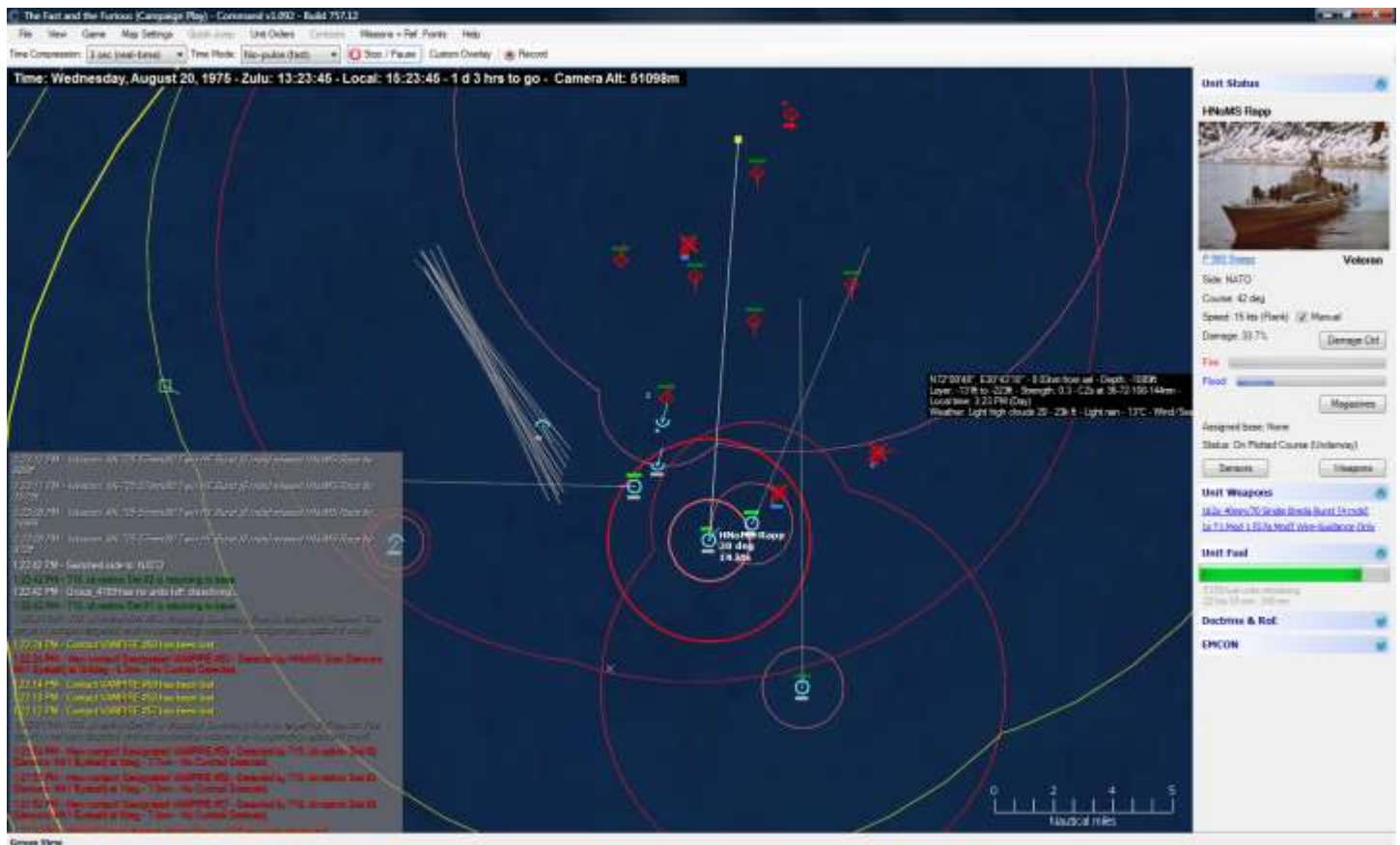
During the run-in to fire on Stroiny the Arg and Blink have crept within gun range of both the Otmenny, ahead of the main Soviet group, and the CL Zhdanov with her long-ranging 152-mm guns. In the space of a very few minutes Arg takes a hit for minor damage from Otmenny's 130-mm gun, then a brutal series of salvos from Zhdanov's 6-inchers leaves her nearly dead in the water. This is followed by a torpedo strike that breaks her back. The surviving ship, HNoMS Blink, wheels around and sprints away from the Russians to seek cover with MTB Sqdn 21.

The commanding admiral jumps down a database rabbit-hole where he discovers that... I'll be darned... the Otmenny has anti-ship torpedoes.

At 1257Z Sqdn 21 has moved within Penguin range of the Soviet group, and opens their action with six RB12s all fired at the cruiser Zhdanov. Thanks to the Soviet formation beginning to break down, my Sea King is able to maintain position to observe the results of the strike, with three missiles hitting home for medium damage. The group follows with its last five missiles, four targeted at Zhdanov and one at the so-far untouched Kotlin-class frigate Spokoinyy. Both ships are hit and Zhdanov is now visibly flooding and badly hurt. Spokoinyy is also flooding and shows signs of fire.



The last pair of F-5As arrives on scene at 1321, armed with four Bullpup missiles. These are targeted, two each, on the surviving frigates. Both finally succumb to the onslaught, leaving the path completely open to strike the Soviet amphibious task group. HNoMS Snogg launches two torpedoes at a Ropucha-class LST, while Snar closes to launch two at a Polnochny-class LSM.



The Ropucha succumbs first, and at that point the scenario officially concluded as sinking one of the Russian amphibious ships was enough to deliver victory. I continued to engage, MTB 21 followed in order by MTB Sqdn 23 and her torpedo boats. Ultimately the frigates Trondheim and Sleipner, joined by Blink returning to the action, finished off any remaining targets with their 76-mm guns.

RESULTS AND IMPRESSIONS

The scenario closed with an Average result after the first Soviet amphibious ship went down. I continued the fight until all Soviet ships had been eliminated, while losing several missile and torpedo boats. None of my light forces got off unscathed, all of them suffering some degree of gun damage while making their torpedo and missile runs.

My impressions:

- The Rockeye issue was partially a poor combination of targets and shooters, partially a software issue that's been resolved. More details here:
<http://www.matrixgames.com/forums/tm.asp?m=4003436>
- I missed one adjustment when I edited the save-game. I forgot to set the Soviet group to "Ignore Plotted Course While Attacking – No." I think that would have maintained some formation discipline and made the job of getting to the 'phibs a bit tougher. Throwing in a zig-zag, rather than a ruler-straight course for Banak, would have complicated things too.
- I was surprised by the overall lack of capability in such a major NATO ally... no ELINT/ESM on any of the aircraft, and the F-5A is a pretty poor attack platform. Did they have any better combat aircraft in the mid-70s? This was the country expected to anchor NATO's northern flank, and against a concerted Soviet effort with any real air or sub support, things would have been ugly. I know that if there had been subs the scenario designer would have included Norwegian MPA/ASW aircraft, but still... F-5As are not the strongest hook on which to hang your air combat hat.
- The short range of the Penguins surprised me a bit too, the Norwegian missile boats were almost inside Zhdanov's gun range before the Penguins could launch.
- All in all, a very fun scenario. My favorite scenarios are good combination of air and surface action, and this fit the bill.

Now on to the next challenge.... Oh.

Well.

More sneaking around.