

# COUNTERSTRIKE

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A few weeks before the tenth anniversary of their occupation of Earth, the Invid launched the largest coordinated global offensive since the invasion a decade earlier. The goal was clear – to wipe out all major organized resistance – and the Invid nearly succeeded. As with all such endeavors throughout history the final outcome was the result of several factors – planning, timing and most of all, luck.

The exact nature of the Invid strikes in North and South America remains unclear, as there were no survivors who could provide that information, but in Oceania the remaining United Earth Forces were able to piece together a picture of the events of that fateful day in late February 2043.

Hindsight being 20/20, it was apparent after the fact that the Invid buildup had begun some eight weeks earlier. Military intelligence teams investigating the circumstances of the attack poured over sensor logs, reviewed patrol and mission reports, and even ventured into the Melbourne ruins to interview the ragtag outcasts still eking out a living there. With the end result known, the pattern became easy to discern. Sometime in late December or early January the Invid forces at the New South Wales and Queensland Hives began relocating large numbers of mecha to staging areas in the mountains along the Tasman Sea coast of southeast Australia.

Recon teams sent into the area since the attack found a massive network of tunnels and caverns dug into the mountains. The structure, now abandoned, appears to have been nothing less than a fully functioning Invid Hive, built over the course of a few short months but designed to house and sustain the nearly 20,000 combat mecha that participated in the assault on New Zealand. But the New Zealand strike was only one of several coordinated attacks made on United Earth Forces across Oceania that day.

## AUSTRALIA

The attacks began as the sun rose over the Great Barrier Reef and eastern Australia. A force of several thousand Invid launched from the Queensland Hive bound for Alice Springs while the New South Wales Hive dispatched two assault groups, one headed eastward for Norfolk Island and a smaller one to the southwest to deal with the United Earth thought to be based out of the small settlement of Junction Station. At the same time, a contingent of Invid consisting mainly of aquatic Manta and Stingray mecha left the mountain staging area to make a surprise attack on the UEF outpost at Hobart on Tasmania. On the other side of the continent, with dawn still a few hours away, the Western Australia Hive launched a force of nearly ten thousand mecha to attack the UEF holdings in southwestern Australia, and sent a smaller force north to try and ferret out the United Earth Forces known to be operating somewhere near the northern edge of the Great Sandy Desert.

The goal of these initial strikes was to eliminate the UEF presence in mainland Australia, and to do so quickly so no warning could be sent to New Zealand of the impending attack there. An hour after launch the western Invid force had closed near enough to the UEF bases to the south to begin jamming their targets' communications and sensors. Having grown accustomed to the occasional electromagnetic interference generated by whatever the Invid were up to in the Gibson desert north of them, the United Earth Forces at the main base at Karlgarin were slow to realize that something different was happening.

## TASMANIA

About a half hour after the Western Australia force had begun their electronic jamming, the Tasmania strike group emerged from the waters off Hobart and launched their assault. The UEF troops there were caught completely by surprise by the sudden eruption of several hundred Invid mecha from Storm Bay, some fifty kilometers from the outpost near the Hobart ruins. Veritech pilots raced for their planes but none could get their Alpha Fighters in the air before the Invid arrived. The mecha were destroyed on the ground by a series of strafing attacks while the Marine Infantry Company stationed at Hobart desperately tried to fight off the attackers. Most of the Marines had made it to their Cyclone mecha but in the end they were no match for the attackers. Though they fought valiantly, the element of surprise and sheer number of Invid was too much and within a matter of minutes the UEF outpost at Hobart was silenced, never having had the chance to get a warning out or call for help.

## **VALHALLA BASE, SOUTH AUSTRALIA**

While the Hobart outpost was being destroyed, the Invid forces back in Australia encountered their first setback. The swarm of several hundred Invid dispatched from the New South Wales Hive to Junction Station was detected by United Earth Forces at the newly established Valhalla Base. Set up in the ruins of the second Grand Cannon planetary defense site, Valhalla was too recent for the Invid to be aware of its existence and Lt. Col. Robert "Deadman" Graves, whose 54<sup>th</sup> Marine Veritech Battalion was stationed at Valhalla, sent out forces to intercept the Invid. Two Veritech Alpha Fighter squadrons, backed up by a Heavy Silverback Veritech mechanized squadron and one of the base's MTA Titan Ground-Based Mobile Units (GMU), ambushed the Invid while they were headed for Junction Station. A series of long, medium and short range missile barrages from the Marine forces resulted in heavy losses for the Invid force before they'd had a chance to react. Their attack swarm disrupted, the remaining Invid mecha were disorganized and easily dealt with by the Alpha Fighters.

As the Marines returned to base, the United Earth Forces at Valhalla discovered that they were unable to make contact with the UEF bases at Alice Springs, Karlgarin or Hobart. One of the returning Veritech Fighter squadrons was dispatched to Tasmania, the site of the closest outpost, to investigate.

## **AUSTRALIA**

Two hours after launching from their hives, the remaining Invid strike forces dispatched across continental Australia reached their targets and began their attacks. The Western Australia forces descended on the main UEF base at Karlgarin as well as the outpost at the settlement of Crossroads and the docks at Safe Harbor. To the north another force began electronic jamming and random bombardment of a wide area. The hidden New Dundee Base went silent in the hope of evading detection by the probing force; and in central Australia the Invid swarm from the Queensland Hive began its devastating attack on the nomad settlement at Alice Springs and the UEF outpost there. With the known UEF bases of operation in Australia under siege the main Invid force destined for New Zealand began launching from their hidden hive in the mountains of the Great Dividing Range.

## **ALICE SPRINGS**

During the Second Robotech War the settlement at Alice Springs had been home to a significant United Earth Forces communications and signals intelligence facility. That made Alice Springs a major target and both the settlement and facility were destroyed near the end of the war. The area was resettled after the war by a group of nomads that travelled the old rail lines, scavenging and trading with the handful of settlements along the way. When the United Earth Forces began reestablishing themselves after the Invid Invasion, the rail route that ran south from Alice Springs to Junction Station and then west almost to the Perth ruins became the main supply line connecting the UEF-controlled territories in southwest Australia (and by extension New Zealand) to New Dundee Base in northern Australia. An outpost was established at Alice Springs that served to handle the overland transport of rail goods from Alice to New Dundee. The outpost also became a communications center, helping to link remote UEF bases, as well as a staging area for reconnaissance and counterintelligence missions against the Invid and against human enemies of the UEF.

When the Invid strike force hit Alice Springs there were two full Marine Cyclone Companies as well as Military Intelligence, Reconnaissance, Combat Engineering and Civil Defense platoons stationed there. All told there were nearly five hundred UEF Marines stationed at Alice Springs, and half again as many civilians living there. The Invid strike force, by comparison, numbered over two thousand enemy mecha. The enemy came out of the morning sun, a black cloud that for a short time cast a twilight pall over Alice Springs. The outpost's anti-aircraft guns and mobile missile batteries opened fire as soon as the enemy was in range, but despite hundreds of direct hits they had barely made a dent in the Invid ranks before the alien mecha descended on the outpost and its defenders.

The outpost defenses were swept aside and the base itself was completely destroyed in less than five minutes. As the brave UEF defenders struggled to hold on, the enemy spiraled out, leveling the nearby settlement and scattering the populace. Barely ten minutes after the attack had begun the UEF ranks had broken, with two thirds of their number dead or dying. Among those that remained a handful tried to rally the troops with limited success. By sheer weight of numbers the Invid overwhelmed the UEF troops. The few that survived had fled into the surrounding desert with Invid squads in pursuit.

## **NEW DUNDEE BASE, NORTHERN AUSTRALIA**

New Dundee Base was established early in the Invid Occupation, near the ruins of the old Fort Gibson Earth Defense Force Base. Fort Gibson had been destroyed during the Second Robotech War, but its underground secondary mecha hangar, located some three kilometers from the base itself, had survived the war intact. UEF soldiers established a base of operations there, naming it after their former home of Dundee Base – once the main United Earth Force base in northern Australia and destroyed at the end of the Second Robotech War.

A patrol group out of New Dundee had spotted the incoming Invid strike force from the Western Australia Hive and sent word to the base. Once the size of the strike force had been ascertained (comparable to the one that was attacking Alice Springs that very moment) the base commander, Lt. Commander Lee Travers, ordered all nearby patrols to return to base. There was no way the base could defend against that large an attack force so all they could hope to do was go dark and pray the base not be detected. Any action against the incoming Invid would only serve to reveal their location, so the United Earth Forces at New Dundee pulled in tight and went silent.

The Invid knew that the UEF had a base of operations somewhere near the edge of the Great Sandy Desert, but not exactly where. The strike force split up and began a concerted search effort, backed up with random strafing and bombardment of any suspicious areas. The ruins of Fort Gibson became a primary target and some of the bombardment struck New Dundee and its hidden defenses, but the hangar had been buried deep and withstood the indirect hits without giving in. After thirty minutes of devastating fire the Invid moved on to another target and, when it was clear they were gone, the UEF troops at New Dundee started to dig themselves out.

## **SOUTHWESTERN AUSTRALIA**

Crossroads was a small settlement that only existed by virtue of being at the western terminus of the still functioning rail line used by the nomad scavenger-traders based out of Alice Springs. When the rail route became the primary overland supply route for the United Earth Forces operating in Australia they reinforced the rail terminus at Crossroads with a Mechanized Infantry Company and a handful of anti-aircraft defenses. The Marine Company was responsible for securing the rail terminus as well as patrolling the region around Crossroads. The contingent of Invid that broke away from the massive Western Australia strike force to deal with the UEF at Crossroads was a “mere” six hundred mecha. While this was a small number compared to the size of some of the other Invid strike forces it was still sufficient to annihilate the UEF at Crossroads. Within ten minutes of the onset of the attack the outpost defenses had been wiped out; five minutes later the last of the Marine defenders had been killed, incapacitated, or had fled; and five minutes after that the entire settlement, including the rail terminus and the nomad train that had arrived a few days earlier on a supply run, had been destroyed. The Invid forces had lost only ten percent of their mecha and proceeded on to Karlgarin to assist in the attack there.

Down on the coast, Safe Harbor was a relatively new outpost. It had been established as an offshoot of the base at Karlgarin to facilitate the overseas transport of supplies and personnel to recently liberated New Zealand. Though supply efforts had been greatly facilitated by the arrival of several Horizon-T transport shuttles from off-world in recent months, the sea link between mainland Australia and New Zealand was still vital, making Safe Harbor a strategically important site. A full Marine Infantry Battalion was stationed at Safe Harbor along with anti-aircraft defenses; and at the time of the Invid attack one of the MTA-Titan Forward Supply Ground-based Mobile Units (GMU) was also there. The GMUs were mobile fortresses, with their own command and defense capabilities as well as prodigious cargo capacity. The Forward Supply GMUs were designated as support vehicles, sent to the battlefield as mobile logistics centers that carried supplies, ordnance, and repair facilities for the front line combat forces. The Invid detailed a force of well over two thousand mecha from the Western Australia assault group to handle Safe Harbor. This turned out to be overkill, as the Invid attack force was able to destroy the defenses, the outpost itself, the dock facilities and the mighty GMU and kill or scatter almost all the Marine defenders in under fifteen minutes while losing fewer than a hundred of their own mecha. Done with their task at Safe Harbor the Invid turned towards the target at Karlgarin, where the UEF defenders there were fighting a desperate battle to survive.

Castle Karlgarin was the main UEF base on mainland Australia, though that role was slowly being taken over by the newly established Valhalla Base. Castle Karlgarin was a fortress near the village of Karlgarin that had been established by a small mercenary army a few years into the Invid Occupation. The UEF resistance group in Australia took out the mercenary leadership and absorbed the rest of the troops into the resistance. When New Zealand was liberated and UEF reinforcements arrived from off-world, the facilities and defenses at Castle Karlgarin were improved greatly over the medieval-like fortress that the mercenaries had constructed.

Unfortunately even the presence of a pair of GMUs on site was not enough to prevent Karlgarin from falling to the Invid onslaught. Two thirds of the force that departed the Western Australia Hive, approximately six thousand Invid mecha, laid siege to Castle Karlgarin. In a little over ten minutes the fortification had been levelled; and within five minutes of the fall of the base the last of the Marine defenders and the two GMUs had been wiped out. A few small groups of Marines had fled during the battle, but found themselves running straight into the Invid groups that had just dispatched with nearby Crossroads and Safe Harbor. The UEF Marines defending Karlgarin stood no chance. Only a handful of UEF troops remained alive in southwestern Australia after the assault, the groups of Marines that had been on patrols or missions, and therefore away from the stations when the attacks occurred, and those that had fled the battles when their ranks were broken and were now wandering aimlessly in the wilderness as Invid patrols sought them out.

### **HOBART, TASMANIA**

An hour after the UEF outpost on Tasmania had been wiped out, the 5<sup>th</sup> Marine Veritech Fighter Squadron out of Valhalla arrived to investigate why Hobart was out of contact. A detachment of Invid from the force that had wiped out Hobart had remained behind and now moved to intercept the Veritechs. After a furious air battle the Alpha Fighters emerged victorious, but had taken heavy damage and were forced to return to Valhalla Base.

### **GREAT DIVIDING RANGE, NEAR THE MELBOURNE RUINS**

Wave after wave of Invid had been launching from the hidden hive for nearly half an hour when the 21<sup>st</sup> Combined Veritech Squadron arrived on the scene. The 21<sup>st</sup>, also known as the "Blackjacks", had been in the area for a few days investigating the disappearance of three separate reconnaissance teams over the preceding weeks. Ascending into the mountains from the inland side of the range they had been shielded from detection by the Invid, but had likewise been prevented from spotting the massive waves of enemy mecha now bound for New Zealand.

It was only on cresting the mountain range that the Blackjacks noticed anything amiss. Some of the last groups of Invid mecha to launch detected the intruders and one of the attack groups broke away from the swarm to deal with the 21<sup>st</sup>. The Blackjacks were a mixed mecha squadron, made up of a flight of Veritech Alpha Fighters, two platoons of Veritech Hovertanks and a platoon of Veritech Silverbacks and, though outnumbered by the Invid almost two-to-one, the Blackjacks had the advantage in overall firepower and in skill; the squadron was made up of a mix of veteran pilots from the Second Robotech War and the Invid Space War.

The 21<sup>st</sup> emerged from the battle victorious with only two of the mecha having sustained any major damage, both Alpha Fighters including the one piloted by Blackjacks commanding officer Maj. Yossef "Bullseye" von Varenburg. It was after the battle that the 21<sup>st</sup> was able to spot the departing Invid assault force. None of their mecha's instruments could get an accurate count of the enemy, so large was the swarm that it overwhelmed their instrumentation. Its intention was crystal clear however; this force was enough to completely wipe out the UEF presence on New Zealand. Out of radio range for Valhalla, the closest UEF outpost to the 21<sup>st</sup>'s current position was Hobart, but it was not responding. Maj. von Varenburg dispatched the two remaining Alpha Fighters in the squadron to Hobart to determine why no one was answering their call.

### **LORD HOWE ISLAND, TASMAN SEA**

Three hours after departure, the Invid force from the New South Wales Hive sent to attack the UEF base on Norfolk Island passed within 150 km of Lord Howe Island, a small island in the Tasman Sea between Australia and New Zealand. A secret UEF observation outpost on the island spotted the attack force and radioed a warning to the Norfolk Island Air Base. Norfolk in turn contacted New Zealand, which dispatched two Veritech Fighter squadrons to join the squadron already stationed there to defend the island.

### **HOBART, TASMANIA**

The two Veritech Fighters from the 21<sup>st</sup> Squadron sent to investigate the lack of communication with Hobart saw the destroyed outpost, littered with the still smoldering wrecks of UEF and Invid mecha. Out of radio range with the rest of the squadron the senior pilot, Capt. Richard Daniels made the decision to head for New Zealand as fast as possible to radio them and warn of the approaching Invid force. He and his wingman Sgt. Eddie

“Hollywood” Henderson climbed to high altitude to allow for maximum speed and blasted towards New Zealand at over twice the speed of sound.

### **TASMAN SEA, BETWEEN TASMANIA AND NEW ZEALAND**

Twenty minutes and nearly one thousand kilometers later the two Veritech Fighters were close enough to make contact with the UEF outpost at Invercargill, on New Zealand’s south island. Within minutes Capt. Daniels was connected through to Division Headquarters in Christchurch to deliver the warning of the approaching Invid attack force. Daniels and Henderson were ordered to continue on approach to New Zealand and to land at Invercargill and prepare to aid in defending the outpost there. Their warning would prove to be one of the deciding factors in the events of that day, as it gave New Zealand time to prepare for the oncoming storm.

### **NORFOLK ISLAND AIR STATION**

With word of the impending attack on New Zealand, the order came down from Division Command – Norfolk Island was to be evacuated as New Zealand could no longer afford the resources to defend the island. The military personnel and small civilian populace on the island were loaded onto Horizon-T transports for evacuation to New Zealand. The Veritech Fighter squadrons would remain on station to provide cover for the evacuation.

### **NEW ZEALAND**

Already in a heightened state of readiness because of the Invid force headed for Norfolk Island, the United Earth Forces on New Zealand went to full alert. All available forces were mobilized and the aircraft of the 352<sup>nd</sup> Air Reconnaissance Squadron launched to get a clearer picture of what was approaching New Zealand. At the same time all fighter aircraft and Veritech Fighter squadrons at Christchurch were scrambled. The three Marine Fighter Squadrons of the 777<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Group would provide Combat Air Patrol around the Division Headquarters and Aerospace Station at Christchurch while all available Veritech Fighter Squadrons would be loaded with maximum ordnance and sent out in three waves to engage the Invid force while it was still over the Tasman Sea.

### **STRIKE GROUP ONE, TASMAN SEA**

The first wave of Veritech Fighters to engage the Invid Main Force, designated Strike Group One, consisted of the 196<sup>th</sup>, the 314<sup>th</sup> and the 322<sup>nd</sup> Marine Heavy Veritech Fighter Squadrons and the 112<sup>th</sup> and 223<sup>rd</sup> Marine Veritech Fighter Attack Squadrons. The Attack Squadrons were made up of Alpha Fighters while the Heavy Squadrons were Alpha/Beta Fighter tandem Veritechs in TREAD (TRans-EARth Deployment) mode.

As they approached the enemy force the instrumentation on the Veritech Fighters became useless. Even if the Invid had not been engaging in active jamming, the combat computers on the fighters would have been overwhelmed by the sheer number of enemy mecha approaching. Strike Group One’s combat systems were being linked back to the Electronic Warfare aircraft of the 352<sup>nd</sup> several hundred kilometers behind them, but even the advanced computer systems on board those planes was not up to the task. In a desperate gamble the communications teams back in New Zealand adapted the Signals Intelligence Systems at the Waihopai Base in order to provide enough computational muscle to process the sensor readings coming back the Strike Group.

To the pilots of Strike Group One, what was on their fighter’s gun cameras was a sight they had never beheld. What at first looked like a strange, dark cloud soon resolved into an undulating wave. Individual enemy mecha were indiscernible in the miasma before them, a giant grey-blue wedge in the sky nearly a kilometer across, over two hundred meters tall and stretching back over half a kilometer. Though the fighters stayed outside of the theoretical maximum range of the Invid weaponry, this did not stop the aliens from trying. A stream of energy blasts emerged from the advancing mass, nearly blinding the pilots. Gathering themselves the fighters loosed their missiles in a string of barrages, until all their launchers were empty. Individual impacts could not be made out, just a wave of explosions cascading across the surface of the enemy cloud.

Strike Group One did not remain to see what effect their attack had; as one the fighters turned about and headed back to base at top speed. They had to reload and get back out as quickly as possible to get in as many strikes as they could before the Invid wave reached New Zealand.

## **STRIKE GROUP TWO, TASMAN SEA**

Strike Group Two had taken off from Christchurch five minutes after Strike Group One. They had the advantage of that extra time to grow accustomed to the nature of the enemy force, having listened in on Strike Group One's attack. The returning Strike Group One passed Strike Group Two mere minutes after turning back, wishing them luck as they headed for base. Like Strike Group One this group also consisted of three Heavy Squadrons (the 242<sup>nd</sup>, 312<sup>th</sup>, and 542<sup>nd</sup>) and two Attack Squadrons (the 122<sup>nd</sup> and 224<sup>th</sup>), and like Strike Group One they also came under blistering fire from the enemy force. In an echo of what had occurred a few minutes earlier, Strike Group Two unleashed their missile payloads, turning back as soon as their launchers were depleted. The Invid Main Force continued towards New Zealand at a steady pace, the massive explosions tearing across its forward flank little more than an annoyance.

## **STRIKE GROUP THREE, TASMAN SEA**

Five minutes behind Strike Group Two was the third and final group of fighters. Smaller than the other two, Strike Group Three was made up of the 115<sup>th</sup>, 211<sup>th</sup>, 214<sup>th</sup> and 231<sup>st</sup> Marine Veritech Fighter Attack Squadrons. Nevertheless, like their predecessors Strike Group Three faced the enfilade of enemy fire and loosed their missiles before turning back to base to reload for another sortie.

The Invid Main Force was now less than nine hundred kilometers from the coast of New Zealand and closing at a steady pace slightly less than five hundred kilometers an hour.

## **CHRISTCHURCH AEROSPACE STATION, NEW ZEALAND**

Forty-five minutes after their missile attack, Strike Group One landed at the main UEF airbase outside Christchurch. The pilots took a moment to stretch in their seats as support teams raced to reload the Veritechs' launchers. With a full load of ordnance the group took off, streaking back towards the enemy just as Strike Group Two was coming in for their reload. And so it went again, with Strike Group Two taking off as Strike Group Three arrived for their reload before heading out again five minutes later with a full weapons load.

## **VALHALLA BASE, SOUTH AUSTRALIA**

While the strike groups were rearming at Christchurch, the damaged Veritech Fighter squadron out of Valhalla that had defeated the Invid force at Hobart landed back at base. Needing more information to discern what was going on, Lt. Col. Graves sent out his remaining fighter group, the 6<sup>th</sup> Marine Veritech Fighter Tactical Squadron, out to try and find out.

## **NORFOLK ISLAND**

The Horizon-T shuttles carrying the evacuees lifted off from Norfolk Island as the Invid swarm from the New South Wales Hive closed in. The 517<sup>th</sup> Veritech Fighter Squadron, joined by the 121<sup>st</sup> and 231<sup>st</sup> from out of New Zealand, moved to engage the Invid with missiles to buy the Horizons time. As soon as the shuttles were clear the Veritechs in turn broke off their attack and made for New Zealand. With Norfolk Island written off the three squadrons' new job would be to help defend the Marine outpost and fuel production facilities at Whangarei on New Zealand's North Island.

## **STRIKE GROUP ONE, TASMAN SEA**

It took Strike Group One half the time to close to the Invid Main Force as it had during the first sortie. The Air Reconnaissance planes were still in the skies over New Zealand relaying tactical information on the approaching Invid horde, and they guided Strike Group One in on its attack. To the naked eye the previous sorties had had no perceptible effect on the enemy, the pilots of Strike Group One had to take the word of the sensor operators in the Reconnaissance Squadron and on the ground that damage had indeed been inflicted. Ready for the enemy response this time, Strike Group One braved the oncoming storm of fire and deployed their missile loads before once again turning about and returning to base to rearm for another sortie.

## **STRIKE GROUPS TWO AND THREE, TASMAN SEA**

As the enemy continued to close on New Zealand, the gap between the Strike Groups had dropped to four minutes. Strike Group Two deployed its ordnance and swung around as Strike Group Three closed in. By the time the third group of fighters had completed its second sortie and was heading for shore the Invid were three hundred and fifty kilometers from New Zealand.

## **MOUNT BULLER, SOUTHEAST AUSTRALIA**

It had taken the 21<sup>st</sup> Squadron nearly three hours to fall back from the site of their battle with the Invid and emerge in a valley in the foothills of the Great Dividing Range. Clear of the mountains the Blackjacks chief communications specialist, Sgt. Gabriel "DJ" McManus, was finally able to raise Valhalla Base and report what they had seen. Lt. Col. Graves immediately ordered the in-flight 6<sup>th</sup> Marine Veritech Squadron to head for New Zealand at top speed.

## **CHRISTCHURCH AEROSPACE STATION, NEW ZEALAND**

Strike Group One was back on the tarmac at Christchurch twenty-five minutes after deploying their ordnance. Within minutes the ground crews had reloaded the Veritechs. Strike Group Two was already on the ground when Strike Group One took off again, and Strike Group Three was only a minute out. In less than fifteen minutes all three waves of fighters had been rearmed and were in the air again. The enemy force was now less than one hundred and fifty kilometers from the New Zealand coast.

## **TASMAN SEA, NEAR NEW ZEALAND**

The time to intercept the Invid Main Force had dropped to twelve minutes for Strike Group One. Once again the Veritech Fighters danced amongst the glittering rain of particle weapons fire from the enemy to position themselves to fire missiles. The dull thud that reverberated through the cockpit when the Hammerhead short-range missiles ignited in the launch tubes had become a familiar sound to the pilots. Their ordnance depleted yet again, Strike Group One pulled hard gee turns and raced back to Christchurch, desperate to squeeze in a fourth and God-willing even a fifth sortie before the Invid reached their targets. Hot on the heels of Strike Group One came the other two waves of Veritech Fighters, repeating their engagement with the Invid for a third time before heading back to base for more missiles.

## **CHRISTCHURCH AEROSPACE STATION, NEW ZEALAND**

Strike Group Three had barely finished launching her missiles and turned back when Strike Group One alit on the runway at Christchurch. Support teams had the missiles stacked on the tarmac now, ready for a fast turnaround. Strike Group One was back in the air before Strike Group Two had a chance to land, headed out as the enemy bore down on the islands.

## **TASMAN SEA COAST, NEW ZEALAND**

Mobile missile batteries and anti-aircraft railgun emplacements along the Tasman Sea coast locked onto the approaching Invid horde and opened fire. Sparkling explosions danced across the dark grey-blue cloud that was all the gunners could make out of their target. Hits were scored, but the Invid ignored the defenders and continued on. Further inland the MTA Titan GMUs stationed at Christchurch and Waihopai began firing their long-range missiles at the Invid and crews scrambled to reload the launchers after each volley, a job not normally performed in the field, desperate to get as many shots from the weapons as possible.

## **SOUTHERN ALPS, NEW ZEALAND**

The enemy was approaching the mountains of the Southern Alps when Strike Group One closed with the wall of Invid for the fourth time. One group of Invid, perhaps as many as three thousand enemy mecha, had already broken away from the horde and was headed towards the North Island. To the pilots it still looked as though the multiple sorties had had no effect on the approaching wave despite assurances that nearly two thousand enemy

mecha had been downed over the Tasman Sea. Strike Force One diligently unleashed their arsenal before straining the mecha to the breaking point to come about and race home in the hopes of getting one more sortie in.

Less than three minutes later Strike Group Two closed with the Invid Main Force. A second group of three thousand enemy mecha had broken away and turned south, its target undoubtedly the UEF base at Invercargill at the tip of the South Island. As Strike Group Two locked its missiles on the mass of Invid in front of them, Strike Group Three was taking off from Christchurch. Strike Group Two deployed its missiles and broke for home; and four minutes later Strike Group Three was back in firing position. By the time the fourth sortie by the three fighter groups was over the Invid Main Force was less than one hundred kilometers from UEF Division Headquarters and the Christchurch Aerospace Station.

A third group of Invid, also nearly three thousand strong, then broke away from the core group and turned towards the Signals Intelligence Station at Waihopai, location of the region's only communications link with the United Earth Forces in outer space, while the remnant of the Main Force, still numbering nearly six thousand enemy mecha, closed on Christchurch.

### **CHRISTCHURCH AEROSPACE STATION, NEW ZEALAND**

Barely three minutes apart from each other the three Strike Groups landed; and the ground crew moved at double speed to get the missile tubes reloaded one last time. By the time that Strike Group Two was taking off the remainder of the Invid Main Force was less than fifty kilometers from Christchurch.

Defensive missile batteries around the base opened fire, with the support teams struggling to reload them quickly after each volley. Across the base non-essential personnel were given one last warning to get to shelters. UEF Marines in their Cyclone power armors, backed by squads of Veritech Silverback mecha took up position to await the arrival of the enemy; and hundreds of other soldiers had been pressed into duty as infantry for ground defense, clad in CVR-3 combat armor and wielding the powerfully effective rifle-mode variant of the Gallant H-90 infantry weapon.

Strike Group Three launched, but instead of heading for the larger Main Force bearing on Christchurch the group split up – two squadrons were sent south to engage the Invid force headed towards Invercargill while the other two went north to attack the Invid force that was crossing over to the North Island and headed straight for the UEF outpost at Whangarei.

### **CANTERBURY PLAINS, SOUTH ISLAND, NEW ZEALAND**

Strike Group One rained missiles on the Invid Main Force for the fifth and final time some forty kilometers from Christchurch Aerospace Station, while to the north Strike Group Two launched its payload at the group that had broken away for Waihopai. Their missile loads depleted, both Strike Groups fell back. Two Veritech Heavy Squadrons split from Strike Group Two and returned to Christchurch, linking up with the returning Strike Group One. The remainder of Strike Group Two raced to Waihopai, arriving ahead of the Invid and joining the Marine defense forces there. The missile defense batteries and GMUs at Christchurch continued hammering the Invid, knocking dozens of enemy mecha from the sky, but it still barely made a dent in the enemy's numbers.

### **OTAGO REGION, SOUTH ISLAND, NEW ZEALAND**

One hundred and fifty kilometers from Invercargill, the southbound Invid force was engaged by two sets of Veritech Fighter Squadrons. From behind, the 115<sup>th</sup> and 211<sup>th</sup> Attack Squadrons from Strike Group Three launched their final volleys of missiles; while on approach the Invid were met by the 125<sup>th</sup> and 401<sup>st</sup> Attack Squadrons out of Invercargill. Their explosive ordnance spent, both sets of fighters joined up and fell back to Invercargill to await the enemy.

### **MOUNT RUAPEHU, NORTH ISLAND, NEW ZEALAND**

The two northbound squadrons from Strike Group Three caught up with the Invid force bound for Whangarei just north of Mount Ruapehu. While they launched their missiles from behind, the Invid force was also being engaged ahead by the three Veritech Fighter Attack Squadrons that had been covering the Norfolk Island evacuation.



Repaired and rearmed at the Tamaki Air Station near the Auckland ruins, these three squadrons also unloaded their missile tubes at the approaching horde. The five squadrons then linked up and fell back to Whangarei, where the UEF defenders had gathered to make their stand; Tamaki Air Station having been abandoned in favor of a concentrated defense at the more vital Whangarei location.

### **CHRISTCHURCH AEROSPACE STATION, NEW ZEALAND**

The Invid force was close enough for the defenders on the ground to pick out individual mecha. There was no more time to reload the missile batteries for another try. They had done their best and thinned the enemy ranks a little; now it was time for the support teams to run. Some headed for shelters while others picked up a rifle and joined one of the defensive infantry groups deployed across the grounds of the base. The four Heavy Veritech Fighter Squadrons split into separate Alpha Fighter and Beta Fighter mecha and changed to battloid mode, doubling their effectiveness for the coming battle. They joined the other Veritech Alpha Fighters in the sky, gun pods at the ready. The Combat Air Patrol made up of the Combat Fighter Squadrons of the 777<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Group joined in as the battle for Christchurch began.

Led by the powerful Enforcers, the Invid Fighter Scouts began dueling with the Veritech Fighters and Combats in the sky while Shock Troopers began strafing the GMUs, Cyclone Marines and the base proper with their annihilation discs. From behind the Invid lines Mortar Scouts began lobbing plasma charges across the base while the mysterious Invid Recon Scouts continued to wage electronic warfare on the defenders. Though the base missile batteries had run dry, the anti-aircraft railguns were at the ready and filled the sky with their deadly projectiles; while across the tarmac the point defense laser turrets of the three GMUs lit up the airborne enemy. Meanwhile the close-combat Invid Troopers and Scouts had dropped from the sky and were now engaging the Marine Cyclone forces, Silverbacks and infantry defenders on the ground.

### **INVERCARGILL, SOUTH ISLAND, NEW ZEALAND**

The Invid force bearing down on the port of Invercargill had a surprise waiting for them. The 6<sup>th</sup> Marine Veritech Fighter Squadron out of Valhalla Base had reached the town minutes ahead of them. Joined by the two repaired and rearmed Alpha Fighters from the 21<sup>st</sup> Combined Squadron, the Veritechs unleashed one last airborne missile barrage on the attackers before falling back and joining the other four Veritech Attack Squadrons. The defensive missile batteries at the UEF outpost were depleted and now it was up to the base's anti-aircraft railguns, the Veritech Fighters and the handful of Marine Cyclone platoons and infantry defenders on the ground to hold off the attackers and keep the vital port from falling.

Small groups of airborne Invid Shock Troopers and Fighter Scouts, led by Enforcers, engaged the Veritechs; small being a relative term, as the Alpha Fighters found themselves outnumbered six to one in the skies. The remaining Shock Troopers and Fighter Scouts began strafing attacks on the UEF outpost and port, dodging railgun fire, while the Troopers and Scouts landed and engaged the Marine Cyclones and infantry.

### **WAIHOPAI STATION, SOUTH ISLAND, NEW ZEALAND**

The Signals Intelligence and Communications Station at Waihopai was the second best defended UEF base in New Zealand, next to the main headquarters and aerospace station at Christchurch. While the station had a fraction of the Marine Cyclone platoons and infantry defenders that Christchurch did, Waihopai still had a large number of defensive missile emplacements and anti-aircraft railguns and, equally important, a GMU on station. The GMU, like its counterparts at Christchurch, had combined with Waihopai's missile defense batteries to take out nearly one fifth of the incoming Invid before the enemy had reached the station.

The mecha of the two Heavy Veritech Fighter Squadrons separated into their component Alpha and Beta Veritech Fighters and joined up with the four Veritech Attack Squadrons on station. They met the enemy in the air, gun pods blazing. The airborne Enforcers, Shock Troopers and Fighter Scouts divided their attention between combatting the Veritech Fighters and strafing the base while the Troopers and Scouts touched down to do battle with the defenders on the ground. Meanwhile, the GMU's point defense weapons and the base railguns combined to try and thin out the aerial attackers.

### **WHANGAREI, NORTH ISLAND, NEW ZEALAND**

The city of Whangarei was both the major port on the North Island and the primary fuel production facility for New Zealand, taking advantage of nearby offshore petroleum reserves. That made the city doubly vital to the UEF in New Zealand, and its defenders would do their best against the overwhelming force approaching them.

Unfortunately, Whangarei did not have as many advantages as some of the other New Zealand bases. Its distance from the UEF main base in Christchurch meant it did not have as many resources to draw on for defense, as supply lines were stretched thin at this end of New Zealand. While the defensive missile batteries did their best, the Invid still greatly outnumbered the defenders when they reached the city. The anti-aircraft railguns and Veritech Alpha Fighter Squadrons engaged the airborne Invid, but the prospects were not good. Invid Enforcers, Shock Troopers and Fighter Scouts arrived in such numbers that they could not only handle the Alpha Fighters and attack the vital infrastructure of the port but could also strafe the Marine Cyclone and Silverback defenders on the ground. The Troopers and Scouts joined in, attacking the Cyclone and Silverback platoons as well as the infantry defenders.

### **CHRISTCHURCH AEROSPACE STATION, NEW ZEALAND**

The battle was brutal, but the Christchurch defenses were holding. After five minutes nearly a quarter of the enemy forces had been dealt with and though the infantry defenders had taken heavy casualties the rest of the Marine units were still standing strong. The Invid succeeded in penetrating the Division Headquarters, leading to sporadic battles with Marine and Security forces in the hangars, corridors and control areas of the base itself. The command center was breached, but Marines and Military Police were able to evacuate General Isaacs and most of his command staff. UEF defenses briefly fell into disarray when the command center was lost, but unit commanders picked up the slack and General Isaacs was safely escorted to one of the MTA Titan GMUs where he quickly established a new command center to coordinate the UEF defenses.

### **INVERCARGILL, SOUTH ISLAND, NEW ZEALAND**

At the bottom of the South Island things were not going so well. Unlike the headquarters and aerospace station at Christchurch, which had been built recently by the UEF combat engineers as secure, well-defended and predominantly underground facilities, the outpost at Invercargill had been set up in the existing town infrastructure, mainly around the harbor and port waterfront. Within minutes the outpost had been completely destroyed, including the defensive railguns and missile batteries. Likewise, the Invid ground forces had made short work of the infantry defenders and were now proceeding through the town itself, engaging the remaining Cyclone platoons in street-to-street fighting. Before their destruction the railguns had done a fair bit of damage to the airborne Invid, but the Alpha Fighters still found themselves greatly outnumbered. While half the airborne enemy continued to engage the Veritechs, the remainder was breaking away and heading back towards Christchurch to assist in the battle there. On the ground a similar number of Invid took flight as well, joining their airborne brethren on the way to Christchurch while the rest continued attacking the Cyclone forces in the streets of Invercargill.

### **WAIHOPAI STATION, SOUTH ISLAND, NEW ZEALAND**

Like Invercargill, the UEF outpost at Waihopai had been established in an existing facility; in this case it had been rebuilt from an old United Earth Defense Force communications station that had been destroyed during the initial Invid invasion a decade earlier. Five minutes after the assault had begun much of the base had already been destroyed, including the vital communications link with the UEF outposts on the Moon, Mars and Jupiter. More than three quarters of the base's defensive railguns were still intact though, and were continuing to deal with airborne Invid alongside the Alpha Fighters and the GMU's point defense systems. On the ground, while the infantry forces had not been able to stand long against the Invid Troopers and Scouts the Cyclone and Silverback squads were still in the fight and holding their own.

### **WHANGAREI, NORTH ISLAND, NEW ZEALAND**

The defenses at Whangarei had held longer than they should have by right, but now the Invid forces had broken through in some key areas, damaging parts of the port and dealing heavy casualties to the UEF defenders on the ground. Half of the Cyclone and Silverback troops had been taken out, as had three quarters of the infantry. Invid

losses were heaviest in the air, where the lethal combination of the railgun defenses and Veritech Fighters had thinned the enemy ranks. With the ground-based defenders falling back under the assault of the Troopers and Scouts, however, the railguns were exposed and were now a priority target for the strafing attacks of the airborne Invid.

### **CHRISTCHURCH AEROSPACE STATION, NEW ZEALAND**

With General Isaacs able to resume coordinating the defense, the United Earth Forces at Christchurch rallied. Heavy damage was being dealt to the surrounding infrastructure as the Invid continued their onslaught, but the defending mecha units were still intact and fighting to beat back the attackers. Two thirds of the base's railguns were still operational and between them, the hardy GMUs, and the Veritech Fighters, nearly ninety percent of the airborne Invid had been eliminated, greatly reducing the enemy's effectiveness.

### **INVERCARGILL, SOUTH ISLAND, NEW ZEALAND**

Heavily outnumbered, the Cyclone forces on the ground at Invercargill switched tactics and began hit-and-run attacks on groups of Invid while steadily falling back through the city. They hoped now to lure the Invid away from areas where civilians had taken shelter and keep them occupied. Word that Christchurch was holding buoyed their spirits, some even hopeful that if they held out long enough there would be reinforcements sent to help. In the air the Veritech Fighter squadrons continued to dance with their numerous opponents, but many of the Alphas had sustained heavy damage and would not be able to continue much longer.

### **WAIHOPAI STATION, SOUTH ISLAND, NEW ZEALAND**

There was now little left of the base itself, beyond a few burning buildings, but nearly half the railguns were still up and firing. Heavy losses had been inflicted on the Enforcers, Invid Shock Troopers and Fighter Scouts in the air but the enemy ground forces were still largely intact. The infantry defense had been scattered but the courageous Cyclone and Silverback troops were holding strong, as was the GMU. In the skies over Waihopai the Veritech Fighter squadrons continued to harass the remaining airborne Invid despite the heavy damage many of them had taken. Though the destruction of the base was a blow to its defenders, the forces at Waihopai were determined to make sure the Invid paid for that loss.

### **WHANGAREI, NORTH ISLAND, NEW ZEALAND**

The military facilities at Whangarei had held longer than many would have expected, but the Invid pressed on and now only a handful of buildings remained intact, the few remaining Marines making their last stand in barely intact Cyclones and Silverbacks. Nearly half of the railguns were still functional and continued to rain fire on their aerial oppressors while the Alpha Fighters tried to help their desperate allies on the ground while dodging the staccato of white flame that fell on them from all sides, but it was a losing battle. The defenses on the ground cracked and the surviving Marines were scattered. Some tried to rally, but there was no hope against the wave of Invid that now poured all but unopposed across the outpost and surrounding town.

### **CHRISTCHURCH AEROSPACE STATION, NEW ZEALAND**

The relentless barrage from the railguns and the GMUs had combined with the aerial efforts of the Veritech Fighter squadrons to knock all but a handful of the Invid attackers from the sky. Seeking new targets from their mounted perches the gunners manning the defensive railguns turned their sights on the Invid Troopers and Scouts still on the ground and cut into them. Their ranks severely thinned, the Invid pulled back and attempted to regroup, making them easy targets. The Invid gathered together in the skies above the base, forming together in an uneven arrowhead shape, seemingly oblivious to the continuing losses they were sustaining from the ongoing weapons fire around them. Then on some unknown signal the Invid moved as one and began accelerating at full speed towards the defenders on the ground in a mad, final suicide dive. Many of the soldiers on the ground were veterans of the Invid War in deep space and had recognized what was about to come. As the Invid arrowhead sped down at them, the Marine defenders stood their ground and opened fire as the railguns and point defense lasers worked to erect a curtain of steel and fire between the Invid and their targets. Not a single enemy mecha made it to the ground intact, though the rain of fiery shrapnel and debris still took its toll, and the field of battle fell eerily silent for a moment before the sounds of fire and secondary explosions mixed with the cries of the wounded

and dying brought the defenders back to reality. It had been barely twenty minutes since the first Invid attacker had touched down at Christchurch.

### **INVERCARGILL, SOUTH ISLAND, NEW ZEALAND**

On the ground, the Marines' tactics were working. The Invid were focused on them and not the town infrastructure, minimizing the collateral damage. In the skies, however, things had not gone so well. The Veritech Fighter squadrons had been broken, most of the mecha blown apart in the air or sent spiraling down to the ground by the endless onslaught. In one of the surviving Veritechs, Capt. Daniels watched as the once orderly formations of Alpha Fighters broke down around him. Most of the pilots had been young men and women born in the off-world colonies who had come back to free a homeworld they had only heard stories about. Losses during the Invid War meant that the ranks of the Expeditionary Forces in space were filled with many fresh faces that had seen few battles before coming to Earth. Daniels was the opposite, in his mid-thirties he was a veteran of the Second Robotech War and a former pilot with the Tactical Armored Space Corps. Surviving that war and the fall of the Earth to the Invid he had withdrawn from the life of a soldier and focused instead on survival, first for himself and then for the small band of fellow survivors who gathered around him. It was the Blackjacks that had brought him back into the fold; while he and his friends had hidden they had fought the Invid. When reinforcements arrived from space and the 21<sup>st</sup> needed pilots, Daniels became a soldier again... and he was not going to go down without a fight.

Daniels rallied the remaining pilots around him. There weren't even enough Veritechs left to qualify as a squadron, but they had a better shot at surviving as a unit. Hollywood was still on Daniels' wing, his Alpha Fighter somehow still in the air despite a direct hit from the twinned heat cannons of an Invid Enforcer. Invercargill was lost, but the Marines below had lured the Invid on the ground away from the town and those in the air were focused exclusively on the surviving Veritechs. That meant the Alpha Fighters did not have to be on the defensive anymore, and Daniels was determined to take back the initiative. Taking his cue from the Marines on the ground, Daniels ordered the Veritechs to flip to jet mode and they took off at high speed. As Daniels had hoped, the Invid followed in pursuit, unwilling to allow their prey to escape.

### **WAIHOPAI STATION, SOUTH ISLAND, NEW ZEALAND**

The battle still raged in and over the burning wreckage of the base at Waihopai. The Invid's numbers in the air had been thinned to the point where it was nearly a one-on-one battle with the Veritech Fighters, but the Veritechs still had the GMU and the surviving railgun emplacements on their side. A few minutes later the air threat was no more. Caught between the hardy Silverbacks and resilient Cyclone Marines on the ground and the Veritech Fighters in the air, the remaining Invid Troopers and Scouts were in a kill zone and the UEF were giving no quarter and taking no prisoners.

### **WHANGAREI, NORTH ISLAND, NEW ZEALAND**

The troops on the ground were dead and the last of the railguns silenced; only the Veritech Fighters in the air remained, less two squadrons that had fallen to the Invid. While the Invid in the air continued to try and eliminate the last of the United Earth Forces at Whangarei those on the ground, their mission complete, took to the skies and turned south, where other targets awaited. Major Jennifer "Jink" Kendrick and her team had been in the air almost continuously for nearly four hours, ever since they'd been dispatched to first defend and then help evacuate Norfolk Island. Now they were fighting for their lives. When the Invid on the ground flew off, Jink decided it was time to do the same. She ordered her squadron to break off and head south, hoping to get ahead of the Invid wave. The other two Alpha Fighter squadrons followed suit, and so did the Invid, who were determined to not let a single Veritech Fighter escape.

### **CHRISTCHURCH AEROSPACE STATION, NEW ZEALAND**

The fight at Christchurch was over, but the battle for New Zealand was not. Even now the reconnaissance and surveillance aircraft that had retreated over the Southern Ocean for safety were tracking the Invid forces from Invercargill and Whangarei that were converging on Christchurch. As medical teams dealt with the wounded, combat engineering teams were racing to get command and control systems back online. Support crews cut through damaged sections of the base to gain access to the munitions stores and improvised the necessary

equipment to start reloading the missile tubes on the Veritech Fighters. The surviving base defense missile launchers were also being reloaded, by hand where necessary, all in preparation for the next wave of Invid attackers. The Flying Angels of the 777<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group kept watch in the skies, landing in small groups to get their own ordnance replenished before taking off again.

### **SOUTHLAND PLAINS, SOUTH ISLAND, NEW ZEALAND**

Daniels took his makeshift squadron to the deck, clipping the treetops at just under the speed of sound. The Alpha Fighters could go faster, but they would quickly outdistance their pursuers and that was not what Daniels had in mind. Flying this low was dangerous but it was a skill Daniels had perfected years earlier skimming the wavetops of the Great Barrier Reef in his VF-8 Logan fighter and earning him his callsign, "Reefer". The other Veritechs followed his lead, despite the damage some of them had sustained. Hollywood proved his own skill, deftly keeping his own fighter in position despite its threats to break apart at any second. Reefer checked his instruments to confirm that the Invid were still behind them, and looked forward as the squadron's destination was coming into view. The peaks of the Garvie and Eyre Mountains loomed ahead, and the narrow valley between them was their target.

### **WAIHOPAI STATION, SOUTH ISLAND, NEW ZEALAND**

Though now outnumbered and outgunned, the remaining Invid fought viciously and held out for longer than expected. When the fighting was finally over the wounded Marines were brought onboard the GMU, where a triage unit had been set up. It would have to do until transport could be arranged to a proper medical facility, assuming any still existed. Word had come that Christchurch Aerospace Station had withstood the siege, but also of the loss of Invercargill and Whangarei and the approach of the Invid forces from those two directions. With the base destroyed, there was no ordnance available at Waihopai anymore so the Alpha and Beta Fighters flew at top speed back to Christchurch to reload their missile launchers. Time was of the essence if they were to rearm and intercept the force approaching over the North Island.

### **MANUKAU HARBOR, NORTH ISLAND, NEW ZEALAND**

The Invid were taking the direct route from the smoldering wreckage of Whangarei to Christchurch, heading back out over the Tasman Sea and bypassing any other apparent targets on the North Island. The Veritech Fighters could outpace the Invid horde, but they had no idea what the situation was on the South Island; interference from the Invid was preventing them from making contact with any other UEF outposts. Jink made the call – the Veritechs would do what they could to stall the Invid, buying time for Christchurch and the South Island. Staying in fighter mode, Jink led the three surviving squadrons from Whangarei in a series of snaking "S" pattern raids on the Invid formation. The Alphas would approach the enemy flank from the landward side, strafing what targets they could and possibly drawing off some of the Invid. Once out over the water they would swing around and approach the Invid flank from seaward, making another strafing run. They would repeat this pattern for as long as they could manage, hopefully slowing the enemy's progress.

### **CANTERBURY PLAINS, SOUTH ISLAND, NEW ZEALAND**

The Invid force approaching Christchurch from Invercargill was nearly fifteen hundred strong, only a small fraction of what had set out from the Australian coast that morning but still a threat to the weakened UEF outpost. One hundred kilometers out from their target the alien horde came under fire from the resurgent Veritech Fighter Squadrons as volley after volley of missiles cut deep into the Invid ranks. The missiles did their job, dropping close to a third of the enemy mecha into the waters of the Canterbury Bight. As the Invid crossed back over land the rearmed GMUs and missile batteries at Christchurch unleashed their full arsenal. Back at Christchurch the exhausted ground crews raced to rearm the Veritech Fighters for one more sortie.

All told, the Invid numbers had been more than halved by the time they entered the range of the railguns. The Veritech Fighters, reloaded in the nick of time, emptied their missile racks in one final strike. The few dozen Invid that made it through the combined barrage were swiftly picked apart by the Marine defenders on the ground before they could inflict more than a negligible amount of damage to the nearly crippled base.

## **SOUTHERN ALPS, SOUTH ISLAND, NEW ZEALAND**

Reefer and his makeshift squadron tore across the zigzag of Lake Wakatipu, their jet wash stirring up walls of water behind them and obscuring them from view for a moment. The vanguard of the Invid pursuers plunged through the mist only to find that the Veritech had come around and switched to Guardian mode. Their gun pods cut into the Invid mecha, devastating the forward flank of Fighter Scouts, though not without consequences. The Invid's return fire struck down one of the damaged Alpha Fighters. As the slower but more dangerous Shock Troopers and Enforcers came into view the squadron switched back to Fighter mode and headed deep into the canyons and river valleys between the peaks of the Southern Alps.

For most pilots this kind of high speed maneuvering would have been impossible, but these men and women had made it through an extended dogfight with the Invid over Invercargill; they could handle their aircraft. The less maneuverable Shock Troopers, however, were not so lucky and a few of them impacted into the mountainsides trying to keep up with the Alphas. The cat and mouse game snaked along the Matukituki River valley before emerging from the mountains onto Lake Wanaka. Hoping to repeat their earlier success, Reefer took the squadron to the deck again, stirring up the waters into an artificial storm cloud. On command the Veritech flipped over to Guardian mode and pivoted to take aim at their pursuers. This time, however, Hollywood's battered Alpha Fighter could not take the strain and broke into a thousand pieces over the water, the mecha's trigger finger still depressed on the gun pod as it struck the lake surface.

There was no time to mourn the loss of his wingman. Reefer and the three surviving Veritech made their attacks, switched back to Fighter mode, and ran for the mountains again. For nearly half an hour Reefer and the other Alpha Fighters weaved their way through canyons, over peaks and across glaciers with the Invid in pursuit, kept just out of weapons range by the deft flying skills of the Veritech pilots, before they finally emerged from the mountains and into the Rangitata River Gorge. Clear of the mountains the Veritech were able to make contact with Christchurch, and with word that the aerospace station had survived Reefer and the others accelerated to lose their pursuers and ran for the base.

## **MOUNT TARANAKI, NORTH ISLAND, NEW ZEALAND**

With each pass the Veritech had inflicted damage on the Invid swarm, but had taken their own losses in turn. Jink formed up the remaining Alpha Fighters into a command flight with her in the lead and two reduced squadrons on each wing. The group was now coming around for their latest attack run, passing the towering volcanic peak of Mount Taranaki. As had happened every time so far, a group of Invid broke from the formation to engage them and the fighters braced for enemy fire as they maintained their spearhead formation. Instead of the destructive rain of enemy weaponry, however, this time the Alpha Fighters found a cloud of explosions in their path as dozens of Invid mecha flew apart in bursts of fire before them.

"Tally ho!" came the call over Jink's radio as the combined force of Alpha and Beta Fighters from Christchurch and Waihopai rained missiles on the Invid. "Attention, Veritech Fighters, follow us home and come load up on some party favors!"

Jink and the other Alpha Fighters in her group were so surprised they almost forgot to complete their strafing run before turning to follow the combined strike group back to Christchurch. Almost.

## **AFTERMATH**

Surveillance aircraft were keeping watch on the Tasman Sea but had detected no further attack waves. General Isaacs and his staff had expected a swift follow up strike to deal a final blow to them but that did not seem to be the case. In the days afterward there were sporadic reports of small groups of Invid around New Zealand, orphaned members of the strike force, but no subsequent attack from Australia. Nevertheless, they were still vulnerable and the initial efforts were in shoring up defenses not counting the cost. It would take days to gather a tally of the losses across New Zealand, and weeks before a clear picture would emerge of the state of the United Earth Forces back on the Australian mainland. They had survived the Invid onslaught, but had been hit badly. Just how badly was still to be determined, and many questions remained unanswered in the aftermath of the Invid counterstrike – chief among them being if the United Earth Forces would even be able to viably recover from this catastrophe and take the initiative in the fight against the Invid occupation.