

SHARKBAIT 21

(Earnest sounding and totally toneless 'official' American voice, familiar to anyone who has sat through a military training film.) "Sharkbait 21 made a rather distinctive and unique flight into North Vietnam. The voices you are about to hear are the voice of actual combat pilots coming from the cockpits of F4C aircraft assigned to Cam Ranh Bay Airbase, Republic of Vietnam. This recording was obtained from covert sources, and without the knowledge of Sharkbait One:

(Sounds of breathing into oxy mask.) "Sharkbait 21 flight check in."

"Two."

"Three."

"Four."

"Arr, roger there Sharkbait. - Airpatch, Sharkbait 21 Flight, airborne with four. Be advised that this flight is being led personally by Sharkbait One. I was the spare, but Lead aborted in the arming area, and so now I'm Lead, and Four is now Two, Two is Three, and Three is Four. You copy that Airpatch?"

"Arr, roger, Airpatch copies. What did your Lead abort in the arming area for? Go ahead."

"Roger Airpatch, Sharkbait 21. Originally he apparently had forgotten his flashlight. We might get diverted and have to come back at night. You can't be too careful with these war machines you know."

"Arr, rog, I understand."

"And Airpatch, you might relay to ole Airpatch One that seeing I'm in the Lead now, the war will probably be over after this mission."

"Arr, roger 21, copy, will relay."

"OK Sharkbait, let's all tippytoe over to channel five."

"Two."

"Three."

"Four."

"Sharkbait 21 Flight, check in."

"Two."

"Three."

"Four."

"Ahh, roger there.... Peacock, this is the famous Sharkbait 21 Flight checking in. We've got four of the finest on your - let's see - ahh, one four zero and a little over a hundred, and we're climbing to, ahhh, let's see..... ahh, how's about twenty-nine thou sound there, uhh Peacock?"

"Sharkbait 21 Flight, Peacock, squawk flash, say your mission number."

"Ahh roger there Peacock old boy, squawking flash, our mission number is ahh... ahh, just a minute. Ahh say, Two, did you copy our mission number by any chance?"

(Very bright, very young Lieutenant's voice.) "Roger, Sir. Our mission number is 410."

"Roger Sharkbait, I have you contact. Continue north. Contact Hillsborough this time for a divert mission, over."

(Hillsborough controlled strikes north of the De-Militarized Zone; ie, in North Vietnam or Laos.)

"Roger there, Peacock, can do. We Sharkbaits are here to please. Anything to help the war effort. OK, Sharkbait, let's trip on over to channel eight."

"Two."

"Three," (Concerned) "Did he say Hillsborough? We're briefed for an in-country mission."

(In-country was South Vietnam, a very different and far less threatening proposition to a 'route-pack' mission in the North.)

"That's right, Three, now pull yourself together there son. We're all here to do a job, and that job is good bombs on target. The harder the target, the more we Sharkbaits like 'em, so let's go on over to channel eight an' check in."

"Three copy, ahh, I think I've got a tank that's not feeding."

"Sharkbaits, check in."

"Two."

"Three." (Not happy.)

"Four."

"Hillsborough, ole buddy, this is Sharkbait 21 Flight at your disposal, sir."

"Roger, Sharkbait 21, Say your mission number and ordinance, over."

"Roger, sir, we're mission number ahh... doggone it, say Two, ahh, what was that mission number again?"

"Yessir, that's mission number 410, sir."

"OK, ahh Hillsburger, did you copy that little ole mission number there?"

"Roger, copy 21. Say your ordinance, over."

"Rog, Hillsborough, ahh Sharkbait 21 is carrying twelve of those little things that go poof. Number Two has four of those cans of stuff that burn

like crazy. Three has six pods of those little fellers that go shoosh in the night. And four has six of those great big mothers that really go bang."

"Rog, 21. I think I copied that. You're to rendezvous with Cubby 61 and 64 on the 321 slash 34 channel 109, 1-0-9. They're holding there and listening out this frequency. Go ahead."

(Translation: the Forward Air Controller aircraft are holding 34 miles on the 321 radial - north west - of Tacan channel 109. = Tiger Country, north of the border.)

"Ahh, rog. That's the 321 radial, you say?"

"That's a rog, 321 slash 34, channel 109. Go ahead."

"Roger, ole buddy, that's 321 at 34 off of 109."

(Three's voice, high pitched and panicked.) "321 at 34?"

"That's affirm, number Three."

"We got shot up there last week!"

(Totally self-assured and not a bit concerned.) "That's right, number Three, it's bombs on target that's going to win this war. And the harder the target, the more we Sharkbaits like 'em. Now pull yourself together there man, and let's get on with this war. A faint heart never won a trip to Pay To."

(Three) "Uhh, no, I'd like to, but I've got a rough engine, an' I've got a generator out, an' my Tacan's broke, an' I think I'm gunna get a P.O.C. light."

"OK, no sweat there Three. Just play through, an' press right on to the target. No Sharkbait ever aborts a counter. - Hello there Chubby 61 and 64, this is the great Sharkbait 21 Flight, ready to smash the aggressor for you."

(Very professional, no nonsense voice.) "Roger 21, I copy your weapons. This is Cubby 64. I'll be working you tonight. Cubby 61 will be holding about five miles south of your target. Over."

"Good show, Cubby. 21 here. What kind of targets have you got for us dedicated aviators today?"

"Ahh, roger 21, 64. Your target is a line of loaded trucks parked in the trees just south of Route 101, and it's a refuel and meals rendezvous. Elevation is about one hundred feet, the wind is about ten knots out of the west. Looks like a north-south run in will be best. There are about ten triple-A positions in the area, and I expect some automatic weapons fire, but I haven't seen too much today so far, and the highest ground is about 3200 feet and about ten miles to the west. Over."

"Ahh, roger, Cubby ole boy. We're here to put these bombs on target, an' interdict the supplies flowing from the North. Sounds just like a target for a flight of Sharkbaits, isn't it boys?"

(Three's voice, high-pitched and panicked.) "How many guns did he say?"

"OK, Cubbys, we're coming on up the 321 now. Should be picking you up pretty soon. Let's keep our eyeballs peeled, Sharkbait. We don't want to stay in this high threat area too long. - Ahh, Cubby 64, how about a hold down for a DF?"

"Roger, 21, 64 is transmitting." (Sound of breathing into microphone, with sound of continuous and close anti-aircraft shells exploding in the background.)

"We should be right over you Cubby.... I still don't have you yet . How about another hold down there?"

"Roger, I'm holding down. 64 is right over the target, orbiting at about 1000 feet. Stand by for another hold down." (Sounds of breathing and more anti-aircraft shells exploding, very close.)

"Ahhh, I still don't have you lad. - Does any Sharkbait see the FAC?"  
"Two neg."

"Three," (very unhappy) "I don't see the FAC. I think it's ground fire coming up there at two o'clock low."

"OK, steady there now Three. Stiff upper lip now. They are allowed to shoot back, but I don't see any fire down there."

"Lead, this is Four." (Exasperated) "Don't you think we'd have a better chance of spotting the FAC if we dropped down below thirty thou? Over."

"Well, no need to expose ourselves more than we have to, Four. You know the rules up here in Tally Ho." (The Ho Chi Minh Trail.) "These aircraft are valuable combat weapons, and we don't want to lose one. Remember, we must put these bombs on target, and it takes these vehicles to deliver these bombs."

"Lead, this is Two. I think I see one of them way-y down there at three o'clock."

"This is Three. I've got a CSD light, and my launch light might be gonna come on , an' I'm down to bingo plus two."

"OK. stay there Three, remember the mission now, son."

(Exasperated Sigh) "Sharkbait, Cubby 64. I have some con trails orbiting my position. Could that possibly be you way up there?"

"Roger, Cubby ole boy, could be. I wanted to keep my troops out of the small arms fire until I've spotted the target up here. Err, I think we have you. How about marking the target for me there?"

"Roger 21, I'll mark, but I don't think you can see it from way up there. OK Sharkbaits, the marker's away. .... The target is right under my smoke, just along the treeline. Anywhere from my smoke to 500 metres north of my smoke along the treeline."

"Anybody in the flight see that smoke?"

"This is Two. I can ju-ust barely see a little white puff way-y down there."

"This is Three. I can't see anything and I'm down to bingo plus fifteen hundred now."

"Lead, this is Four. I still think we could see better if we got down below this high cirrus."

"Sharkbait, this is Lead. Err.... I have the marker now, in what I think are trees down there. OK, I'm gonna continue on round and come in out of the sun. No need to unnecessarily risk these war machines you know, but remember men now, it's good bombs on that target."

"OK, Sharkbait, I can't see any of you, but you're clear on down now. I'm just to the west of the target, and Cubby 61 is five miles south. Watch out for us now when you come in. Over."

"OK, Cubby, ole boy. Lead is rolling in from base leg here at 31,000 feet. I'll be pickling at 22 thou. No need to go any lower than we have to to put good bombs on the target, you know."

"Roger, Lead. You're cleared in."

"OK, Lead is in," (Heavy breathing through live microphone.) "- and Lead is off to the right and going full burner toward the water, moving around quite a bit here. Uhh, left, right. OK, watch out, Two and Three, pulling in in front of you here." (More heavy breathing.)

(Exasperated.) "Oh, no, Lead! You're at least two miles short. Hey, Two, the target is under the treeline, two miles north, right under my smoke. Do you see it over?"

"Two is out. I took it all the way down to 18,000 feet with my nape. How'd it look, Cubby? Better'n a new one, eh?"

(Cubby's tone is becoming one of disbelief.) "Hey, Two - God, you were shorter than Lead. You went right where Cubby 61 is orbiting. - Cubby 61, did you see where his nape hit? - Cubby 61, this is 64, over..... Cubby 61, 64..... 61, 64, over..... OK, Three, would you put your rockets five miles north of the burning FAC?"

(Babbling, very high pitched.) /i]

"OK.Three'sIn,Off,OutToSea,Bingo.Where'dYouGoTwo,I Don'tHave You."

(Cubby) "Three, did you say you had rockets?"

"Right. Three's in, off, out to sea, bingo. Where're you at Two?" (This call, like the first, sounds like one long, panic-stricken word.)

(Cubby, sounding [/i]really pissed off.) "Sharkbait 23, you just punched your rockets off in the pod. Hey, Four, do you by any chance have my smoke?"

"Rog, I have your smoke." (Sounding very cool and in command.)

"Well look, would you please try to get it somewhere near the target?"

(Still sounding very 'John Wayne' professional.) "Rog, Four's in, and I'm going down to seventy-two hundred where I KNOW I can hit." (More heavy breathing.)

Seven thousand feet is the normal release height for an F4 on a dive bombing mission - not the Lead's release height of twenty-two thousand feet - or over seven kilometres up!

"Hey, Four, I can see you. Hey, that looks great! Bring it right on down. Man, that was great!"

(Very smug and self-satisfied.) - "Four's off. Bombs on target. A great run. I had the pipper on the smoke, corrected for wind, about a hundred and six and a half mils set, with 351 knots and exactly on that 45 degrees dive. Like Lead says, bombs on target will win the war."

"Rog, Four, your bombs were on target. I can see the er... dust all around my smoke. But would you believe six duds?"

"Oh shit! I didn't set the nose/tail switch." (ie, arm the bombs.)

"OK, Four, this is Lead. We're out over the water now, doing Mach 1.7 heading south, protecting these aerospace weapons systems so that we can return another day and put more of these good bombs on target. That's why we're over here, to win this war, and er, Cubby 64, this is Sharkbait 21, standing by for our BDA, over." (Bomb damage assessment.)

(Sounding REALLY pissed off.) "21, this is Cubby 64. BDA is as follows: Time on the target was 32. Time off was 32 and a half. I'll give you 25 per cent on target, with zero coverage. Give you one O-1 aircraft destroyed, and I think I'll call it a day. This was just TOO much, over."

(Not one bit abashed.) "Roger, Cubby ole boy. We're glad to be of help. We Sharkbaits are always ready to be of help, any time. Sorry about those bombs and stuff, but you know it's awful hard to work when the cirrus is pushing you down below 30 thou. No time to... no time to aim, you know. Offset, and all that, but there'll be another day. Wars aren't won in just one mission, but we're always ready to do our part. - Hey, Hillsborough, Sharkbait 21, did you copy that BDA? 25 per cent on target's pretty great for Tally Ho, eh?"

"Roger, Sharkbait 21, Hillsborough, we copy. What... are you shitting me?"