

Green Leader

This particular raid was recorded in the cockpit of the pilot leading the Canberras. This is an edited transcript of this tape recording. Most of the conversation takes place between Green Leader and his navigator/bomb-aimer. Parts of this tape were released to the Rhodesia Broadcasting Corporation and the Press immediately after the raid.

The strike force consisted of Green Section (Canberras), Red, White and Blue Sections (Hunters) and a number of K-Car helicopter gunships. As the aircraft approached the border, they began their descent from 4,500 feet to 1,600 feet to come in under the Zambian radar.

Nav: *Start descending from this road.*
GL: *Okay. Do you want me to maintain the same speed or do you want me to reduce to 250?*
Nav: *No, maintain the speed. We'll have to increase it to maintain 300.*
GL: *Okay.*
GL (to formation): *Green descending.*
Nav: *Go right four degrees...*
GL: *(altimeter setting QNH) 1019 is set now, 4,500 feet, 310 knots.*
Nav: *Zero-zero-five.*
GL: *Zero-zero-five. Ya.*
GL (to formation): *Right, let's tighten it up a bit now.*
Nav: *Coming up to one minute out. We're on track and we're on time. Get your speed up.*
Blue Sec: *Green, what's your level?*
GL: *Roger, we're at 1,600 feet.*
GL: *290 knots coming up.*
Nav: *290 knots.*
Blue Sec: *Got you visual.*

The Hunters come into loose formation with the Canberras.

GL: *Okay. We're coming up to the stream now (Zambezi).*
Nav: *Zero-zero-six.*
GL: *Zero-zero-six we've got. We're crossing the stream now.*
Blue Lead: *Check.*
GL: *Well done JR (leading the Hunters).*
Nav: *Turn left now.*
GL: *Onto?*
Nav: *Now, three-zero-four.*
GL: *Three-zero-four.*
Nav: *We're going to have to climb a bit.*
GL: *Ya. One bird! Three-zero-four. Rolling out now. How's our speed? We're holding about 290.*
Nav: *No it's fine. Just check on these rivers. Go left—about two degrees.*
GL: *Three-zero-two. Roger.*

The Canberras and Hunters are now heading on a course west-north-west towards their target—Joshua Nkomo’s Chikumbi (Freedom) Camp at Westlands Farm.

Nav: *We’re a bit starboard of track.*
GL: *Roger. We didn’t get round that turn as fast as I wanted.*
Nav: *Speed back 15 knots. On track. On time...*
GL: *Dead right.*
GL: *(Looking at the Hunters flying in formation with them):
These Hunters with this bloody golf bomb here, or
something. It’s all
painted bloody red. Quite f. . .ing weird!*
Nav: *Go two degrees left.*
GL: *Roger, that makes us three-zero-zero. I was on three-zero-
two.*
Nav: *Steer three-zero-two.*
GL: *Three-zero-two. I was on three-zero-two.*

The Canberra at low level is very susceptible to the turbulence and flying can be extremely uncomfortable. The pilot and the navigator can be heard trying to breathe normally, but the air is forced out of their lungs as they hit each bump. There had been a case of structural failure in the air force Canberras.

GL: *Oh shit! I hope the f. . .ing wings don’t fall off!*
Nav: *What’s your speed?*
GL: *275—which is the 15 you wanted off Do you want me to get
down?*
Nav: *Yes. You can go down a bit.*
Nav: *OK. We’re on track, on time.*
GL: *Dead right—it’s about a minute and a half before the
Hunters leave us.*
Nav: *Two starboard onto three-zero-four.*
GL: *Two starboard.*
Nav: *No, make it three-zero-five*
GL: *Three-zero-five. OK.*
Nav: *Make it three-zero-six.*
GL: *Three-zero-six. OK, you ‘ye got it.*
GL: *There’s not a peep out of tower so that’s going to be superb.
We won’t have to talk to him.*

The attack aircraft were listening in on the Lusaka tower frequency to see if they had been picked up on Zambian radar. It was almost time for the Hunters to accelerate ahead for their attack.

Nav: *The Hunters will be going in about 50 seconds.*
GL: *Roger.*
Nav: *Go right another two degrees.*
GL: *Three-zero-eight?*
Nav: *Ya.*

The voices of Lusaka tower are heard talking to a Kenya Airways flight.

GL: *That’s the bloody tower.*

Nav: *OK, just stand by sir, we're coming up to...*

A second Canberra pilot offers advice.

2nd Canberra: *I think we passed it—I think that rise on the right, is the one. That should have been our turning point.*

GL (to 2nd Canberra): *Oh! Shut up, man.*

Nav (to GL): *OK. Go Hunters go!*

GL (to Hunters): *Blue Section Go. Blue Section Go.*

Blue Section, with JR, Tony and Baldy leaves to carry out its mission.

Nav: *OK. They were spot on time.*

GL: *That's OK. Roger—270 knots. You 'ye got it now. Shit, they only accelerated bloody quickly.*

It was now just before 08h30 and the Zipra forces were all on parade as the Hunters prepared to dive down on them with their cargoes of golf bombs.

Nav: *Heading now two-eight-one, sir.*

GL: *Two-eight-one. Roger.*

Nav: *When I give you 'doors', can you switch on at the same time?*

GL: *Will do.*

Nav: *OK! We're coming up to 40 seconds to turn, sir.*

GL: *Roger.*

Nav: *We passed a river on our left here. We'll see the bridge fairly shortly.*

GL: *We 'ye passed two-eight-one. Shall I turn back on it now?*

Nav: *Yes, back to two-eight-one.*

GL: *Two-eight-one we've got.*

Nav: *Can you bring the speed back—240?*

GL: *Steering two-eight-one.*

Nav: *Two-eight-zero.*

GL: *Two-eight-zero.*

Green Section is now heading on a westerly course, which will take them over the camp.

Nav: *Everything is set up and ready.*
GL: *There's a school coming up.*
Roger, I have 310 knots, two-eight-zero, QNH 1019.
GL: *There's nothing from tower and I'm not going to call them.*
OK?
Nav: *Okeydoke.*
GL: *It's going to be perfect.*
Nav: *Little dam coming up. We're drifting port. Go to the right.*
Two-eight-three. Two-eight-four.
CL: *Two-eight-four? Or two-eight-five?*
Nav: *I want to do a kink, sir, to get it spot on.*
GL: *Tell me when to roll out.*
Nav: *Go left. Two-eight-two.*
GL: *Roger, coming up to two minutes to run. Two-eight-two. Got*
two minutes to run. Perfect.
Nav: *Go left a bit. Steady.*
GL: *Two-seven-eight?*
Nav: *Two-eight-two!*
CL: *A school coming up—acceleration point. Two-eight-two is*
the heading.
Nav: *OK. We should start accelerating now.*
CL: *Roger. Shall I go?*
Nav: *Just leave it in case they (the Hunters) are going to be a bit*
late—to the minute.
GL: *OK.*
Nav: *Accelerate!*
GL: *Roger.*

At this stage, the tension becomes very apparent. The voices of both the pilot and navigator go up an octave and they begin to speak more quickly, using short phrases.

Nav: *You want to get your doors open.*
CL: *Yes, as soon as I've got my speed.*
Nav: *Go left a bit. Go left.*
GL: *More?*
Nav: *No. OK. Flatten out on two-eight-two. Quickly. Carry on.*
Flatten out. Quickly. Carry on.
GL: *Roger.*
Nav: *Up there—target!*
GL: *Ab! Beautiful. Yes! Switches. Speed up, or is it OK?*
Nav: *Speed's fine. Go left. Steady. Steady. Two-seven-eight.*
GL: *Roger.*
Nav: *Steady. Steady. Left a touch.*
GL: *Beautiful!*
Nav: *Steady. Steady. Left a touch. Steady. Steady. Steady. Can I*
switch the doors open?
GL: *Yes. Switch your doors.*

The adrenalin is now flowing as the excitement reaches fever pitch. Both the pilot and the navigator are shouting. They realize that the strike is going to be right on target. They can see the enemy running.

Nav: *Right. I'm going to put them into the field.*
GL: *Yes!*
Nav: *Steady. I'm going to get them. Steady.*
GL: *YES! F...ing beautiful!*
Nav: *Steady. Steady. NOW! Bombs gone. . . They're running...*
GL: *Beautiful! Jeez! You want to see all those bastards. The f...ing bombs are beautiful!*

The tension in the crews' almost breathless voices eases slightly, but the euphoria carries on for a long time. The fact that they have another duty to perform in getting the message to Lusaka tower reduces the elation for a moment, but it will soon come flooding back.

GL: *Roger, just let me get onto the f...ing tower and give them our bloody message. Where's this f...ing piece of shit? (the message).*
Nav: *Things will be better when you've climbed up, sir. (Radio communication with the tower).*
CL: *Yes, I know. I'm just trying to get the thing ready...*
Nav: *That was lovely! F...ing hundreds of the bastards. It worked out better than we could have... they ran straight into the bombs.*
GL: *Those f...ing bastards.*
Nav: *Look out for aircraft, sir.*
CL: *There's the bloody city. There.*

The K-Cars can then be heard over the target, with their cannons firing.

Nav: *Are we putting in K-Cars here?*
CL: *Yes, they've got K-Cars there. They'll have a beautiful time. They are like f...ing ants running around there. jeez. That was marvellous. Shit!*

Nav: *Straight ahead for one more minute.*
GL: *OK.*
Nav: *Keep an eye open, sir.*
CL: *Yes, I was going to say—a big pylon.*
CL: *Just check the tape recorder while you're there. Otherwise just leave it.*

Nav: *OK. Still turning.*
CL: *Roger. OK. Let me try and get this spiel off*
CL: *Lusaka tower, this is Green Leader. How do you read? (No answer).*
Lusaka tower, this is Green Leader.

Lusaka tower: *Station calling tower?*
CL: *Lusaka tower this is Green Leader. This is a message for the station commander at Mumbwa from the Rhodesian Air Force. We are attacking the terrorist base at Westlands Farm. This attack is against Rhodesian dissidents and not against Zambia. Rhodesia has no quarrel, repeat, no quarrel with Zambia or her security forces. We therefore ask you not to intervene or oppose our attack. However, we are orbiting your airfield now and are under orders to shoot down any Zambian Air Force aircraft, which does not comply with this request and attempts to take off Did you copy all that?*

Lusaka tower: *Copied.*
CL: *Roger, thanks. Cheers.*
CL: *Jeez, you should have seen the bombs raining down from the other aircraft here. F...ing unreal.*

Nav: *I hope the K-Cars get those bastards. I was so tempted to drop short.*
CL: *But the other ones (alpha bombs from the other Canberras) were going onto them.*

Nav: *They were running that way.*
Nav: *It couldn't have worked out better— they ran straight into the bombs. I couldn't believe it.*

The Canberras are now setting course for base, and Green Leader has to deal with the air traffic problems that have arisen at Lusaka.

Lusaka tower: Rhodesian Air Force, 118.1.
CL: Go ahead.
Tower: Can you confirm we can let our civil aircraft take-off from here? You have no objection?
GL: Roger. We have no objection there, but I advise you for the moment to stand-by on that. I request that you hang on for a short while—half an hour or so.
Tower: I copy. Can you please keep a listening watch on this frequency so we can ask you what we want to ask?
CL: Roger will do.
Tower: What do I call you?
CL: Green Leader!

Having dropped their golf bombs, Blue Section has completed their task, the Canberras are heading for home and it is now up to the K-Cars and White Section (John and Dave) to mop up. The K-Car cannons can be heard in the background of the pilot interchanges. Meanwhile Red Section (Aif and Jim) is still orbiting Mumbwa to deal with any possible threat from the Zambian Air Force.

K-Car Lead: How does it look?
K-Car 1: Beautiful. (Bursts of machine gun fire).
White Lead: What would you like us to take out?
K-Car Lead: White Section—I think that building you are going for was taken out completely but you might like to have a re-go at it just to make absolutely certain.
White Lead: Roger.
White 2, White Leader. Sir, if you would like to watch my strikes and then re-strike after us.
White 2: Roger.
White Lead: I think if you could take out the radio shack down there if you know which one it is.
White 2: Affirmative.
White Lead: Roger, sir—if you take out that one I'll put my frans on the headquarters. I'll be attacking from south to north.

The Kenya Airways aircraft, which has been denied landing permission, is becoming more and more frustrated with Lusaka tower. But the tower has other immediate concerns.

Kenya Airways: Lusaka tower this is Kenya 432.
Tower: 432 stand by.

The command Dakota, Dolphin 3, with Air Commodore Norman Walsh on board has kept a listening watch but has not heard the result of the Canberra attack.

Dolphin 3: We've heard nothing from Green Section. Confirm they did go through?

K-Car Lead: Affirmative. Right on target.

Dolphin 3: OK. Thanks very much.

GL: Dolphin 3 from Green Leader.

Dolphin 3: Green Leader, this is Dolphin 3, go ahead.

CL: Roger. Shortly I'm going to ask you to take over.

Tower: Green Leader, Lusaka.

GL: Go ahead.

Tower: How much longer is this operation?

CL: Roger. If you'll hang fire, I'll advise you shortly.

Tower: I have one to take off to the north and if you have no objection one to take off to the south. Civilian, you know.

CL: Request you hold them for another ten minutes.

Tower: Roger. Will do.

GL: Lusaka, this is Green Leader. Would you now contact Dolphin 3. He'll be taking over my transmissions.

Tower: Roger. Dolphin 3, Lusaka.

Dolphin 3: Lusaka, this is Dolphin 3, do you read me?

CL (interjecting): Dolphin 3, this is Green Leader. I have advised Lusaka to hold their civilian traffic for another ten minutes. We're going out of range shortly.

Dolphin 3: Roger. Lusaka, this is Dolphin 3. Just a message that you are to keep your air traffic on the ground for another ten minutes. Did you copy, over?

Tower: Copied, thank you. I have a civilian aircraft coming in from the north to land in about one-zero minutes. Any objection to him coming in to land?

Dolphin 3: Roger, there is no problem with that. You can let him come in and land. The main thing is that if there is any air force, repeat air force traffic, they are to remain on the ground. You can let that civilian traffic land—there's no hassle on that.

CL (to his Nav): The Hunters are f...ing squalling back like scalded cats up there making little trails of white shit in the sky.

The captain of the Kenya Airways jet asks who has priority. Lusaka tower replies in all truth: *I think the Rhodesians do!* Meanwhile Green Section Canberras have moved out of range and Green Leader is checking with Salisbury radar. And so comes his final transmission:

GL: Salisbury radar, this is Green Section.

Salisbury: Green Section, radar.

GL: Flight level 250. We'll be top of descent at 58, the field at 08 and request priority landing for all our aircraft.

Salisbury: Report top of 'D'.