

**Thinking Sideways Podcast**

Episode 5: UVB-76

Hosts: Steve, Devin, and Joe

Transcriber: Allison Perrone

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[**Theme song plays**]

**Devin:** Wait, do you hear that?

[**Low buzzing noise begins**]

**Steve:** What is that?

[**Buzzing noise continues, switching tones**]

**Joe:** It's a fog horn.

**Devin:** It's annoying, right?

**Steve:** A little bit.

**Joe:** Yeah.

**Devin:** So, now imagine listening to that for hours or days or weeks or years...

**Steve:** No.

**Joe:** Mmm...

**Steve:** I'd go crazy. That's an annoying noise. What is that noise?

**Devin:** Well, I'll tell you in a minute.

**Steve:** Okay.

**Devin:** Welcome to Thinking Sideways. I'm Devin.

**Steve:** I'm Steve.

**Joe:** And I'm Joe.

**Devin:** We're going to talk about UVB-76, or "The Buzzer", today. That's what that noise is.

**Steve:** UVB-76?

**Devin:** Yeah. So, this station transmits a buzzing sound that lasts about a second, pauses for a second... you know, you just heard it. It repeats twenty-one to thirty-four times a minute all day long. For years.

**Joe:** Mhm.

**Steve:** Twenty-one to... how much?

**Devin:** Thirty-four times.

**Steve:** So about every other second or so.

**Devin:** About.

**Joe:** Yeah.

**Devin:** It's not exact.

**Joe:** Yeah. And what's the range? I mean, can we pick this up in the US or is it...

**Devin:** Sometimes.

**Joe:** Really?

**Devin:** But not always.

**Joe:** Depending on atmospheric conditions, yadda, yadda, yadda...

**Devin:** Yeah.

**Joe:** Is it broadcasting to this day?

**Devin:** Yes.

**Joe:** And it's been broadcasting how long?

**Devin:** So, it's been broadcasting since at least 1982.

**Joe:** Uh huh.

**Devin:** That's the first actual recording of it, but there have been reports of it as back as far as 1976...

**Steve:** Wow!

**Joe:** Mmm.

**Devin:** ...which is apparently when the US started monitoring it. So, maybe even longer than that.

**Joe:** Mmm.

**Steve:** So... what is it?

**Devin:** I've listened to this thing a lot. It's been on my radar forever - no pun intended.

**Joe:** Do you listen...

**Steve:** You go to sleep to it?

**Devin:** Sometimes! It's kind of soothing after a while.

**Joe:** Actually, that's the kind of thing I would wake up to.

[**Steve laughs**]

**Joe:** It sounds a lot like my clock alarm.

**Devin:** After the first couple repetitions, it kind of has this soothing... it's not like the ticking of a clock. It's not quite that repetitive, but it's still repetitive enough that it's soothing. To me, at least.

[**Steve laughs**]

**Devin:** I understand I'm crazy.

**Joe:** Yeah.

**Steve:** Okay.

**Devin:** You can hear people talking in the distance behind this thing often, which means that it's a tone that comes from a device in front of a live microphone, not a recording.

**Steve:** As in a speaker with a microphone in front of it?

**Devin:** Yeah, as in maybe actually a foghorn that is there and it goes "BEEERM" in front of a microphone that is connected to the broadcaster that broadcasts that. And actually, the current

theory is that it's two different transmitters, likely within the same building, maybe within a couple rooms of each other because you can hear things in the background that are consistent.

**Steve:** Mhm...

**Devin:** But one goes, "BEEERM" and there's a pause and the other one goes "BEEERM" and then there's a pause and it goes "BEEERM" and you can kind of hear that variation if you listen again really closely. Hold on, listen:

[**The buzzer noise plays**]

**Devin:** Hear it?

**Steve:** A little bit...

**Devin:** It's very slight. It's very slight. There's some recordings where it's way more apparent and it will not surprise you to know that these come out of Mother Russia.

**Joe:** Of course.

**Steve:** Good old Mother Russia.

**Devin:** Mhm.

**Steve:** A land of men chasing bears with bats.

**Joe:** Uh huh.

**Devin:** So, we're not here to talk about this noise, although it is weird.

**Steve:** We're not?

**Devin:** No. We're here to talk about what happens when the noise stops.

**Joe:** Nuclear warfare?

**Devin:** No.

[**Steve laughs**]

**Steve:** I'll bite. When and why did the nose stop?

**Devin:** Hold on.

[**Recording a male voice speaking Russian plays**]

**Joe:** What is he reciting, a bunch of numbers and letters in Russian, or what?

**Devin:** He is.

**Joe:** Yeah.

**Devin:** This transmission, this specific one, is from December 24th, 1997. It was the first recorded vocal transmission of the stop of the buzzer, and if you would really like to know I can tell you what he says but it doesn't really matter. It's in code.

**Joe:** Yeah.

**Devin:** Obviously.

**Joe:** How long does the message go on for? How many characters?

**Devin:** So, with one exception, all of the messages are one or two call signs, which says what they're broadcasting from and then one or two more number sets of completely varying length. I've heard some that are five or six and I've heard some that are twenty or thirty. Which is another thing that makes it a little creepy, I think, that it's not just the same message going out every time. So that one went out and then one went out on December 9th, 2002. One went out on February 21st, 2006 and that was it for four years.

**Steve:** Those were the only vocal?

**Devin:** Those were only vocal.

**Joe:** Has anybody crosschecked those days with events in Russia on those particular dates?

**Devin:** Yeah, and they come up with nothing.

**Joe:** Really? Hmm.

**Devin:** Nothing of any kind of consequence.

**Steve:** So it's totally benign.

**Devin:** It seems that way, yeah.

**Joe:** Ah, no, it's out of Russia, nothing in Russia is benign.

[Everyone laughs]

**Devin:** Three years ago, the transmission just disappeared. Like, actually disappeared, just went off the air. The buzzer just went off the air.

**Joe:** Oh, I don't know if you know, but they don't electricity in Russia now, for about three years...

[**Everyone laughs**]

**Devin:** Three years ago...

**Joe:** Yeah!

**Devin:** Yeah. On June 5th, 2010, UVB went silent for 24 hours and then resumed normal buzzing and then on the 10th at approximately 21:30, which is in Coordinated Universal Time, there was this series of Morse code beeps emitted with the buzzer for just under four minutes. And a little bit later in that day, they had another voice message that was very, very short. About two days later, the signal went completely silent again. Then, it was followed by a series of thumping sounds that were apparently in the same room as the open microphone, which was followed closely by a hail of electronic noises, which faded quickly into the buzzer broadcast. Later that day, voices were heard conversing loudly behind the buzzer.

**Steve:** So the janitor walked into the room, knocked a bunch of stuff around, somebody fixed it and then they were in there complaining about him? Is that what I'm gathering?

**Devin:** It kind of sounds like that, doesn't it?

**Steve:** It kind of does!

**Joe:** Or somebody was having sex in there.

**Devin:** Maybe. I mean, it could have been that too. Nobody really knows what happened there. And then on September 1st, the buzzer was...

[**Music begins**]

**Devin:** ...interrupted by 38 seconds of "Dance of the Little Swans" from Tchaikovsky's Ballet of the Swans...

[**Music continues and fades out**]

**Devin:** ...and a Morse code signal accompanied that fragment. So it was right underneath it. On September 5th, a female voice was heard counting from 1 to 9 in Russian. About an hour later, the buzzing was silenced for a muffled male voice trying to read a message, but it was garbled. So it sounds like they were having some technical difficulties, right?

**Steve:** A little bit. Based on the fact that it sounds like it's a microphone in front of a speaker doesn't sound high tech to me at all, so...

**Devin:** Mhm.

**Steve:** ...not shocking.

**Devin:** Right. And then on September 7th, there was a male voice that made a broadcast. It was just a series of numbers and codes again, but it was one of twenty-five voice messages that would be broadcast by September 30th. So in 23 days, they sent out 25 messages after being basically silent since... '76, did I say? '72.

**Steve:** So, no human voice is on it and then suddenly just a slew of talking.

**Devin:** Just suddenly - yes.

**Joe:** Now, I thought you said that the broadcasts were cut off in 2007 or something like that or 2010.

**Devin:** They stopped for a while.

**Joe:** Yeah.

**Devin:** For a really long time.

**Joe:** Well, okay, you said there were 25 messages in September of what year?

**Devin:** 2010.

**Joe:** 2010, okay.

**Steve:** So it popped back up and suddenly had a flurry of, not just the buzzer, but people chatting...

**Joe:** Yeah, exactly.

**Steve:** ...and giving codes.

**Joe:** Yeah.

**Devin:** Lots of codes.

**Joe:** Okay.

**Devin:** And then between October and December of that same year, there were another 56 voice messages sent out.

**Steve:** Odd..

**Devin:** Right?

**Joe:** Yeah.

**Devin:** Each of these, with the exception of the one on September 10th, replaced the familiar UVB-76 call sign with a MDZHB call sign.

**Steve:** So they changed the call sign?

**Devin:** They changed their call sign.

**Joe:** Hmm...

**Devin:** Which suggests perhaps that during their times of radio silence, of buzzer silence, they were re-locating.

**Steve:** Oh, okay!

**Joe:** Or perhaps they were overrun by rival hand radio enthusiasts.

[**Everyone laughs**]

**Devin:** That's definitely possible.

**Joe:** Yeah.

**Devin:** On November 11th, 2010, intermittent phone conversations were transmitted and recorded by a listener for a period of about thirty minutes. They were confidential messages. They have yet to be fully, publicly translated. The phone calls mentioned the "brigade operative officer on duty" and communication nodes like "Debut", "Nad..." I can't say Russian words, but it's the Russian word for hope. And then a couple other code names for things. And then a female officer says, "Officer on duty of communication node Debut senior ensign... got the control call from" someone, "okay." And then they're cut off.

**Steve:** Hmm.

**Devin:** And then on that same day, there was a phone call that was out that said, "Did you get the call?" And the person responded, "Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes." And that was it. Since then, between January 5th and February 5th of 2011, fourteen more voice messages have been...



**Joe:** But then no more buzzing.

**Devin:** Buzzing. Buzzing in between these voice messages.

**Joe:** Oh, still buzzing!

**Devin:** Yeah.

**Joe:** Oh, okay.

**Devin:** So the way that this works is that it buzzes, it buzzes, it buzzes, it goes silent for a minute and then somebody talks and then it starts buzzing again.

**Joe:** Mhm.

**Devin:** It says if this, whatever's honking or buzzing into the microphone just gets shut off for a minute, then they take the mic and they say their announcement and then it gets turned back on.

**Joe:** Well it's just saying, this thing is buzzing and buzzing and buzzing and it gets turned off and you hear this Russian voice say, "Wow, that's really annoying."

[Everybody laughs]

**Devin:** "This is the most annoying thing ever!"

**Steve:** "This job is terrible!"

**Devin:** So, there's a couple theories out there about this, one that it's a numbers station, which is fair.

**Steve:** What exactly is a numbers station?

**Devin:** A numbers station is a shortwave radio station, which is used mostly by the military. They're characterized by their, quote: "unusual broadcasts" which is just of spoken words, mostly numbers. They just read a string of numbers or letters, usually by female voices although sometimes men or sometimes children's voices are used. They're used mostly by the military because you send them out on an empty AM short wavelength. You can just send your operative out with a tiny little handheld radio. You just tune it to that station and just listen to the silence all the time and when something comes up, they'll have it. They'll hear the broadcast is happening. Usually the broadcasts - and this is true of UVB - when they do broadcast information, they repeat it twice so they do call sign, call sign, message, call sign call sign, pause, and they repeat back that same message over again and they go back to the buzzer.

**Joe:** So do they, when they do actual voices and everything like that, is it the same time of the day every time?

**Devin:** Nope. Completely different times.

**Joe:** Mmm.

**Devin:** There's no consistency, not at all.

**Steve:** So it's just random? Nobody...

**Devin:** It's totally random.

**Steve:** ...can figure out a pattern?

**Devin:** Right, which if you're an operative out in the field somewhere, sure. That works great. The only thing is that it's hard to understand why they would have a buzzer constantly, why they would have a sound constantly because it's so much easier if you're out in the field to just say, "All right, around this time I'm going to tune my radio and listen to silence and as soon as I hear something..."

**Joe:** Mhm.

**Devin:** "...I'll know that I need to start paying attention." Instead there's a buzzer...

**Joe:** Yeah.

**Devin:** ... and then it changes in tone, sure.

**Joe:** Yeah.

**Devin:** There's a distinct change but it's nothing compared to silence. Additionally, it's an expense.

**Joe:** Well, you know what the beauty of it would be, though, is that if you want that particular wavelength to be available for you and your operatives to use, then it's a good idea to occupy it at all times because otherwise, somebody else might set up a radio station and broadcast on that particular wavelength and step all over your stuff.

**Devin:** That's true, although couldn't you just broadcast dead air?

**Joe:** Dead air as in what?

**Devin:** Silence?

**Steve:** Static?

**Joe:** As in silence or static? Well...

**Steve:** You can't broadcast silence.

**Joe:** Yeah.

**Steve:** You have to broadcast some kind of noise.

**Joe:** Yeah.

**Devin:** Mmm...

**Steve:** I guess you could broadcast some kind of interference...

**Devin:** Just static.

**Joe:** Yeah.

**Steve:** But dead air would have to be static.

**Joe:** Some sort of jamming, but yeah, just a really simple low-tech solution and this is typical of the Russians. They're not going to go for the high-tech solution when they can come up with something cheap and down and dirty that works.

**Devin:** Sure.

**Joe:** So, you broadcast an annoying buzz, an annoying loud buzz so nobody is going to think to try to set up a radio station broadcasting that particular wavelength that would interfere with your transmissions.

**Devin:** That's fair.

**Joe:** You know?

**Devin:** That's very...

**Joe:** Even though... yeah.

**Devin:** Yeah, the other theory that people had was that it was a Dead Hand system.

**Joe:** Mhm.

**Devin:** And before you ask, because I see that little twitch of your head...

**Joe and Steve:** Uh huh.

**Devin:** A Dead Hand is a system that automatically triggers the launch of nuclear weapons in case of a devastating strike by the enemy.

**Steve:** Mhm.

**Devin:** So, it's constantly broadcasting and when the broadcast goes dead, it means that something devastating has happened to the country, there's been some kind of really horrible attack on it, so you launch weapons at whoever the likeliest person was. They were big in the Cold War. We had them and Russia had them and a bunch of people had them and if that tone went dead, it meant that the President was dead, everyone was dead...

**Joe:** Mhm.

**Devin:** ...we'd been attacked just horrifically.

**Joe:** Yeah, it kind of depends on where the transmitter is located, though.

**Devin:** It absolutely does.

**Joe:** Was it actually located anywhere near any nuclear missile silos?

**Devin:** No. So that's the other kind of mystery that nobody totally knows for sure where it is.

**Joe:** Oh, really. They've never been able to pin it down or something? I seem to recall something about how that it actually broadcasts from two different locations, is that true? Or did I read that right?

**Devin:** The theory is that they broadcast from two different speakers...

**Joe:** Uh huh.

**Devin:** ...but not two different locations.

**Joe:** Oh, okay. So, the same building, just different rooms or different speakers in the same room?

**Devin:** Yes.

**Joe:** Okay.

**Devin:** That's the current theory.

**Joe:** Okay.

**Devin:** The problem with the Dead Hand theory is that it did go silent.

**Joe:** Yeah.

**Devin:** And nothing happened.

**Joe:** Yeah.

**Devin:** So, that's pretty much bunk.

**Joe:** Yeah.

**Devin:** So the question kind of is, what is this thing and why are the Russians still using this mechanical device...?

**Joe:** But the buzzing - is the buzzing still occurring? It shut off in what, 2007? Or 2010? When did the buzzing stop?

**Devin:** Never.

**Joe:** Oh, it's still going on?

**Devin:** It stopped just briefly.

**Joe:** Uh huh.

**Devin:** It went off the air for twenty-four hours.

**Joe:** Uh huh. But it's still going on?

**Devin:** It's still going on. You can still tune in and listen to it today.

**Joe:** Mhm. Yeah.

**Steve:** Now, I seem to remember something when I was going through - and this might just be a troll on the internet - that somebody was saying that they'd figured out what the location that it was broadcasting from was and that when they went there, it was a derelict building that had some old, decrepit broadcasting equipment in it and some code books and stuff like that, but since the hand was going, this was I'm guessing after the point where it went dead for a bit and then popped back on the air and so that was the transition period.

**Devin:** Yeah, yeah. That's the theory and that's stuff that I've heard too, that some urban explorers found...

**Steve:** That's exactly the same story!

**Devin:** ...this derelict little place. Yeah, I don't know how much I believe that.

**Steve:** But it's the internet.

**Devin:** Yeah.

**Steve:** Everybody can make whatever story they want up and say, "I found this stuff but I never disclosed it! I burned it for secrecy because I didn't want the KGB after me."

**Devin:** Yeah.

**Steve:** But, I've heard those stories so I don't know if you've ever heard anything that seemed concrete evidence that it had actually shifted locale.

**Devin:** No, the most concrete, I think that it's probably true if that story's true, which it may well be, that they found it. I don't know why else it would go quiet for twenty-four hours. I mean, technical difficulties, sure, but that should only take an hour or two, especially since the technology seems to be pretty much the basics.

**Steve:** Those vacuum tubes are hard to replace.

**Devin:** They are.

[Everybody laughs]

**Steve:** They don't make them no more!

**Devin:** That is kind of what it sounds like, those old toys that you would...

**Steve:** Yeah!

**Devin:** ...around your head?

**Steve:** Yeah.

**Devin:** A little bit.

**Steve:** Or a recording of an air raid siren or something?

**Devin:** Yeah.

**Steve:** That the tape breaks and they've scotch taped it together so many times that it just doesn't work anymore?

**Devin:** It just does not tape anymore.

**Joe:** That's why it emanates from Russia. That's kind of their style.

**Steve:** Have you heard of the other two stations that they have that does basically the same thing? They have two more stations in Russia that have been recorded and the names are - I think they're nicknamed "The Pip"...

**Devin:** Oh yeah.

**Steve:** ...and "The Squeaky Wheel."

**Devin:** Yes.

**Steve:** And they have a very similar history of, everything is just fine, constant buzz, no big deal, and then there have been some interruptions where suddenly they're being used with verbal casts or audio being sent out but nobody knows why that's happening. Which adds a little more depth to the mystery of wait, what are they doing with this?

**Devin:** Mhm.

**Steve:** Is this travel plans for the country's mascot? Or is this air raid scenarios or...

**Joe:** Mmm...

**Steve:** ...formations? I don't know.

**Devin:** "The Pip" sounds exactly like "The Buzzer" used to sound.

**[ "The Pip" plays - an intermittent higher beep ]**

**Steve:** Oh, really?

**Devin:** Mhm. It's gone through a couple different incarnations throughout the years of what it sounded like and "The Pip" is what it used to sound like in the 80's, actually. So let's check out "The Squeaky Wheel".

**Steve:** So "The Pip" is...

**Devin:** It may have been the same technology.

**Steve:** Which sounds to me almost as if it's a heart rate monitor.

**Devin:** Yeah, what are they doing over there?

**Steve:** So, Joe, you think that you might have had some ideas or some theories as to why these would be used?

**Joe:** Well, no, I mean there was the one, which is that they're basically trying to keep the channel open for communication...

**Steve:** Mhm...

**Joe:** ...by keeping other people off the wavelength. The other one was why I asked about the wavelength, but it doesn't really actually make sense when you think about it because if you wanted to, say, use it as a Dead Hand, then to communicate, say, to your ballistic missile subs that Mother Russia has been nuked, time to go nuke the US or whoever, then if it was a Dead Hand it would work really well except for one thing which is that it's in a fairly short wavelength, which doesn't penetrate water very well.

**Steve:** Mhm.

**Joe:** So, on a longer wavelength, like VLF or ELF, would actually be able to reach submarines way, way far away, deep under the water.

**Steve:** Mhm.

**Joe:** But if it's AM then all bets are off for that so if it is a Dead Hand, it's not for communication with ballistic missile subs. Anyway, that's about it.

**Devin:** Yeah.

**Joe:** That kind of shoots that theory all to hell. But that's why I was asking what that wavelength was.

**Steve:** So nobody really knows what this thing is for.

**Devin:** No, nor do they know who runs it.

**Joe:** Mhm.

**Devin:** You know, the theory is that it's the Russian armed forces, but it's unconfirmed. You can guess from the codes, you can guess from whatever you want to guess from but nobody even knows for sure that it's actually the Russian military, just that it broadcasts out of Russia.

**Steve:** I'm guessing that the entire thing is being broadcast from Stalin's coffin.

**Devin:** Oh...

**Joe:** Mmm.



**Steve:** That's where it's coming from.

**Devin:** Mhm, it's his heart monitor.

**Steve:** Uh huh!

**Devin:** And his his grunts.

**Joe:** Yeah.

**Steve:** Yeah! They've got him on life support but he's in hibernation.

**Devin:** Mhm.

**Steve:** So it's his heart rate and his heart rate is so bad because he's been in suspended animation-

**Joe:** Suspended animation?

**Steve:** ...suspended animation for so long that instead of going "beep-beep-beep" - "BEEERM".

**Joe:** "BEEERM"...

**Steve:** "BEEERM". That thing is going to break down. Somebody needs to change the distributor on him.

**Devin:** Oh, yeah.

**Joe:** Mhm.

**Devin:** Definitely.

**Steve:** It's a problem.

**Joe:** Yeah.

**Devin:** Or, you know, it could just be aliens.

**Joe:** Well, here's - no, it could be aliens but I think the most likely explanation is just probably a publicly funded - probably by US dollars - publicly funded sort of art installation.

[**Steve laughs**]

**Steve:** Public art!

**Joe:** Yeah, so probably some Russians running around with a quest and they're probably getting a couple million dollars a year to put on this at thing. So I would suggest that you go to the Feds and ask them what art stuff in Russia they're funding and you'll probably find the application in there. So there you go.

**Devin:** It's a good theory.

**Joe:** Yeah.

**Steve:** All right, well, good to know.

**Joe:** It works as well as anything.

**Devin:** Yeah. It does.

**Joe:** Yeah.

**Devin:** So, I guess that does it. So if you want to hear any of these recordings or read any of these links that we have for you, they're all really exciting links. You can go to our website which is [thinkingsidewayspodcast.com](http://thinkingsidewayspodcast.com). If you have your own theory, please share it with us because there are so many theories out there and they're just so interesting. So thanks for sticking with us.

**Joe:** Hey. Goodnight, everybody.

**Steve:** Beep! Beep! Beep

**Devin:** BEEERM.

[Steve laughs]

**Joe:** Ah. *Do svidanya!*

[Outro music plays]