

## ITU PHONETICS

by D. W. Thorne, K6SOJ

The use of ITU phonetics in EMCOMM and formal traffic handling is essential to accurate and efficient communications. (I use them on a daily basis just to keep in practice.) It is my experience that some hams simply haven't ever researched "the why". Others just haven't ever taken the time to learn them. And sadly, I have heard a few hams campaign against their use based upon some weird misguided resentment of "authority". (I sure hope they drive on the right side of the street as do most of us.)

In 1947 the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), adopted rules and procedures that included standard phonetics. The reason? TO SAVE LIVES. There are documented incidents where aircraft (and lives) have been lost as a result of phone traffic being misunderstood or unreadable as a result of non-standard phonetics and thereby miss-communication between pilots (usually those whose primary language was not English) and ground control stations.

In 1956 the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) adopted the current phonetic alphabet. Today (with a few rare exceptions) it is THE worldwide standard for military, naval, civilian aeronautical and maritime, search and rescue groups, public safety, (law enforcement is an exception); AND, the A.R.R.L. Even the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts teach them!

Here are a few reasons that the ITU Phonetic alphabet is used by proficient EMCOMM and NTS phone operators:

1) It is the INTERNATIONAL standard. Operators that do not have English as their primary language, can clearly spell out a word that may be difficult to copy. Not only due to poor conditions or static, but due to a foreign accent. I know personally, of an incident, where EMERGENCY traffic, originating from a foreign (visiting in the U.S.) mobile amateur operator, calling for assistance on 2 meters FM was boggled, because the responding ham did not know ITU phonetics.

2) In handling RADIOGRAMS, or other traffic, a skilled operator that is familiar with ITU phonetics will automatically recognize that a phonetic is NOT part of the text of the message. If non-standard phonetics are used, the receiving station may get confused, and require additional time consuming "fill".

3) It sounds..."professional" and efficient.

ITU phonetics and correct pronunciation (use under poor conditions):

|            |               |
|------------|---------------|
| A--Alfa    | "AL-FAH"      |
| B--Bravo   | "BRAH-VOH"    |
| C--Charlie | "CHAR-LEE"    |
| D--Delta   | "DELL-TAH"    |
| E--Echo    | "ECK-OH"      |
| F--Foxtrot | "FOKS-TROT"   |
| G--Golf    | "GOLF"        |
| H--Hotel   | "HOH-TELL"    |
| I--India   | "IN-DEE-AH"   |
| J--Juliet  | "JEW-LEE-ETT" |

|             |                |
|-------------|----------------|
| K--Kilo     | "KEE-LOH"      |
| L--Lima     | "LEE-MAH"      |
| M--Mike     | "MIKE"         |
| N--November | "NO-VEM-BER"   |
| O--Oscar    | "OSS-CAR"      |
| P--Papa     | "PAH-PAH"      |
| Q--Quebec   | "KEH-BECK"     |
| R--Romeo    | "ROW-ME-OH"    |
| S--Sierra   | "SEE-AIR-RAH"  |
| T--Tango    | "TANG-GO"      |
| U--Uniform  | "YOU-NEE-FORM" |
| V--Victor   | "VIK-TOR"      |
| W--Whiskey  | "WISS-KEY"     |
| X--X-ray    | "ECKS-RAY"     |
| Y--Yankee   | "YANG-KEY"     |
| Z--Zulu     | "ZOO-LOO"      |

Numbers pronunciation:

- 0 - "ZEE-RO"
- 1 - "WUN"
- 2 - "TOO"
- 3 - "TH-UH-REE"
- 4 - "FOW-ER"
- 5 - "FI-IV"
- 6 - "SIX"
- 7 - "SEV-EN"
- 8 - "ATE" or "A-IT"
- 9 - "NIN-ER"

DECIMAL = "DAY-SEE-MAL"

ANOMALIES and IDIOSYNCRASIES:

1 - To distinguish "Z" from "C" on phone, is it a common practice to say "zed" (an old British phonetic) for "Z", especially when saying a call sign. "Zed" is shorter (one syllable vs. two for "zulu".) However, in formal traffic, the ITU: "ZULU" is correct and proper.

2 - "ROGER" (an early phonetic) is still used for "received" (equivalent of sending "R" in Morse) - It does NOT mean "yes" or "affirmative". It only means: "I have received your complete message".

From Emcomm.org archives