NATO

phonetic alphabet, codes & signals

The ability to communicate and make yourself understood can make a difference in life-threatening situations – imagine for example that you are trying to alert a search and rescue helicopter of the position of a downed pilot. To ensure clear communication, NATO uses a number of well-known formats which are in general use. NATO standardization agreements enable forces from many nations to communicate in a way that is understood by all.

Some standards can be found in everyday civilian and military life. "Bravo Zulu", typically signalled with naval flags on ships at sea and meaning "well done", is also commonly used in written communication by the military, for example by replying "BZ" to an email.

Phonetic alphabet
The NATO alphabet became effective in 1956 and, a few years later, turned into the established universal phonetic alphabet for all military, civilian and amateur radio communications.

International Morse Code
Morse code transmits text through on-off tones, light-flashes or clicks. It was widely used in the 1890s for early radio communication, before it was possible to transmit voice.

Flaghoist communication
Ships use flags as signals to send out messages to each other. The use of flags, known as flaghoist communication, is a fast and accurate way to send information in daylight.

Semaphore
Semaphore is a system in which a person sends information at a distance using hand-held flags – depending on the position of the flags, the message will vary. The signaller holds the flag in different positions that represent letters or numbers.

Panel signalling
Panels are visual signals for sending simple messages to an aircraft. Using a limited code, ground forces can send messages to pilots, for example to request medical supplies.

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-tel)
I India (in-dee-ah)
J Juliett (jew-lee-ett)
K Kilo (key-loh)

L Lima (lee-mah)
M Mike (mike)
N November (no-vem-ber)
O Oscar (oss-cah)
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 (vic-tah)
W Whiskey (wiss-key)
X Xray (ecks-ray)
Y Yankee (yang-key)
Z Zulu (zoo-loo)

Numbers

1 One (wun)
2 Two (too)
3 Three (tree)
4 Four (fow-er)
5 Five (fife)
6 Six (six)
7 Seven (sev-en)
8 Eight (ait)
9 Nine (nin-er)
0 Zero (zee-ro)

More information on NATO's codes, signals and standards can be found on the NATO Standardization Office (NSO) website: http://nso.nato.int/nso/ – More on the history of the NATO phonetic alphabet: http://www.nato.int/declassified/
This poster can be downloaded at http://www.nato.int/alphabet

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