

Military Phonetic Alphabet

If you've ever talked on a call with bad reception or with someone in a loud place, you know how difficult it can be to communicate using regular English. Many words sound similar and can be easily misunderstood, and the same is true for a few letters if you attempt to spell something out. Clear, expedient communication is vital to any military operation, and the everyday method of conveying ideas isn't always suitable. Without a solid understanding of what's being communicated, mistakes are likely to be made and may even be lethal.

Currently, the U.S. military uses the same phonetic alphabet adopted by NATO. More accurately, the alphabet is known as the International Radiotelephony Spelling Alphabet (IRSA). The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) developed the IRSA to account for discrepancies in similar alphabets between different countries and organizations. Currently, the only difference in the IRSA among countries that adopt it is the spelling of certain words, such as Alfa for many European countries to avoid mispronunciations.

The military uses the IRSA to communicate for many different purposes including communicating code, shorthand, [slang](#), and certain [acronyms](#). For example, the phrase Tango Uniform correlates with the phrase tits up, which refers to either a deceased individual or a broken piece of equipment. These types of phrases may also arise from other forms of communication, such as the Naval saying "bravo zulu" which means "well done." Rather than relating directly back to the first letters of "well done," bravo zulu references flags of the same designation from a maritime tactical signals publication.

Letter	1957-Present	Morse Code	1913	1927	1938	World War II
A	Alfa (or Alpha)	· _	Able	Affirmative	Afirm	Afirm (Able)
B	Bravo	_ . . .	Boy	Baker	Baker	Baker
C	Charlie	_ . _ .	Cast	Cast	Cast	Charlie
D	Delta	_ . .	Dog	Dog	Dog	Dog
E	Echo	.	Easy	Easy	Easy	Easy
F	Foxtrot	. . _ .	Fox	Fox	Fox	Fox

G	Golf	__ .	George	George	George	George
H	Hotel	Have	Hypo	Hypo	How
I	India	..	Item	Interrogatory	Int	Int (Item)
J	Juliett	. _ _ _	Jig	Jig	Jig	Jig
K	Kilo	_ . _	King	King	King	King
L	Lima	. _ . .	Love	Love	Love	Love
M	Mike	_ _	Mike	Mike	Mike	Mike
N	November	_ .	Nan	Negative	Negat	Negat (Nan)
O	Oscar	_ _ _	Oboe	Option	Option	Option (Oboe)
P	Papa	. _ _ .	Pup	Preparatory	Prep	Prep (Peter)
Q	Quebec	_ _ . _	Quack	Quack	Queen	Queen
R	Romeo	. _ .	Rush	Roger	Roger	Roger
S	Sierra	...	Sail	Sail	Sail	Sugar
T	Tango	_	Tare	Tare	Tare	Tare
U	Uniform	. . _	Unit	Unit	Unit	Uncle
V	Victor	. . . _	Vice	Vice	Victor	Victor
W	Whiskey	. _ _	Watch	William	William	William
X	X-ray	_ . . _	X-ray	X-ray	X-ray	X-ray
Y	Yankee	_ . _ _	Yoke	Yoke	Yoke	Yoke
Z	Zulu	_ _ . .	Zed	Zed	Zed	Zebra

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