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ABSTRACT

The U.S. Navy and other services use the same 26-letter alphabet that people use every day, but they substitute a word for each letter. You might pronounce the letter "a" when spelling the word a-n-t. A sailor uses words in place of each letter, making a-n-t into "alpha-november-tango." This system prevents mix-ups between similar sounding letters such as "m" and "n," and "b" and "v." This clarifies a message over a static-filled telephone line. The Navy also uses flags to symbolize letters. These signal flags are flown on the open deck of a vessel. Flags allow ships to communicate with other vessels without picking up a radio or sending an e-mail. This lesson is divided into five sections: (1) "Navy ABCs"; (2) "Military Alphabet and Signal Flags"; (3) "Spelling Worksheet"; (4) "Flag Worksheet"; and (5) "History of Phonetic Alphabet and Signal Flags". (BT)

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Navy ABCs

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Navy ABC's

You may have heard a Sailor or Soldier spell a word to someone over the radio or on the phone in a funny code. It may have sounded like she or he was transmitting a highly classified message, when they were merely speaking in the military's alphabet. We cannot give away any encrypted codes, but you can learn this alphabet to create your own secret messages.

The Navy and other services use the same 26-letter alphabet that we use everyday, but they substitute a word for each letter. You might pronounce the letter "a" when spelling the word a-n-t. A Sailor uses words in place of each letter, making a-n-t into alpha november tango.

This may sound confusing to you, but the system prevents mix-ups between similar sounding letters such as "m" and "n," and "b" and "v." This also clarifies a message over a static-filled telephone line.

The Navy also uses flags to symbolize letters. These signal flags are flown on the open deck of a ship or boat. Flags allow ships to quickly communicate with other vessels without picking up a radio or sending an e-mail. Special combinations of flags translate into phrases or warnings, such as "submarine attack!"

Ready?

Here is the alphabet, then we will test your knowledge.
For a more detailed explanation and a guide to the alphabet before 1957 see attached information sheet

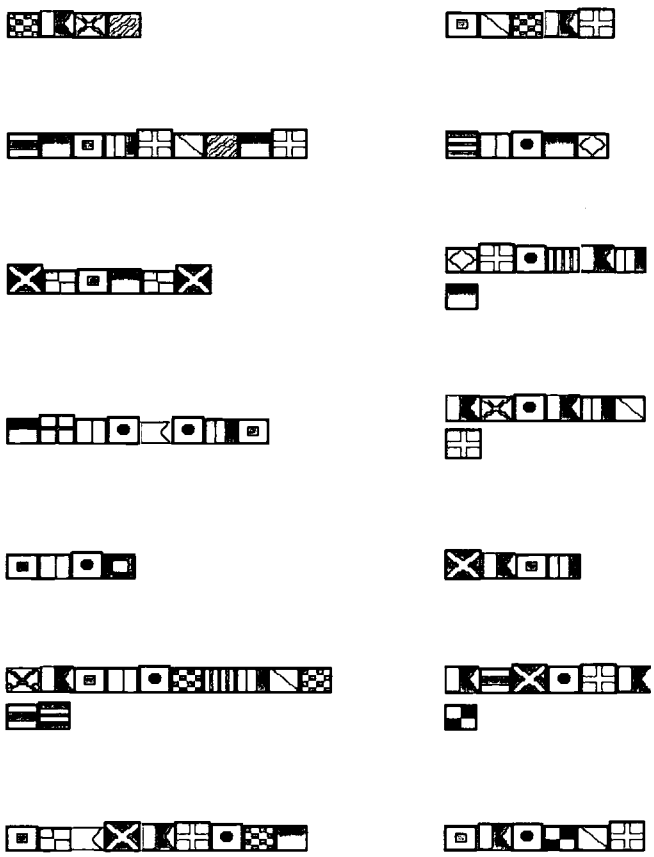
Military Alphabet and Signal Flags

A	Alpha		**N**	November	
B	Bravo		**O**	Oscar	
C	Charlie		**P**	Papa	
D	Delta		**Q**	Quebec	
E	Echo		**R**	Romeo	
F	Foxtrot		**S**	Sierra	
G	Golf		**T**	Tango	
H	Hotel		**U**	Uniform	
I	India		**V**	Victor	
J	Juliet		**W**	Whiskey	
K	Kilo		**X**	X-ray	
L	Lima		**Y**	Yankee	
M	Mike		**Z**	Zulu	

Spell these words aloud with the new alphabet:

Navy	**Destroyer**
Washington DC	**Frigate**
Museum	**Mast**
Exhibits	**Admiral**
Ship	**Sailor**
Submarine	**Chief**
Aviator	**SONAR**

Match these flag configurations with the words you just spelled above.



BRAVO ZULU!

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History of Phonetic Alphabet and Signal Flags

A phonetic alphabet is a list of words used to identify letters in a message transmitted by radio or telephone. Spoken words from an approved list are substituted for letters. For example, the word "Navy" would be "November Alfa Victor Yankee" when spelled in the phonetic alphabet. This practice helps to prevent confusion between similar sounding letters, such as "m" and "n", and to clarify communications that may be garbled during transmission.

An early version of the phonetic alphabet appears in the 1913 edition of *The Bluejackets' Manual*. Found in the Signals section, it was paired with the Alphabetical Code Flags defined in the International Code. Both the meanings of the flags (the letter which they represent) and their names (which make up the phonetic alphabet) were selected by international agreement. Later editions included the Morse code signal as well.

Flags with special meanings in Navy signaling were given extra names. These five flags are called governing flags. They convey specific information about how to interpret a signal based on their position among the other flags raised. The governing flags are called Afirm (Affirmative), Int (Interrogatory), Negat (Negative), Option (Optional), Prep (Preparatory). The Navy often substituted these special names for the standard word listed in the phonetic alphabet. During World War II, when it was necessary for the Navy to communicate with the Army or Allied forces, signalmen were directed to use the standard words, given in parentheses.

The words chosen to represent some letters have changed since the phonetic alphabet was introduced. When these changes occur, they are made by international agreement. The current phonetic alphabet was adopted in 1957.

Letter	1913	1927	1938	World War II	1957-Present	Signal Flag
A	Able	Affirmative	Afirm	Afirm (Able)	Alfa	
B	Boy	Baker	Baker	Baker	Bravo	
C	Cast	Cast	Cast	Charlie	Charlie	
D	Dog	Dog	Dog	Dog	Delta	
E	Easy	Easy	Easy	Easy	Echo	
F	Fox	Fox	Fox	Fox	Foxtrot	
G	George	George	George	George	Golf	
H	Have	Hypo	Hypo	How	Hotel	

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

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