

Phonetic Alphabet History by VEOMWD

The NATO phonetic alphabet, (more formally the international radiotelephony spelling alphabet), is the most widely used spelling alphabet. The alphabet's common name arose because it appears in Allied Tactical Publication ATP-1, Volume II: *Allied Maritime Signal and Manoeuvring Book* used - by all allied navies in NATO, which adopted a modified form of the International Code of Signals.

Because the latter allows messages to be spelled via flags or Morse code, it naturally called the code words used to spell out messages by voice its "phonetic alphabet". The name NATO phonetic alphabet became widespread because the signals used to facilitate the naval communications and tactics of NATO have become global.

The first internationally recognized alphabet was adopted by the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) in 1927. The experience gained with that alphabet resulted in several changes being made in 1932. The resulting alphabet was adopted by the International Commission for Air Navigation, and was used in civil aviation until World War II. It continued to be used by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) until 1965. It used mostly place names and started: *Amsterdam, Baltimore, Casablanca...*

During World War II (in 1941), the requirements of joint Allied operations led to the development of the Joint Army and Navy Phonetic Alphabet. The one that most military oldies remember to this day: *Able Baker Charlie Dog Easy Fox George How Item Jig King Love Mike Nan Oboe Peter Queen Roger Sugar Tare Uncle Victor William X-ray Yoke Zebra.*

After the war, with many aircraft and ground personnel drawn from the allied armed forces, "Able Baker" continued to be used in civil aviation. But many sounds were unique to English. The International Air Transport Association (IATA), recognizing the need for a single universal alphabet, presented a draft alphabet to the ICAO in 1947 which had sounds common to English, "French, and Spanish. After further study and modification by each approving body, the -revised alphabet was implemented November 1 , 1951.

Immediately, problems were found-with this list. To identify the deficiencies of the new alphabet, testing was conducted among speakers from 31 nations, principally by the governments of the United Kingdom and the United States. After much study, only five words representing the letters C, M, N, U, and X were replaced. The final version, the one we use today, was implemented by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) on March 1, 1956; and was adopted shortly thereafter by the ITU.

Because the ITU governs all international radio communications, it was also used by all radio operators, whether military, civilian, or amateur. It was finally adopted by the IMO in 1965.