

TYLER COUNTY AMATEUR RADIO ASSOCIATION

HISTORY OF THE PHONETIC ALPHABET

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After the introduction of voice radio communications, it was realized that it was easy for letters to be mistaken. However it was only with the advent of international radio communications in the mid 1920s that the need for the international organization cooperation was recognized. As a result of this, the International Telecommunications Union, ITU, took on many responsibilities from allocating call sign blocks for the different countries to gaining agreements on codes and other standards.

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As a result of this work the ITU assembled and adopted the first internationally recognized alphabet in 1927. This was widely used in early radio or “Wireless” communications of the day. As a result of its use, a number of weaknesses were discovered and in 1932 it was revised.

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1932 ITU Phonetic Alphabet:

Amsterdam; Baltimore; Casablanca; Denmark;
Edison; Florida; Gallipoli; Havana; Italia; Jerusalem;
Kilogramme; Liverpool; Madagascar; New_York;
Oslo; Paris; Quebec; Roma; Santiago; Tripoli;
Upsala; Valencia; Washington; Xanthippe;
Yokohama; Zurich

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During the Second World War, another phonetic alphabet was devised to be used by the allies. It was introduced around 1941 and was called the Joint Army / Navy Phonetic Alphabet. This one was used by many, especially ex-servicemen after the war.

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Joint Army/Navy Phonetic Alphabet:

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

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After the war there were several phonetic alphabets in use for radio communication and the then International Air Transport Association recognized the need for a single one to be used. As a result they presented a draft version of one to be used in 1947. This was modified after some use and adopted in 1951. This proved to be unsatisfactory in use and was modified again in 1956, and soon after this it was adopted by the ITU.

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Since then the ITU Phonetic Alphabet has been in widespread use for all forms of radio communication from shipping to aeronautical and all forms of professional radio communications to radio hams share.