



Turner's Topics

Time Zones

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Time is one of the most critical factors for communicators—especially for those who work in communications centers. Aside from those everyday need-to-know aspects of time, such as when the lunch hour begins, comm center personnel really need to know when everybody else's lunch hour begins, too.

If you ever get a look at those mysterious (mysterious because their "alphabet soup" language can be unique) messages that are transmitted through comm centers worldwide, you'll understand the need to know the time in other parts of the world. Those "teletypewritten exchange" messages, called TWXs commercially, are identified in two fashions. In addition to a "subject," a TWX will have what is called a "date and time group" identification line.

The date and time are always indicated in "Zulu" time, which is the phonetic name for Greenwich Civil Time, or time zone "Z."

So, regardless of where your comm center is, you really need to know what time it is in Greenwich to transmit a message to another installation or activity. Fortunately, the Army has simplified the math involved in this conversion with a world time zone chart. Using this chart, all you have to do is add (or subtract) the number of hours difference between your time and the Zulu time zone; then add (or subtract) that number to your exact time (expressed in day, hours and minutes) to arrive at the exact Zulu time.

While this may seem rather complicated, still another aid makes the computation simple. A time conversion table does the work for you. The conversion table is a chart of figures organized according to the lettered time zones on the world time zone chart. Zones listed as A through M, which are east of the Greenwich zone, are subtracted to determine Zulu (0). Those zones marked Y through N entail adding hours to determine Zulu; Y through N zones are west of Greenwich.

To give you an example of computing the time, suppose you are in Washington, DC, and want to transmit a message. The time is 2:15 pm (1415 hours) on 15 January 1979. According to the world time zone chart, Washington, DC, is in time zone R (plus 5 hours). Now, find 1400 hours in the R zone of the time conversion table. Simply slide your finger over to the hour on the same line in the Zulu column: the time in Greenwich is 1900 hours. Thus, the date and time group of your TWX is 151915Z Jan 79—the 15th day, at 7:15 pm Zulu time, during January.

Using the map and time conversion table is a fool-proof time saver. The only time you'll have problems with computations is when daylight savings time is used because not everyone uses this contrivance. But, since we have several months to go before we need to be concerned about these computations, we may discuss them some "other time."

