

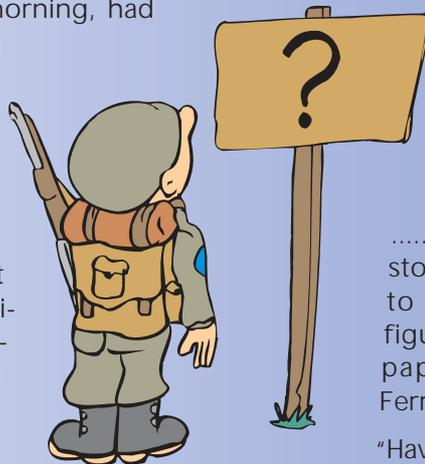
Aphorisms and Aberrations

by the Shepherd



The results of too many abbreviations

Colonel (UK A) Terry Lane-Adams looked gloomily down at the document on his desk; he was having a bad day. This state of affairs was unusual; Colonel Lane-Adams normally thoroughly enjoyed his job and had been much looking forward to today's meeting with the Standardisation Committee. He was due to lobby for the term 'STANAG' to be replaced by the initialisation 'SNA' (although a six letter acronym was acceptable, 'STANAG' fell uncomfortably between two stools as neither a true abbreviation nor initialism). The day had not started well, however. In fact, if he were to be honest with himself, the rot had started to set in at the cocktail party the evening before. The spilling of his glass of excellent 1989 Alto Adige Pinot Nero over the Admiral, resulting from the expansive gesture he used to emphasise his point, had been accidental and very unfortunate. The resultant frostiness from the Ambassador's wife, unduly concerned about her white shag pile rug, combined with the rather unpleasant interview with the MIL REP earlier this morning, had set the tone for the day. Who knows what on earth possessed the Admiral to take issue with his Branch's straw-man on the correct designation for 'the quondam Ruritanian Colony of Argos' (at 6 pages, a concise precis of the considerable difficulties over the issue, he thought). Now, the document lying on his desk was asking him to consider the prospect of his Section being merged with the other two Sections in the Branch in order to be transferred under the control of the NATO Doctrine Branch;



surely a fate worse than being stuck on a spit, basted in Grappa and then slowly roasted.

Known as TLA to his friends (of which there were but a 'select few', mainly centred around the small group of enthusiasts who gathered at Bruxelles Nord station every weekend to record the serial numbers of the Type 212, Series 62 diesel locomotives passing through on their way to the Channel ports), Terry Lane-Adams was Chief of the MAI (Mnemonic, Acronym and Initialism) Section within NATO HQ. He had, he liked to think, helped to create the Section whilst in his original post as SO1 Organisation P&P Div. At the weekly NATO - Future Reforms Committee (FRC) meeting (known to the Brussels cognoscenti as the Wheel Re-invention Committee), he had had a long involved discussion with the Chairman and ACOS P&P Div, General (GE F) Kurt Schmähshal, about the subtle difference between abbreviations, acronyms and initialism. The lecture (for that, indeed, is what it was) had extended well into the lunch hour(s). Being a German officer, extremely well educated in the mysteries of English grammar, the General had appeared, in TLA's view, to be fascinated; an impression he continued to hold despite the subsequent protestations and, to be quite frank, open insults from the remainder of the Committee. TLA prided himself that it was as a direct result of his intervention that the General had formed the 'NATO Military Nomenclature' Branch of 3 Sections: the MAI Sect, a Military Terminology Section (known colloquially as the Buzz-Phrase Bazaar) and a Documents Consistency Section, whose main role seemed to be allocating, memorising, and announcing at every possible opportunity, the alphanumeric designation of NATO publications and their subject, without necessarily feeling the obligation to understand the subject matter contained therein. Coincidentally, TLA found that, somehow, all his military friends had also managed to be posted into this newly established Branch.

As already indicated, TLA was not at his best. The paper on the impending amalgamation of his Branch was still hanging over him like a Damoclesian sword. In common with many NATO documents, the more he read, the more he knew the more he knew, the less he understood. Just as he was about to put finger to keyboard to comment, an immense figure strode into his Office waving the paper over his head like a demented Ferrari Tifoso at the Monza Grand Prix:

"Have you visualised this concentration of



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asymmetric folderol?" bellowed Colonel (NO A) Alf Trargs-Taktik, the Branch Head of the Military Terminology Section. Colonel Trargs-Taktik, a Viking of a man, always spoke in this manner, even when sober. It was impressive to many, but understood by less.

"I was just going through it when you arrived," replied TLA. "The ramifications are appalling. NMD (NATO Military Doctrine Branch) are so dogmatic; the way they do business just doesn't suit our MO."

"I concur," said Alf " Their manoeuvrist approach to the principles and procedures of staff work attrits my sense of humour; they take mission command to untold extremes. The tempo of this offensive doesn't permit us to focus our strengths in a combined counter of unified purpose against their centre of gravity. The synergy between General Schmäshal and ACOS NMD is an opposition Force Multiplier that we must robustly reduce if we are to reach culmination"

"Ah, actually, you don't have to reduce a Force Multiplier" ventured TLA "you just apply a factor of less than 1, d'you see? The Roman punishment of Decimation, for example, was a Force Multiplier by a factor of exactly 0.9."

His reward for this supportive attempt was a very old-fashioned look from Alf.

"Well what are we going to do about it, old bean?" continued TLA, in a conciliatory tone "We will have to throw some kind of delaying manoeuvre."

"DELAY!" bellowed Alf "DELAY! My dear TLA, I do wish you would be more precise in your use of military terminology; we need to attack! Attack hard; attack now and attack with panache!" and, at that, he stormed out, muttering darkly that he was 'off to locate the Head of NMN Branch to analyse the decisive points that arose from this issue'.



Slightly mollified, TLA settled himself once more to consider the problem facing his Section. He really did not wish to find himself working for the boss of the NMD Branch. He had nothing personal against the ACOS, but there had been that one, unfortunate, difficulty shortly after his arrival in Brussels

where, slightly disoriented in the maze of corridors, he had wandered into the General's Outer Office mistaking it for the stationery supplies office. There he had innocently requested a rubber from the ACOS's PA and asked if he could 'bum a fag off her'. The resultant squeals of outrage, uttered as they were in a piercing Texan accent, alerted TLA to the pitfalls of language usage in a NATO environment, even between native English speakers; the fall-out still brought back shivers of embarrassment.



Just then, sounds of exultation emanating from the Chief's office interrupted his thoughts. The unmistakable roars from Alf were intermingled with the more modulated accent of the Italian Branch Chief. TLA hurried to join them in order to ascertain what was going on.

"We're saved," shouted Alf, crushing TLA in a Nordic embrace and forgetting, for once, to speak in riddles, "NATO has come up with a new concept that requires tonnes of new techno-speak. It incorporates new abbreviations, acronyms and loads of new NATO documents for the Documents Consistency lot to give titles & alphanumeric designations to!"

"But best of all," continued the Branch Chief, "there is no chance that DIMS will send us to the Doctrine Division now. This new concept is a catalyst for transformation and encourages us to think outside the box, to push the envelope, to set the bar high and not to be too dogmatic; there is no way that we could operate with those narrow-minded NATO Doctrine tyrants now! It's the new NATO Response Force and it's our saviour!"

