

# Boatswain's Mates:

By BMCS (SW/AW) Danny Tidwell,  
Naval Safety Center

The Navy uses many one-flag signals. Small vessels often do not maintain a constant signal watch in port and frequently rely on the petty officer of the watch to recognize some of these signals or at least find a signalman to interpret them. Of course, all boatswain's mates should at least know the signal flags, and their meanings, that follow:

**Alfa.** This is a square, swallow-tailed flag and is half white and half blue, with the swal-

low-tailed half being blue. Alfa indicates divers or underwater demolition personnel are in the water. If a numerical group follows the flag, the numbers indicate in hundreds of yards the radius within which personnel are working. The Alfa flag and the Bravo flag are the only two Navy signal flags having a swallow tail.

**India.** This is a square yellow flag with a black ball in its center. When flown in port and at the dip, India on an approaching ship indicates

U.S. Navy Signal Flags				
Flag	Name	Phonetic Pronunciation	Navy Meaning	International Meaning
	Alfa	AL-fah	I have a diver down; keep well clear at slow speed.	
	Bravo	BRAH-sok	I am taking in, discharging, or carrying dangerous cargo.	
	Charlie	CHAR-lee	"Yes" or "affirmative".	
	Delta	DELL-suh	I am maneuvering with difficulty; keep clear.	
	Echo	ECK-oh	I am directing my course to starboard.	
	Foxtrot	FOKS-trot	I am disabled; communicate with me. On aircraft carriers: Flight Operations underway	
	Golf	GOLF	I require a pilot.	
	Hotel	hoh-TELL	I have a pilot on board.	
	India	IN-dee-ah	Coming alongside.	I am directing course to port.
	Juliett	JEW-lee-ett	I am on fire and have dangerous cargo; keep clear.	
	Kilo	KEY-loh	I wish to communicate with you.	
	Lima	LEE-mah	You should stop your vessel immediately.	
	Mike	MIKE	My vessel is stopped; making no way.	
	November	no-YEM-bar	No or negative.	
	Oscar	OSS-aur	Man overboard.	
	Papa	pah-PAH	All personnel return to ship; proceed to sea (Inport).	
	Quebec	kay-BECK	Boat recall; all boats return to ship.	Ship meets head on; request clearance in port.

# Know Your Flags

that ship is preparing to come alongside. The flag hauled close-up indicates the approaching ship is ready to come alongside. India is always displayed on the side where the upcoming alongside evolution is to take place. The receiving ship also flies India on the appropriate side at the dip, to indicate preparations for taking the approaching ship alongside. The receiving ship then closes up India to show that it is ready to receive the approaching vessel. When the first line is secured between the

two ships, India is hauled down on both ships for underway replenishment. At sea, the Romeo flag is used in place of India. The Romeo flag is red with a yellow cross.

**Juliett.** When another ship displays your ship's call sign followed by Juliett, that indicates the other ship has a semaphore message for your ship. The hoist remains flying during transmission and is hauled down when the message has been sent.

**Mike.** The ship having medical guard duty flies the Mike flag, which is a square blue flag having a white X through it.

**Oscar.** The Oscar flag indicates man-overboard and always is ready to break. It is a two-color flag with the right half being red and the left half being yellow. The color division is diagonal from the upper left corner to the lower right corner.

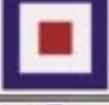
**Papa.** A square blue flag with a white square in its center, the Papa flag is a recall flag and is hoisted to indicate that all ship's company ashore should immediately return to the ship.

**Quebec.** A square, solid yellow flag, Quebec is the ship's small boat recall. When flying alone, it orders all boats to return immediately. If Quebec is flown with one or more numeral pennants, it is recalling the boat(s) having the applicable numerals being flown.

**Romeo.** In port, the ship having the ready duty flies Romeo. At sea, ships preparing, and ready, for replenishing fly it. Romeo is hauled down when the first messenger is in hand (alongside method) or when the hose is in hand (astern method).

For more information on signal flag use and configurations, refer to ATP 1, vol. 2. ☺

You can e-mail the author at [dtidwell@safetycenter.navy.mil](mailto:dtidwell@safetycenter.navy.mil).

	Romeo	ROH-mc-oh	Preparing to replenish (At sea). Ready duty ship (Inport).	None.
	Sierra	see-AIR-ah	Conducting flag hoist drill.	Moving astern.
	Tango	TANG-go	Do not pass ahead of me.	Keep clear; engaged in trawling.
	Uniform	YOU-nee-form	You are running into danger.	
	Victor	VIK-tuh	I require assistance.	
	Whiskey	WISS-lee	I require medical assistance.	
	Xray	ECKS-ray	Stop carrying out your intentions and watch for my signals.	
	Yankee	YANG-lee	Ship has visual communications duty.	I am dragging anchor.
	Zulu	ZOO-loo	I require a tug.	