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(b) (3) -P.L. 86-36

History Rocks

Posted by [redacted] @ 2009-06-18 15:05:26

Tags: history today

(U) Whence The F?

(U) Today's "History Today" article, with its reticence to expand upon (indeed even simply to expand) the acronyms SNAFU and FUBAR, reminded me of an NSA anecdote regarding a similar, much more recent popular abbreviation: RTFM.

(U) Now, I'm aware that many people will quickly refer you to the expansion "Read The Fine Manual." To me, however, this expansion is much less convincing and feels much less like the genuine article than an arguably much more offensive phrase is. And so, I recall with good humor that one ENLIGHTEN enthusiast (who, alas, passed away in the early years of the new millennium) would take great offense if anybody replied to his programming questions with "RTFM".

(U) I found myself torn between agreeing and disagreeing with the level of pique he expressed about the abbreviation. Although I also don't think the F-bomb has any place in official/professional government communications, I didn't entirely agree with him because, like SNAFU and FUBAR, it gained popularity in usage among people who would not even dream of spelling out the F-bomb in a piece of Agency correspondence... or perhaps in any electronic medium. The abbreviations and acronyms mentioned here serve as a kind of a level of euphemism. And in the case of SNAFU and FUBAR, like RTFM, there are more innocuous, though less genuine, ways to expand the letters. I originally learned them as "fouled up". And so I was happy to use them in conversation, and subsequently reluctant to stop using them even after I learned that their original expansion may have been a bit dirtier.

(U) And I know that when there's no popular "safer" expansion of an abbreviation, it usually won't become nearly as popular on NSAnet. I sincerely doubt we'll see "STFU" or "WTF" in wide usage, even when discussions or Reply-To-All storms get out of hand. (And to the more sensitive out there, I apologize for using them as illustrations even now.)

Cross-posted to (Leave a comment)

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