

Words

by Craig Shockley

In my younger days I spent time in the military. Every military organization, like any other organization or profession, has, over the span of its existence developed a vocabulary unique to its own special environment. This is true regardless of whether the military person is a spear wielding caveman, a chariot driving Egyptian, an elephant riding Carthaginian, or a longbow man from Wales. It applies equally to the sailor furling the top mast sail of a Spanish galleon, the spike helmeted Wehrmacht soldaten of the Kaiser, or the modern pilot of a supersonic fighter.

These are some of the unique words I remember from my own service.

DEROS: As in, “When you gonna deros outta here?” The word is, in fact, an acronym for “Date Eligible to Return from Over Seas.

PCS: As in, “I'm PCSing to WSMR. Can't get much closer to home than that.” Another acronym. It stands for “Permanent Change of Station.” And WSMR? (It's pronounced “wizmer.”) It means “White Sands Missile Range” which is located in Southern New Mexico.

Snafu: As in, “If the Lieutenant hadn't been visually inspecting his colon, we wouldn't be in the middle of this snafu.” Still another acronym – the military loves them don't they? It means, Situation Normal, All Fouled Up. Except the “f” doesn't really stand for “fouled.”

Gorf: As in, “He's a real gorf!” Not an acronym at all. It's a term of derision originating from the sound of someone biting a gas bubble in the bathtub. As far as I know, F.A.R.T. Is not an acronym either. The challenge would be to find words meaning “to expel really unpleasant smelling gas from the lower alimentary canal” which would match the acronym. Anyone up to the challenge?

No, no! Not the “expelling” part. The “building an acronym” part.

If you fiddle around with computers or the software which makes the computer into a useful tool, communications device, or just a fun toy, you've discovered a need to learn new and sometimes almost incomprehensible terminology. Of course, to truly be the master of all these special words, you need the brain of Einstein, the memory of an elephant, the tongue of a super linguist, and an ability to keep abreast of all the latest technical advances. I confess. I have none of these traits.

Nevertheless, I have picked up a little computer terminology over the years. Here are a few esoteric terms that stand out most impressively for me.

GUI: Okay, even I can recognize an acronym when I see one, even though it's pronounced like a sticky substance you wouldn't want to put your fingers into - unless it's icing on a cake. But why "Graphical User Interface?" Why not something like "CIA" (Click Initiated Action)? With those initials a dev could say something like, "I developed that version of the CIA." Beautiful women would immediately surround him like he was 007 James Bond. Wow! (Sorry ladies, I know it sounds sexist. Sadly, the only famous female spy I could think of offhand was Mata Hari - and she was executed in 1917. She was surely not a stellar example of secret agent accomplishment, though she frequently "entertained" a bevy of admirers. It is said even the firing squad wept.)

Mount: As in, "Mount up men! We can't let that stagecoach robber get away!" No, wait. It should be, "The scraggly donkey mounted the horse breeders prize Arabian mare." No, no. That's not it either. Just wait! I'll have it in a second. Ah, yes. It should be, "Mount: As in, 'Make the operating system aware of a new data storage device.'"

How did the "mount" terminology come to be used anyway? Whenever I hear the term I immediately think of the first two usages before finally realizing we are talking about computer hardware. . . .

Anyway, more words.

Hard Drive: As in, "I don't want a hard drive. I want an easy drive. Eight hours behind the wheel is enough." Uh, uh? How about, "Driven hard and put away wet?" Nope. That's more horse talk. Now I have it! It's, "Got to buy me a new hard drive. The new OS doesn't recognize the old drive. Whatever is to become of all my stored data?"

And what's an OS anyway? Part of a military acronym meaning "Over Seas?"

Finally. . . .

North Bridge and South Bridge: These are two terms I truly do not understand. Oh, I know they refer to parts of the motherboard (mobo?), but what if the computer was turned 90 degrees? Would they then be East Bridge and West Bridge? Why not London Bridges, "a" and "b," or Brooklyn Bridges "1" and "2?" Who makes up these terms anyway?

Just for information's sake, the original London Bridge now graces Lake Havasu City, Arizona, USA. The Brooklyn bridge of New York City has not moved at all - tidbits of information that have absolutely nothing to do with mobos, or scraggly donkeys either.

I'm sure each of you can easily add to this short list of terminology. But please! Do not send me your list of computer or software acronyms and names. I'm already befuddled way beyond a reasonable person's threshold of disorientation.

