

Federal Aviation Agency

ADVISORY CIRCULAR

AC NO: AC 170-3B

AIR NAVIGATION FACILITIES

EFFECTIVE :

11/8/65

SUBJECT : DISTANCE MEASURING EQUIPMENT (DME)

1. **PURPOSE.** This circular presents information concerning Distance Measuring Equipment (DME) and some of its uses to pilots who may be unfamiliar with this advanced but easily utilized navigational aid.
2. **CANCELLATION.** Advisory Circular No. AC 170-3A, dated June 17, 1965, is cancelled.
3. **BACKGROUND.** As of October 20, 1965, 424 VORTACs and 6 VOR/DMEs were in commission. Present plans call for a total of 751 VORTAC installations. Many pilots are familiar with the use of VORTAC facilities in providing course information to aircraft equipped with VOR receivers. However, less familiar is the range (distance) data available from all VORTAC stations by use of airborne DME. Federal Aviation Regulations require the installation of DME in U.S. registered civil aircraft using VOR navigation at 24,000 feet mean sea level or above when operating within the 48 contiguous states or in the District of Columbia. DME is also presently required, regardless of the altitude flown, on all air carrier and commercial operator turbojet, turboprop, and pressurized reciprocating engine airplanes. It will also be required on other large air carrier airplanes by February 28, 1966. Although this regulation does not affect the great majority of general aviation aircraft, many aircraft owners have enjoyed the benefits afforded by DME and have installed this aid on a voluntary basis.
4. **EXPLANATION.** The Agency has received many inquiries relative to operational use of DME. It is our hope that the information contained in attachment 1 will answer some of your questions and stimulate further interest in this important navigational aid.


George S. Moore
Director

Flight Standards Service

DISTANCE MEASURING EQUIPMENT

1. WHAT IS DME? DME is an electronic system which measures distance from an aircraft to a station on the ground. Basically, it operates by transmitting a signal to the ground station which, in turn, replies. The time taken to exchange these signals is measured accurately, and from this and the known speed of the radio wave, the distance is automatically computed. This is then indicated to the pilot in nautical miles on a circular dial-needle pointer instrument or an odometer presentation.
2. DOES DME MEASURE GROUND DISTANCE? DME measures the distance directly from the airplane to the ground DME facility. This measurement is commonly referred to as slant range distance. The difference between a measured distance on the surface and the DME slant range distance is smallest at low altitude and long range. It increases as the range decreases and altitude increases. The difference is greatest when an aircraft is directly over the ground facility, at which time the DME receiver actually will display altitude in nautical miles above the station. Generally the difference between slant range and surface distance is negligible if the aircraft is one mile or more from the navaid (ground station) for each 1,000 feet of altitude above the elevation of the navaid.
3. HOW ACCURATE IS DME? Lightweight equipment designed for the general aviation market is reported by the manufacturers to be accurate within plus or minus one-half mile or three percent (3%) of the distance, whichever is greater.
4. WHAT IS VORTAC? VORTAC consists of a VOR plus a TACAN facility. It provides course and distance information to military aircraft equipped with TACAN receivers and the same information to civil aircraft using VOR and DME receivers.
5. WHAT IS VOR/DME? VOR/DME is a VOR station with the distance measuring equipment of TACAN installed with it. It provides distance and course information to a VOR/DME equipped aircraft and only distance information to aircraft equipped with a TACAN receiver.
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6. WHAT IS ILS/DME? ILS/DME is an ILS and associated DME. The addition of DME to an ILS provides distance information to aircraft equipped to receive ILS and DME. It thus furnishes continuous three dimensional position information to aircraft equipped to receive ILS localizer and glide slope and DME information.
* *
7. DOES DME OPERATE ON THE SAME FREQUENCY AS VOR? No. DME operates on the ultrahigh frequencies of 960 to 1215 megacycles. VOR stations utilize very high frequency transmitters operating in the 108 to 118 megacycle band.

8. IS A DME RECEIVER TUNED TO THE VOR FREQUENCY OR THE DME FREQUENCY? VOR and DME transmitting frequencies are paired; that is, one DME channel is assigned to a particular VOR frequency. Some aircraft installations provide automatic tuning of the DME receiver through the VOR tuning selector. In most DME receivers on which separate tuning is provided, tuning to the published VOR frequency with the DME tuning selector will place the DME receiver on the proper paired UHF channel. *
- *9. CAN A DME EQUIPPED CIVIL AIRCRAFT OBTAIN INFORMATION FROM A MILITARY TACAN STATION? Yes. Distance information may be obtained from a TACAN facility by tuning the DME receiver to the paired VOR frequency shown in the Airman's Information Manual for the particular TACAN channel. TACAN channels 59 through 70 are reserved for military tactical use and civil DME receivers are not designed to receive these channels. When using DME receivers which are automatically tuned by the VOR selector, any VOR course indications should be ignored while tuned to the TACAN channel (Ref. par. 14). *
- *10. WHAT IS THE EFFECTIVE RANGE OF DME? Effective range of DME depends greatly on altitude. The higher the altitude, the greater the effective range. DME receiving equipment is considered reliable up to 100 miles from the transmitting station. The more sophisticated receiving equipment provides reliable information over greater distances. The term "Operational Service Volume" has been used to identify the normal use areas in which the VOR, VORTAC and TACAN signal coverage is considered adequate, and frequency protection is assured. The operational service volume is based on the class of facility providing the service and is published in the Air Navigation Radio Aids Section of the Airman's Information Manual. Use of the facility beyond the operational service volume might result in undependable or inadequate indications unless specifically authorized as an approved procedure on an aeronautical chart. *
11. WHAT IS THE INDICATION IF A DME RECEIVER IS TUNED TO A STATION TOO DISTANT FOR ADEQUATE SIGNALS? The DME receiver will go into "search operation"; that is, the receiver will scan the DME spectrum looking for a signal on the channel to which it is tuned. This searching will evidence itself in a traveling of the indicator from minimum to maximum range and back again. "Search operation" occurs when the receiver is first turned on, when the receiver's tuning is altered (as in changing from one station to another) or when insufficient signal strength is available. It then becomes a warning that something is amiss and that the DME indication is unreliable.
12. WHAT IS MEANT BY "MEMORY OPERATION"? Memory operation is the ability of the DME receiver to maintain its distance indication for short periods of time when the signal is blanked out momentarily. If the

signal interruption is short enough, the pilot will be unaware that such an outage has occurred. However, if the signal disappears for any considerable length of time, the DME receiver will go into search operation.

13. HOW IS DME IDENTIFIED? Like the VOR ground station, the DME station transmits an identification signal. It is transmitted twice a minute and timed for proper inclusion with the VOR identification. The DME audible signal is recognizably higher in pitch than that of the VOR. Sequence of a VORTAC identification signal with coded identification only is:

* VOR (code), VOR (code), VOR (code), VOR (code), TACAN (DME) (code)*

Sequence of a VORTAC identification with code and voice identification is:

* VOR (code), VOR (voice), VOR (code), TACAN (DME) (code) *

- *14. NON-COLLOCATED VOR AND TACAN FACILITIES. Some military VOR and TACAN facilities serving the same airport are not collocated but have been assigned paired frequencies under an earlier frequency assignment plan. In some cases the facilities are geographically separated by a significant distance. At those military locations with paired frequencies, course and distance information will be received from separate locations when tuned to the VOR facility using a VOR receiver with automatic DME tuning. While the distance indications will be correct, they will not indicate the location of the VOR station. Thus, when a VOR receiver is tuned to other than a VORTAC, VOR/DME or ILS/DME facility and a distance indication is received, that distance should not be used for other than information purposes and then only after verification of the DME facility identification and location. Pairing of frequencies at non-collocated military facilities has been discontinued and non-paired frequencies will be assigned under the present frequency plan. *

15. HOW MAY NON-COLLOCATED FACILITIES BE IDENTIFIED? The facilities are shown as different separated facilities on charts and are not identified as VORTACs. Their identification signals are not timed in accordance with procedures detailed in par. 13 above and will intermix rather than appear in proper sequence.

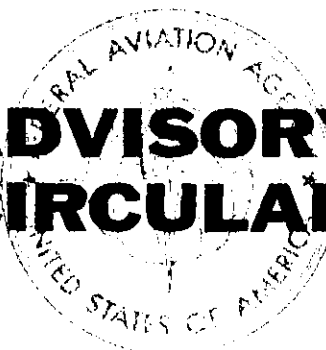
16. WHAT ADVANTAGES ARE OFFERED TO THE PILOT BY DME? The pilot of an aircraft equipped with a properly operating DME receiver has several advantages, including:

a. He has a running fix along a line of position at all times.

- b. His position over the ground is presented to him more accurately than is the case with dual VOR and/or ADF installations, so long as he is in range of a VOR/DME station.
- c. He can quickly and accurately estimate his ground speed because he knows his position at all times while using DME. Some available equipment presents direct read-out ground speed and "time to station" information.
- d. The more readily available position reports gained through pilot use of DME may permit reduction of inflight delays not avoidable when time separation is employed by Air Traffic Control. Also, DME can be very useful in assisting a controller to radar identify a flight without requiring identifying turns.
- e. Many instrument approach procedures either permit or require use of DME. These procedures sometimes eliminate the need for procedure turns and/or other time-consuming maneuvers. Also, lower approach minimums are sometimes possible because of the added position accuracy afforded by DME.
- f. Separation between flights with DME and operating under Instrument Flight Rules (IFR) can be safely reduced from that required by non-radar time separation standards.

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