The below material is taken from OPNAV Instruction 3710.7U of 1 March 2004. NATOPS General Flight and Operating Instructions, which contains what used to be called Flight Purpose Codes. It is some detail about the second character and third character of the flight purpose codes we used back in the day. Still pretty much the same as when we used them. Adds some granularity to the brief short-hand pages in the front of our pilot log books which we used for guidance for pilot and aircrew logs.

Our flight purpose codes were three characters, a number, a letter and a number.

What this calls GPC is the middle letter and what this calls SPC is the number after it. The first letter meaning has changed since our day. For us, the first letter denoted meterological conditions.
1 = day flight in good visibility conditions
2 = day flight in instrument conditions
3 = night flight in good visibility conditions
4 = night flight in instrument conditions

Be careful relating this document to our old codes but may be helpful in breaking the code.

D.5 GENERAL/SPECIFIC PURPOSE OF FLIGHT CODE COMBINATIONS A THROUGH I (TRAINING FLIGHTS)

(These don't apply to us operationally, but are included to be complete and help for tours after or before HA(L)-3)

D.5.1 GPCs

GPCs for training flights (A through I) are used as follows:

a. Use code A if the flight is for training, exercises, or simulated operations conducted by a fleet/FMF/air reserve squadron or unit (nontraining command) to which the pilot is attached when such flight maintains or advances the ability of the squadron or unit to perform the mission for which organized. May be used for flights by training command personnel that do not properly fall under codes C through I.

b. Use code B if flight is for syllabus training of a designated naval aviator undergoing formal instructor training (IUT).

c. Use code C within air commands for pilots assigned thereto when locally imposed requirements for a particular kind of flying are necessary to prepare for satisfactory performance within the command.

Note

When a pilot flies with a squadron or other unit whose primary mission is carried out by the flight of aircraft, he/she may consider himself/herself an integral part of that unit. If he/she makes a flight that maintains or advances the ability or readiness of the unit to perform its assigned mission, the purpose of the flight is unit training (code A), and the effect on individual proficiency is irrelevant.

d. Use code D, E, F, or G for flights by Navy and Marine Corps aircrew attached to units of CNATRA (excluding reserves) and FRSs as required or provided by training command training syllabus.

(1) Use code D if flight is for syllabus training of a SNA undergoing formal training to become a designated naval aviator.

(2) Use code E if flight is for syllabus training of a designated naval aviator undergoing formal training.

(3) Use code F if flight is for syllabus training of a designated naval aviator when the purpose of the flight does not support a formal

training syllabus (i.e., standardization evaluations, instrument checks, or attaining minimum annual flying requirements).

(4) Use code G if flight is for special training (including crew training) for completion of a nonpilot training syllabus (i.e., NFO, AI, midshipmen, student FS training).

e. Use code H or I for training of nonnaval personnel.

(1) Use code H if flight is for the purpose of training, familiarization, or proficiency of personnel of other services of the United States (i.e., Air Force, Army, Coast Guard).

(2) Use code I if flight is for the purpose of training, familiarization, or proficiency of personnel of foreign countries.

D.5.2 SPCs

SPCs to be used with GPCs A through I are listed below. Codes A through I must always be followed by one of the number codes listed below, selecting the code denoting the primary type of training (if syllabus flight, the most advanced requirement being met; if nonsyllabus flight, that on which most effort was spent). In any case, the character following codes A through I shall always refer to the following list:

1 — Fundamentals — Familiarization, aerobatics, formation, cross-country, navigation, etc.
2 — Instrument — General instrument or all-weather, when principal objective of flight.
3 — Field carrier landing practice.
4 — Carrier qualification.
5 — Transition Jet, VP, VR, helicopter, etc.
6 — Air combat intercept, fighter escort, air-to-air gunnery, etc.
7 — Attack — Surface targets; bomb, rocket, torpedo, etc.; non-USW.
8 — Antisubmarine — Patrol, search, escort, attack, minelaying, etc.
9 — Special equipment — AEW, ECM, AMCM, photo, etc.
10 — Unsatisfactory syllabus.

D.6 GENERAL/SPECIFIC PURPOSE OF FLIGHT CODE COMBINATIONS J THROUGH R (SERVICE FLIGHTS)

(For codes J through O, they don't usually apply. Back in our day, if we flew what is now called a post-maintenance check flight (we called them "test flights," we used 1L2. Not reflected below today)

D.6.1 SPCs To Be Used With GPCs J and K for Service Flights

J1 — Those ferry flights funded from the fleet ferry fund managed by the respective TYCOM. Reporting custodians shall ascertain from the controlling custodian under what circumstances the flight categories apply.
J2 — Those ferry flights funded from other sources (i.e., unit operating budgets, allotments, etc.).
K1 — Those functional checkflights funded from the fleet ferry fund managed by the respective TYCOM. Reporting custodians shall ascertain from the controlling custodian under what circumstances the flight categories apply.
K2 — Those functional checkflights funded from other sources (i.e., unit operating budgets, allotments, etc.).
K3 — Functional checkflight observer.
K4 — Bogey in support of other aircraft.
K5 — Bogey in support of ground units.
K6 — Bogey in support of ship operations.
K7 — Flying qualities or performance evaluation of aircraft.
K8 - Accelerated service test or propulsion system evaluation.
K9 — Navigation, weapons, or electronic warfare evaluation.
K0 — Carrier suitability or dynamic interface evaluation.

D.6.2 GPCs L, M, N, and O for Service Flights

a. Code L (Experimental/Evaluation). Experimental, developmental, or evaluation flights of aircraft, its equipment, or an individual (i.e., NATOPS check).
L1 — Operational test and evaluation (OT&E).
L2 — Operational readiness inspection (ORI).
L3 — Instrument check.
L4 — NATOPS check.
L5 — Instructor standardization, test pilot training, or qualification evaluation.
L6 — Special weapons evaluation.
L7 — Ordnance separation, conventional, or nuclear weapon evaluation.
L8 — Drone support or target towing.
L9 — Aircraft or survival system evaluation.
L0 — Project support or other.

b. Code M (Logistics Support). Use code M if flight is for the purpose of logistics support as follows:
M1 — MAG/CVW commitment: A logistics flight in support of the MAG/CVW.
M2 — MAW/functional/typewing commitment: A logistics flight scheduled for support of the wing.
M3 — NAS/MCAS commitment: A logistics flight in support of the air station.
M4 — FMF/CINC commitment: Flights flown in support of FMF/CINC units.
M5 — CMC/CNO commitment: Flights flown in support of CMC/CNO schools or units.
M6 — TYCOM/division commitment: Flights flown in support of the TYCOM or of a Marine division.

c. Code N (Maintenance). Use code N to document aborts or cancellations for maintenance reasons.
N1 — Engine or fuel system.
N2 — Hydraulics, flight controls, or airframe.
N3 — Avionics, communication.
N4 — Avionics, NAVAID.
N5 — Avionics, radar/systems.
N6 — Avionics, electronics/instruments.
N7 — Ordnance system.
N8 — Wingman's aircraft down.
N9 — Support equipment.
N0 — Safety of flight (initiated by higher authority, usually by message).

d. Code O (Operations). Use code O to document aborts or cancellations initiated by operations.
O1 — Weather.
O2 — Mission canceled by higher authority.
O3 — Mission canceled by supported or requesting unit.
O4 — Targets or range not available.
O5 — Required airfield services or navigational facilities not available (tacan, carrier, mirror, etc.).
O6 — Controlled airspace not available.
O7 — Required crewman incapacitated/unavailable.
O8 — Aircraft accident.
O9 — Mission canceled by projects.

D.6.3 SPCs Used With GPC P

(Some of us might have used a P letter for a SAR or a MEDEVAC)

SPCs to be used with GPC P for all search and/or rescue (includes any flight, scheduled or unscheduled, in support of a search and/or rescue effort) or MEDEVAC (includes any flight, scheduled or unscheduled, providing evacuation or other transport of hospitalized and/or medically stabilized personnel) flights are listed as follows:

P1 — Search and/or rescue flight conducted over water in support of military
        personnel.
P2 — Search and/or rescue flight conducted over land in support of military
        personnel.
P3 — Search and/or rescue flight conducted over water in support of non- DoD
        personnel.
P4 — Search and/or rescue flight conducted over land in support of non-DoD
        personnel.
P5 — MEDEVAC flown in support of military personnel.
P6 — MEDEVAC flown in support of non-DoD personnel.
P7 — Search and/or rescue flight into, out of, or over an area where enemy
        fire is received or can reasonably be expected.
P8 — Search and/or rescue flight into, out of, or over an area over water
        where enemy fire is received or can reasonably be expected.
P9 — Search and/or rescue flight into, out of, or over an area over land
        where enemy fire is received or can reasonably be expected.
P0 — Search and/or rescue training.

D.6.4 SPCs Used With GPC Q

**(I have one of these a 1Q5 on my HA(L)-3 logs, but generally not
used by us in my time.)**

SPCs to be used with GPC Q for miscellaneous nontraining service flights are
listed as follows:
Q1 — Aerological (including combat weather reconnaissance).
Q2 — Noncombat patrol or search (other than survivor search, rescue,
        weather).
Q3 — Noncombat photography or radar mapping.
Q4 — Air shows and demonstrations not classified as tactical exercises.
Q5 — Noncombat, nontraining flights not elsewhere classified.
Q6 — Noncombat, nontraining air refueling flights.
Q7 — AEW flights (carrier-based or land-based) in support of either fleet
        tactical exercises or fleet operations.
Q8 — Pathfinder flights.
Q9 — Drug interdiction flights.

D.6.5 SPCs Used With GPC R

**(We all probably had a lot of 1R9 flights, which were the daily
duty SEALORDS flights. 1R9 no longer exists and has been replaced
today with 1R6, Our 1R6 was a MEDEVAC.)**

SPCs to be used with GPC R for transport/troop support are as follows:

a. Logistics transport flights include transportation of military or
civilian personnel (other than at points of contact with enemy or in training
exercises) as incident to change in location of duty or civil employment or
to the transfer of entire units as well as transport of cargo or mail
(including guard mail with or without couriers) for other than troop support
purposes.
If the flight is required for any of the foregoing uses, it is a logistics
transport flight even if it also served an administrative transport purpose.
R1 — Regularly scheduled flight for the purpose of transporting cargo,
        personnel (except hospitalized patients), or mail, as set forth above,
        whether anything was transported or not.
R2 — Special flight, not regularly scheduled, to transport cargo, personnel
        (except hospitalized patients), or mail, as set forth above.

b. Administrative transport flights include transportation of military or

civilian personnel for inspection, conference, instruction, or other official business involving no PCS, and for other authorized purposes of a similar nature, whether or not under travel or temporary duty orders.
R3 — Special flight, not regularly scheduled, to provide administrative transport for the pilot or other persons aboard, and that would not be made were it not for the administrative purpose alone.

c. Troop support flights include transportation of troops and other personnel (including battle casualties) to or from points of contact with enemy as well as rescue of personnel or transport of liaison personnel to or from engaged units. Transport of cargo under equivalent circumstances also falls in this specific purpose category.
R4 — Troop lift into, out of, or over an area where enemy fire is received or can reasonably be expected.
R5 — Liaison flight into, out of, or over an area where enemy fire is received or can reasonably be expected.
R6 — Logistics flight into, out of, or over an area where enemy fire is received or can reasonably be expected.

D.7 GENERAL/SPECIFIC PURPOSE OF FLIGHT CODE COMBINATIONS S THROUGH Z (COMBAT FLIGHTS)

a. GPCs S through Z will be used with FPCs 3 through 7 (noted in paragraph D.4). When in combat status, FPC 6 will be used with GPCs S through Z and will be the only TMR code entered for the flight.

b. SPCs to be used with GPC S for attacks on ground or surface targets designated by air support control:
S1 — Targets assigned before takeoff.
S2 — Targets assigned after takeoff.
S3 — Provision of illumination for attack of targets.
S9 — Escort or cover for above (not assigned to attack).

(We did a lot of 1T2)

c. SPCs to be used with GPC T for attacks on ground or surface targets (excluding submarine and aircraft) not designated by air support control:
T1 — Targets assigned before takeoff.
T2 — Targets of opportunity: armed reconnaissance.
T3 — Provision of illumination for attack of targets.
T4 — Flak suppression.
T5 — Surface-to-air missile suppression.
T6 — Minelaying (all types).
T7 — Aerial refueling tanker supporting combat operations.
T8 — ECM support for attack operations against ground or surface targets.
T9 — Escort to cover for above (VF or VFA not assigned to attack).

d. SPCs to be used with GPC U for anti-air warfare offensive missions (primary objective aircraft; any other target secondary):
U1 — Fighter sweeps, intruder missions, night airfield heckling.
U2 — Combat air patrol over enemy airfields or other targets.
U3 — Offensive diversion and deception missions (other than attack sweep or intruder).
U4 — ECM support for attack operations against aircraft targets.
U5 — AMCM mine neutralization/mine sweep.
U8 — Escort or cover of Air Force bombers.
U9 — Escort or cover of transport aircraft.

(We did some 1V3 which were recon ahead of convoys up the river to Phnom Penh, Cambodia.)

e. SPCs to be used with GPC V for reconnaissance missions (except armed reconnaissance and USW search):
V1 — Photographic reconnaissance.

V2 — Radar and ECM reconnaissance, radar mapping, etc.
V3 — Gunfire spotting, air support controller, and other visual
    reconnaissance of enemy areas. Exclude weather (Q1) and survivor search
    (P).
V4 — AMCM mine search/mine hunting.
V9 — Escort or cover for reconnaissance aircraft.

f. SPCs to be used with GPC W for air defense of own air base (carrier
force or land base) from which aircraft departs:
W1 — AEW or airborne combat information center (CIC) and its escort or cover.
W2 — Combat air patrol, local or advanced.
W7 — Intercept (scramble).

(We did a lot of scrambles #X7)

g. SPCs to be used with GPC X for air defense of other forces or bases:
X1 —CIC and its escort or cover.
X2 AEW or airborne — Special combat air patrol to protect radar picket or
    aircraft.
X7 — Intercept (scramble).

(Later, many of us did a lot of Y and Z missions)

h. SPCs to be used with GPC Y for offensive ASW missions:
Y1 — Routine sector or area search.
Y2 — Barrier patrol.
Y3 — Offensive search.
Y4 — Holddown of located submarine.
Y5 — Attack on located submarine.
Y6 — Locate and attack submarine.
Y9 — Attack submarine facilities (including operational bases, shipyard, or
    other logistical facilities, etc.).

i. SPCs to be used with GPC Z for defensive ASW missions:
Z1 — Protection of own force underway (by aircraft based on ships of same
    force).
Z2 — Escort of vessels not in own force (by ship-based or land-based
    aircraft).
Z4 — Defensive patrol of harbor or other limited area.

Note

Generally, the distinction between offensive
ASW (Y codes) and defensive ASW (Z codes) is
the primary mission of the force involved. If
it is not primarily an ASW force, the ASW
conducted to protect itself from attack by
submarine is defensive ASW. But if it is
primarily an ASW force (primary mission is
ASW), all the ASW it conducts is offensive,
including ASW conducted to protect itself.