Lab-3 Assignment

Objective

TCP (Transmission Control Protocol) is one of the main protocols of the Internet Model (TCP/IP protocol stack). We covered TCP in chapter 5. Please review section 5.2.1 before doing this lab.

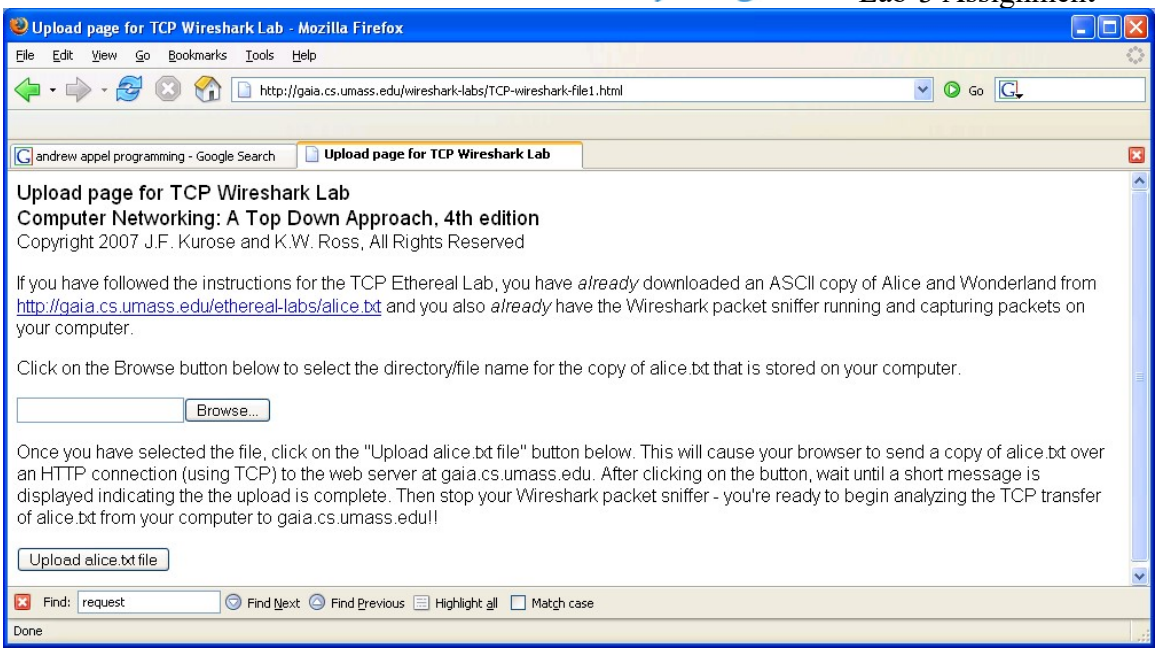
In this lab, we'll investigate the behavior of the celebrated TCP protocol in detail. We'll do so by analyzing a trace of the TCP segments sent and received in transferring a 150KB file (containing the text of Lewis Carrol's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*) from your computer to a remote server.

1. Capturing a bulk TCP transfer from your computer to a remote server

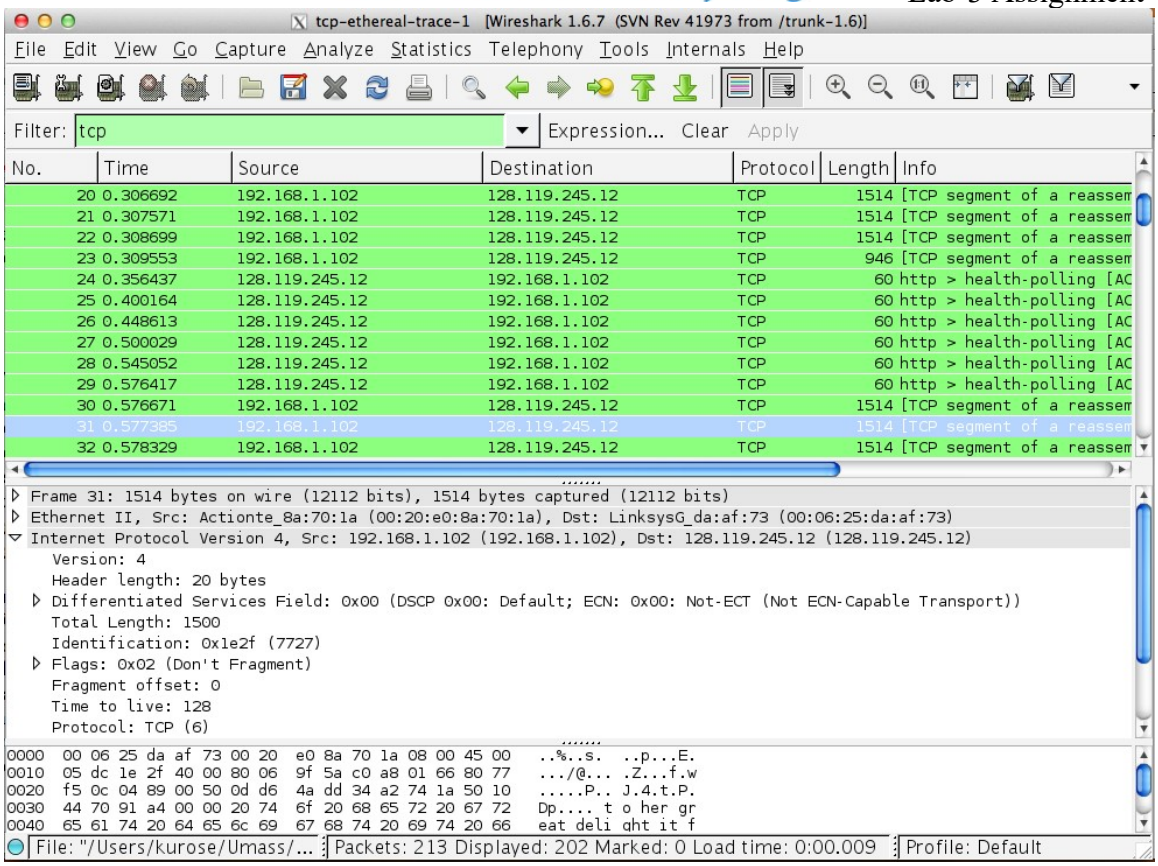
Before beginning our exploration of TCP, we'll need to use Wireshark to obtain a packet trace of the TCP transfer of a file from your computer to a remote server. You'll do so by accessing a Web page that will allow you to enter the name of a file stored on your computer (which contains the ASCII text of *Alice in Wonderland*), and then transfer the file to a Web server using the HTTP POST method (used when a user fills a form e.g when a user provides search word to a search engine). We're using the POST method rather than the GET method as we'd like to transfer a large amount of data *from* your computer to another computer. Of course, we'll be running Wireshark during this time to obtain the trace of the TCP segments sent and received from your computer.

Do the following:

- Start up your web browser. Go the http://gaia.cs.umass.edu/wireshark-labs/alice.txt and retrieve an ASCII copy of *Alice in Wonderland.* Store this file somewhere on your computer.
- Next go to http://gaia.cs.umass.edu/wireshark-labs/TCP-wireshark-file1.html.
- You should see a screen that looks like:



- Use the *Browse* button in this form to enter the name of the file (full path name) on your computer containing *Alice in Wonderland* (or do so manually). Don't yet press the "*Upload alice.txt file*" button.
- Now start up Wireshark and begin packet capture *(Capture->Start)* and then press *OK* on the Wireshark Packet Capture Options screen (we'll not need to select any options here).
- Returning to your browser, press the "*Upload alice.txt file*" button to upload the file to the gaia.cs.umass.edu server. Once the file has been uploaded, a short congratulations message will be displayed in your browser window.
- Stop Wireshark packet capture. Your Wireshark window should look similar to the window shown below.



If you are unable to run Wireshark on a live network connection, you can download a packet trace file that was captured while following the steps above on one of the author's computers[1]. You may well find it valuable to download this trace even if you've captured your own trace and use it, as well as your own trace, when you explore the questions below.

2. A first look at the captured trace

Before analyzing the behavior of the TCP connection in detail, let's take a high level view of the trace.

- First, filter the packets displayed in the Wireshark window by entering "tcp" (lowercase, no quotes, and don't forget to press return after entering!) into the display filter specification window towards the top of the Wireshark window.

[1] Download the zip file http://gaia.cs.umass.edu/wireshark-labs/wireshark-traces.zip and extract the file tcp-ethereal-trace-1. The traces in this zip file were collected by Wireshark running on one of the author's computers, while performing the steps indicated in the Wireshark lab. Once you have downloaded the trace, you can load it into Wireshark and view the trace using the *File* pull down menu, choosing *Open*, and then selecting the tcp-ethereal-trace-1 trace file.

What you should see is series of TCP and HTTP messages between your computer and gaia.cs.umass.edu. You should see the initial three-way handshake containing a SYN message. You should see an HTTP POST message. Depending on the version of Wireshark you are using, you might see a series of "HTTP Continuation" messages being sent from your computer to gaia.cs.umass.edu. Recall from our discussion in the earlier HTTP Wireshark lab, that is no such thing as an HTTP Continuation message – this is Wireshark's way of indicating that there are multiple TCP segments being used to carry a single HTTP message. In more recent versions of Wireshark, you'll see "[TCP segment of a reassembled PDU]" in the Info column of the Wireshark display to indicate that this TCP segment contained data that belonged to an upper layer protocol message (in our case here, HTTP). You should also see TCP ACK segments being returned from gaia.cs.umass.edu to your computer.

Answer the following questions, by opening the Wireshark captured packet file *tcp-ethereal-trace-1* in http://gaia.cs.umass.edu/wireshark-labs/wireshark-traces.zip (that is download the trace and open that trace in Wireshark; see footnote 2). Whenever possible, when answering a question you should hand in a printout of the packet(s) within the trace that you used to answer the question asked. Annotate the printout[2] to explain your answer.

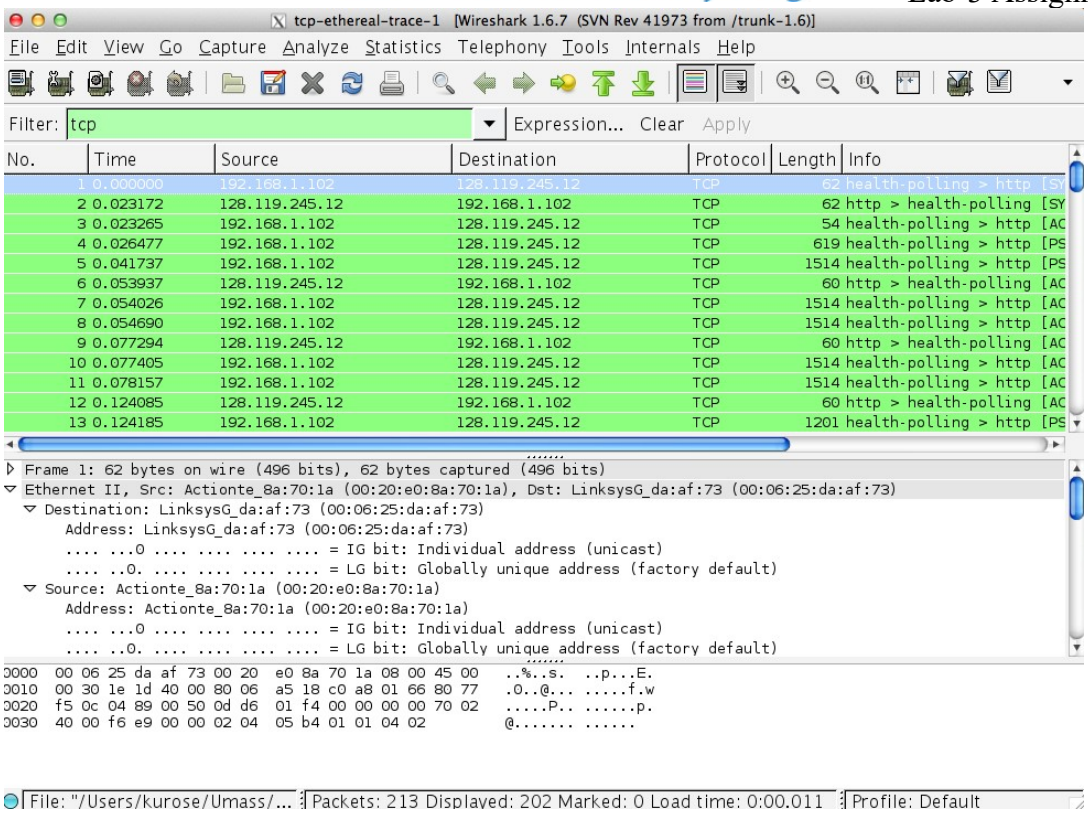
1. What is the IP address and TCP port number used by the client computer (source) that is transferring the file to gaia.cs.umass.edu? To answer this question, it's probably easiest to select an HTTP message and explore the details of the TCP packet used to carry this HTTP message, using the "details of the selected packet header window".
2. What is the IP address of gaia.cs.umass.edu? On what port number is it sending and receiving TCP segments for this connection?

If you have been able to create your own trace, answer the following question:

3. What is the IP address and TCP port number used by your client computer (source) to transfer the file to gaia.cs.umass.edu?

Since this lab is about TCP rather than HTTP, let's change Wireshark's "listing of captured packets" window so that it shows information about the TCP segments containing the HTTP messages, rather than about the HTTP messages. To have Wireshark do this, select *Analyze->Enabled Protocols*. Then uncheck the HTTP box and select *OK*. You should now see a Wireshark window that looks like:

[2] What do we mean by "annotate"? Highlight your answer and add some text (preferably with a colored pen) noting what you found in what you 've highlight.



This is what we're looking for - a series of TCP segments sent between your computer and gaia.cs.umass.edu. We will use the packet trace that you have captured (and/or the packet trace *tcp-ethereal-trace-1* in http://gaia.cs.umass.edu/wireshark-labs/wireshark-traces.zip; see earlier footnote) to study TCP behavior in the rest of this lab.

3. TCP Basics

Answer the following questions for the TCP segments:

4. What is the sequence number of the TCP SYN segment that is used to initiate the TCP connection between the client computer and gaia.cs.umass.edu? What is it in the segment that identifies the segment as a SYN segment?
5. What is the sequence number of the SYNACK segment sent by gaia.cs.umass.edu to the client computer in reply to the SYN? What is the value of the Acknowledgement field in the SYNACK segment? How did gaia.cs.umass.edu determine that value? What is it in the segment that identifies the segment as a SYNACK segment?

6. What is the sequence number of the TCP segment containing the HTTP POST command? Note that in order to find the POST command, you'll need to dig into the packet content field at the bottom of the Wireshark window, looking for a segment with a "POST" within its DATA field.
7. Consider the TCP segment containing the HTTP POST as the first segment in the TCP connection. What are the sequence numbers of the first six segments in the TCP connection (including the segment containing the HTTP POST)? At what time was each segment sent? When was the ACK for each segment received?
8. What is the length of each of the first six TCP segments?[3]

[3] The TCP segments in the tcp-ethereal-trace-1 trace file are all less that 1460 bytes. This is because the computer on which the trace was gathered has an Ethernet card that limits the length of the maximum IP packet to 1500 bytes (40 bytes of TCP/IP header data and 1460 bytes of TCP payload). This 1500 byte value is the standard maximum length allowed by Ethernet. If your trace indicates a TCP length greater than 1500 bytes, and your computer is using an Ethernet connection, then Wireshark is reporting the wrong TCP segment length; it will likely also show only one large TCP segment rather than multiple smaller segments. Your computer is indeed probably sending multiple smaller segments, as indicated by the ACKs it receives. This inconsistency in reported segment lengths is due to the interaction between the Ethernet driver and the Wireshark software. We recommend that if you have this inconsistency, that you perform this lab using the provided trace file.