

UNIFORM SIGNAL CODE

by HAROLD DREW

Some time ago the writer was asked by our President, Harner Selvidge, to form a subcommittee (S.S.A. Flight Operations Subcommittee) for the purpose of submitting recommendations on operational procedures to the Safety Committee. It was suggested that the question of signals ought to be the first item to receive attention. For a number of reasons, we were unable to comply with this request but did undertake to give some thought to this question of signals.

The purpose of this article is to place before the whole gliding fraternity certain proposals which are among those which we are thinking of submitting to the Safety Committee. Our further purpose is to invite comment, criticism, and maybe support, so that we may know that the proposals which we will later submit to the Safety Committee are not too repugnant to our fellow pilots.

We believe that it is important to agree on a uniform code of signals which can apply throughout the United States, so that, wherever a pilot is flying, he is confronted only by signals which are in use in his own club and with which he is entirely familiar.

We believe that the code should be as simple as possible and that it should contain no signals whose usefulness is confined to highly improbable contingencies. Such signals are usually only half remembered and are likely to add to the confusion in emergencies.

We believe that the recommended

signals should be quite unmistakable and that they should not require the use of elaborate, expensive and unreliable equipment.

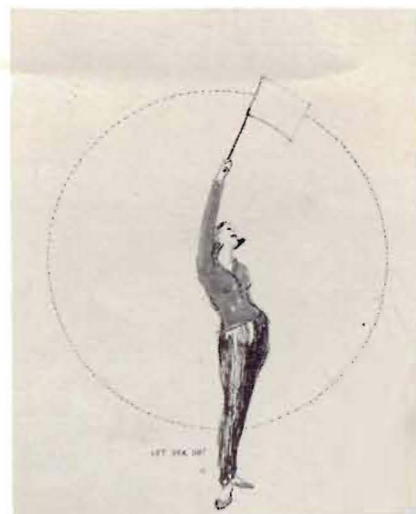
Many of the signals which we use are concerned with launching. Now there are three important launching methods practiced in the United States, aero tow, winch and auto tow. It seems clear to us that it would be advantageous to use identical signals applicable to all three methods and we believe this to be quite practicable. If we devise our signals so that they are easily understood by a winch operator half a mile away, it is certain that they can also be understood by a tow pilot only 200 feet away.

Unfortunately wing leveling signals at present in common use for aero tow launches are only too easily misread by a winch driver half a mile away. For this reason, such signals have been abandoned by at least one club in this country. This has been done not on a whim but because of a number of near accidents and because of a not unnatural instinct for self preservation.

Suppose we are sitting on the winch and gossiping idly with a bystander. Someone points out that there is a glider at the other end which has its wings level. Somewhat guilt stricken, we start up the engine. Noticing a wing tip dipping, we take up slack and the dipping ceases. O.K. let's go. Now, what is really happening at the other end? The boys are retrieving a ship with the wings level. The wing tip man is not holding the wing too steadily — perhaps the ground is icy or he is dodging puddles. Another ship is preparing for a launch and someone is just hooking on the cable. Suddenly the cable tightens and the glider is snatched off maybe with somebody's fingers caught. Maybe somebody's head is dealt a sharp blow by a D tube.

It is to avoid this kind of situation that flag signals for winch launching operations are preferred abroad.

We are well aware that clubs which use aero tow exclusively are likely to resist turning over to flag signals. Resistance to change and even the chore of making a flag and keeping



it available are factors to be reckoned with. A well-known sage, one Hooker, uttered a simple truth way back in the 15th Century. He said, "Change is not made without inconvenience, even from worse to better."

We are quite sure that many clubs will continue to use "wing tip" signals for many years to come. (These are set out in the recently issued section of the S.S.A. handbook on aero tow.) However, we do suggest that at least the more enterprising and progressive clubs might give the flag signals a whirl, particularly when both aero and winch tow is used.

With this explanation off our chests, we will now set out our proposals.

Proposed Official Signals

Signal A - Ready to launch, take up slack.

Wings are held level and flag is given pendulum motion by wing tip man or starter.

Signal B - Kill the take-off.

Wing returned to ground and flag dropped. (Sailplane pilot will release immediately.)

Signal C - Slack Gone - let her go.

Flag rotated through 360° continuously.

Notes:

1. The above signals cover both aero tow and winch launches.
2. A relay signaler is sometimes advantageous for both aero tow launches and winch launches.
3. A freely rotating grip fitted to the staff prevents the flag from wrapping round it.

It would help us assess the consensus of the opinions of pilots if they would complete the following questionnaire and mail the answers along with their comments.

