

Flag Procedure



Item Code FS322086 May 2001 Edition no 1

0845 300 1818

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

Most, if not all, Beaver Scout Colonies, Cub Scout Packs, Scout Troops and Venture Scout Units possess Colours. Both the Union Flag, and the Sectional Colour are used frequently at church services, Scouts' Own Services, Investitures, parades and in camp. While current practice varies considerably throughout the country, the following points are set for the guidance of Leaders.

FLAG PROCEDURE

In the Scout Movement, the following procedure should be adopted when the Union Flag is hoisted, broken or lowered:

Hoisting:

When the Union Flag is to be hoisted or broken all present should be brought into a horseshoe or other formation round the flag, except in very large camps. The order should be given to come to the alert. The Scout carrying out the actual hoisting or breaking proceeds with the matter. The Scout who has performed the ceremony takes two paces back and then salutes, and the others present follow. When the Scout has resumed his/her place in the horseshoe, the Scout Leader gives the order for the Scouts to be at ease.

Lowering:

When the flag is lowered, the following procedure should be adopted. The attention of all those present should be called by some suitable sign - in camp the blowing of a horn, the ringing of a bell, or something of that nature. All Scouts, whatever they may be doing, cease operations and come to the 'Alert' facing the flag. The flag is then lowered and when this is done the signal previously given is repeated so that everyone may carry on with their normal duties. It is the custom in the Scout Movement that no one salutes when the flag is lowered. Those responsible for lowering the flag should take the utmost care to see that no part of it comes into contact with the ground.

In Great Britain, the Union Flag takes precedence over all other flags and in camp is flown above all other flags, banners etc. But if British Scouts camping in a foreign country wish to fly that country's flag as a compliment, this should be flown on a separate mast at the same height as the Union Flag.

FLAG CARRYING - ON THE MARCH

Slope: Sloped over right shoulder, flag gathered in right hand, left arm swinging free.

Carry - gathered in: Flag gathered in, pole vertical, butt in carrier, held in right hand, hand level with mouth, elbow square and level with hand, left arm swinging free.

Carry - flying free: Position of hand as in Carry, but flag not gathered in.

Use: The Slope is the normal method. The Carry - gathered in is used when marching past or when specially ordered. The Carry - flying free is the salute at the actual moment of passing a saluting point. Flags are never lowered on the march.

Note: The Carry position is tiring and should be used sparingly.

AT THE HALT

Order: Flag held vertically at the right side, butt on ground, gathered in right hand.

Carry - gathered in: As on the march but left arm to side.

Carry - flying free: As on the march but left arm to side.

Lower: Point of pole on ground, pole under right arm and flag free, except when ground is wet or muddy.

Use: The Order is the normal position. The Carry - gathered in or Carry - flying free is used on occasions such as an inspection, when ordered. The flag is lowered as a salute in accordance with Policy, Organisation and Rules. When parading with other bodies, common sense should be used in departing from these rules. For example, on Remembrance Day in many places, the British Legion lower flags during the sounding of the Last Post. Scouts should conform. Similarly, in International Parades it is normal custom to follow the practice of the host nation.

FURTHER USES OF FLAGS

The Union Flag takes precedence over all others. When flags are carried into a place of worship, they are usually carried to the faith community leader who receives them from the bearers, either standing or kneeling, according to custom. If handed over kneeling, it is usual to bend the right knee. This allows the

'carrier' or 'bucket' to be in the right position. Each place of worship usually has its own procedures regarding the positioning of the Colours after they have been received by the faith community leader. Flags, however, should not be placed on the altar or table (as per the custom in that faith community) in normal circumstances. The exception is when a new Colour is to be dedicated or blessed.

A general rule underlies all that has been written above, namely that when Colours are paraded in the open, in a place of worship, or in a Scout room or hall, all should be done decently and in order so that due respect is given to the symbols of our country and the Movement. For this reason it is normal procedure for Scouts to stand at the Alert as a token of respect when flags are carried in and out of a place of worship, or on and off parade.

DEDICATION AND BLESSING OF FLAGS

New Flags

The acquisition of a new flag, whether a Colony, Pack, Troop or Unit or Union Flag, calls for a ceremony of some kind. This may take the form of a simple presentation by the donor, a religious service or part of a religious service. In consultation with the religious leader, it might be more appropriate for the act of dedication and blessing to take place during a regular family service. In any case, and particularly where the Group is sponsored by or attached to a local faith community, Leaders are urged to consult well beforehand with the leader of the religious community concerned and the County Chaplain or religious adviser. In this way, much confusion can be avoided.

There is no set pattern or ceremony which must be followed. As circumstances vary, consultation beforehand is vital so that what is finally agreed is meaningful and clear.

Thought, therefore, should be given to the following points: -

1. Consecration - Scout and Union Flags should not be 'consecrated' because this means 'making holy'; that is, setting a person or a thing apart for the sole service of God. Hence a church is consecrated because it is to be used solely for the purpose of religion and worship.

2. Dedication - this means 'setting apart for a particular purpose' not necessarily religious. An author may dedicate his book to a relative or friend; a church may dedicate a piece of furniture or an organ to God. A gift so dedicated should, therefore, be treated reverently and with respect.

It is, therefore, appropriate in certain circumstances for new Colours to be dedicated within the context of a service, a Scouts' Own Service, in a Scout Headquarters or in camp. It must be remembered, however, that flags so dedicated must be treated thereafter with special care. While all Colours should be treated with due respect, opinions differ regarding

the exact treatment which should be accorded to dedicated flags and how they should be disposed of when their usefulness is at an end.

Scout Headquarters does not lay down any hard and fast rules, other than if flags are dedicated they must be treated with the greatest reverence at all times. For instance, it would not be correct to fly a dedicated Union Flag on a flagstaff in camp, or to move it uncased without an escort. Groups are advised to consider this carefully before undertaking the charge of dedicated flags.

3. Blessing - This is a further method open to Scout Groups depending upon their Sponsoring Authority or their religious allegiance. A service of blessing of Colours in no way restricts their future use and they may be paraded at the Group's discretion. The blessing of a Colour may become a visible sign of our Duty to God. This is equally true, of course, of a dedicated Colour.

There are some who would argue that 'dedicated' is more appropriate in relation to people, and that 'blessing' is better used in relation to things. Both words, in fact, have within them similar or associated implications.

In asking God to bless something we are requesting that it may be put to some good use and that our possession of it may remind us of God. In offering a flag to God, we are making use of symbolism, and its usefulness is to remind us of what it means. The Union Flag is a symbol of our loyalty and service to the Queen, our country, and our fellow citizens. The Scout Flag is a symbol of our togetherness in Scouting and reminds us of the ideals set out in our Promise and Law. When we bring these symbols to God for his blessing we are asking him to accept this loyalty, service and togetherness and to acknowledge that without his blessing we should not be able to keep our Promise and Law.

4. Bound up with any blessings of flags must go a dedication of ourselves:

Planning a ceremony involving the dedication or blessing of flags should be done in consultation with the religious leader conducting the service. He/she will be in a position to help in the selection of suitable readings, prayers and music. It is strongly recommended that everyday language be used so that all young people concerned can understand the meaning and purpose behind the service.

The actual ceremony may take place either during the course of a normal service or it may be held separately. Before the service begins, adequate preparation must be made to see that the flag is placed on a stand or table at an appropriate position in the place of worship. A Colour party consisting of a bearer and two Scouts should be in a convenient position to receive the flag at the appropriate time.

FORMS OF SERVICE

The following are intended as a guide and are not exclusively for the use of Scouts. The wording should be changed according to the occasion.

Alternatives are provided for Scout or Union Flags.

a) The presentation of flags (Introduction for a Scout Flag)

Religious Leaders: Scouts, you have come here to receive the flag of your Troop. This flag is a symbol of the unity of the Troop which is part of the world-wide family, you are bound together by the Scout Promise which shows that you acknowledge God as the ruler of all people and things; that you pledge your service and loyalty to your Queen and Country; that you are always ready to help your neighbours; and that you will strive to keep the Scout Law.

The Scout Flag has a long and honoured tradition and the privilege of carrying it is now entrusted to you and to future generations of Scouts in this Troop. It is fitting, therefore, that you should make your Scout Promise again to show your intention of being worthy of that Trust.

Here follows the Scout Promise.

Alternative introduction for a Scout Flag

Religious Leader: Scouts, you have come together to offer this flag and all that it stands for to God; and to offer ourselves in loyalty and service to Scouting throughout the world. We, therefore, dedicate ourselves anew for God's service and purpose for- all people, and pray that God will keep us true and loyal to him.

Alternative introduction for a Union Flag

Religious Leader: Scouts, you have come here today to receive a new Union Flag. This new Colour is a symbol of our loyalty under God to our Queen and our Country. A great company of people have honoured this flag and it is now being handed to you and to future generations of Scouts in the expectations that you will do the same.

b) Prayers

Suitable prayers follow, such as the following Church of England examples.

Minister: God our Father, we ask your blessing upon those who will follow this Colour now committed to their charge. Make them worthy to be called your sons and daughters and may they always find you the courage and faith to justify this trust; through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Here may follow the Lord's Prayer).

For a Union Flag

Minister: Lord God, we ask your blessing upon our Country and Commonwealth; upon your servant Elizabeth, our gracious Queen and Ruler; and upon all who are set in authority under her. Grant that we and all who honour this flag may live and work for the good of others in glad obedience to the example and

command of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who died in the service of people and who now lives for evermore.

c) A Brief Address - can be given by the Religious Leader, Donor or suitable personality.

d) Dedication or Blessing

The Religious Leader will then proceed to the dedication or blessing of the flag using words such as the following:

"According to the faith we hold, we dedicate this flag, that it may be a sign of our duty to God and to our Troop, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. (The final words expressing the name of the Trinity may be excluded where other faiths are concerned)"

or: "In the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ, we dedicate this flag, that it may be a sign of our duty to God and to our Troop, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. (The final words expressing the name of the Trinity may be excluded where other faiths are concerned)".

or: "In the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ, we dedicate this flag that it may be a symbol of our duty to God and to our Troop in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."

For a Union Flag

Religious Leader: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we dedicate and set apart this Union Flag, that it may be a sign of our duty to our Queen and Country in the sight of God. Amen.

e) Further Prayers

Further prayers may be added here for our Country, for peace, for Scouting, and any others which may be appropriate.

f) Presentation of the flag to the Colony/Pack/Troop/Unit

The Colour party will advance and receive the flag(s) at the hands of the donor or the religious leader, the bearer(s) kneeling on the right knee.

Religious Leader: On behalf of your Colony/Pack/ Troop/Unit accept this flag which has been dedicated to God, remembering the purpose for which it is dedicated, the cause of which it is the symbol and the honour in which it is to be held.

g) The National Anthem (If desired and particularly where a Union Flag is involved)

h) A Prayer of Dismissal

This could be a form of the Benediction, Blessing or The Grace.

i) A Simple Presentation in a Place of Worship

The Colour is brought to the communion rail, or to a central position in the church, by the bearer.

Religious Leader: This Colour is the sign and emblem of our Pack/Troop/Unit. It represents the honour and code of the Pack/Troop/Unit and should always be treated with reverence.

We dedicate it to God who is the Lord of our lives and of this Troop. In the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, I dedicate this Colour that at all times it may be the sign of the..... Colony/Pack/ Troop/Unit and an acknowledgment of the allegiance of its members to God; in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Then the company shall say: Almighty God, we pray that this Colour may always inspire us to be true to our Promise, loyal to our Leaders and obedient to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord. People.

The Colour is then placed near the centre of the worship area. e.g. next to altar, communion table.

At the end of the service the bearer kneels to receive the Colour, and as it is returned the religious leader says: Receive this Colour on behalf of your Pack/ Troop/Unit. Remember that it has been dedicated to the service of God. Let it be respected by you. Let it be a symbol of loyalty to your Pack/Troop/Unit and to your Movement the world over.

j) A Simple Presentation not in a Place of Worship

If a religious service is felt to be inappropriate (e.g. in an Open Group with no specific allegiance), a simple ceremony may be held in the Group Headquarters or in the open air. This does not have to be "non-religious" because it is not being held in a religious building, and any of the forms of words may be used as in the foregoing section.

On the other hand, such a ceremony can be more spontaneous and free. Simplicity and sincerity are the keynote.

The following is suggested as being suitable for the presentation of both the Scout Flag and the Union Flag.

The Troop should be drawn up in horseshoe or open-square formation facing the Scout Leaders and the donor (if present). If the donor is not present, he may be asked to nominate someone to present the flag on his behalf. Or the District Commissioner may be invited in his place.

After a few words of introduction, including thanks to the donor, the Leader brings the Colony/Pack/Troop/Unit to the alert. The Leader may lead the Scouts in the Scout Promise. The Colour party is then called forward and the donor (or his nominee) presents the flag. If the flag being presented is the Union Flag, the National Anthem could be sung.

The Troop stands to the alert as the flag is marched off.

Note: Exact wording has been omitted in order to give the Leader the opportunity of speaking naturally and sincerely in words of their choosing. The ceremony might well be used at a meeting and it may be felt desirable to invite parents and supporters. If further prayers are needed they may be found in Scout prayers.

LAYING UP OF FLAGS

This is a matter for local initiative and consultation with the religious leader. Such a service should be short. The ceremony of laying up of Colours may be preferable during a normal service. Prayer and spoken word very much depend upon local conditions. What has already been said about the dedication or blessing of flags applies also to the laying up of flags. Flags should always be treated with respect because they symbolise important ideals and commitments. That is why we are able to offer them in the first place. It is important that Scouts should understand that this respect derives rather from what they symbolise than for the fact that they are dedicated or blessed.

A final point should be made at the end of this chapter. If any religious service is to be meaningful to those attending, it must be well planned and geared to their understanding, regardless of whether it is a Scouts' Own Service, a full ceremonial service in a place of worship, or a simple service or blessing in the open air. Sincerity, simplicity and reality are all keynotes to success.