

**FM 21-60**

# **Visual Signals**

HEADQUARTERS, DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
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# **VISUAL SIGNALS**

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## PREFACE

Efficient combat operations depend on clear, accurate, and secure communication among ground units, Army aviation, and supporting Air Force elements. Control and coordination are achieved by the most rapid means of communication available between men and units. When electrical means of communication are inadequate, or not available, a station-to-station system of visual communication is an alternate means for transmitting orders, information, or requests for aid and/or support.

Through the use of arm-and-hand signals, flags, pyrotechnics, and other visual aids, messages may be transmitted. Although many of these signals are widely used, incorporated into unit communications-electronics operating instructions and standing operating procedures, Army wide standardization will increase their effectiveness.

The purpose of this manual is to standardize visual signals and to serve as a training reference.

It is a guide. It does not cover all visual signals used in the Army, only those that are commonly used. Signals used with equipment (for example, mortar) or during operations (for example, pathfinder, jumpmaster) are in manuals that relate to such operations.

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The proponent of this publication is HQ TRADOC. Submit changes for improving this publication on DA Form 2028 (Recommended Changes to Publications and Blank Forms) and forward to Commandant, US Army Infantry School, ATTN: ATSH- B-ID, Fort Benning, GA 31905- 5410.

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Unless otherwise stated, whenever the masculine gender is used, both men and women are included.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1-1. General

Visual signals are any means of communication that require sight and can be used to transmit prearranged messages rapidly over short distances. This includes the devices and means used for the recognition and identification of friendly forces.

### 1-2. Types of Visual Signals

The most common types of visual signals are arm-and-hand, flag, pyrotechnic, and ground-to-air signals. However, soldiers are not limited to the types of signals discussed and may use what is available. Chemical light sticks, flashlights, and other items can be used provided their use is standardized within a unit and understood by soldiers and units working in the area. The only limit is the soldier's initiative and imagination.

### 1-3. Limitations

Visual signals have certain limitations

- a. The range and reliability of visual communications are significantly reduced during periods of poor visibility and when terrain restricts observation.
- b. They may be misunderstood.
- c. They are vulnerable to enemy interception and may be used for deception purposes.

## CHAPTER 2

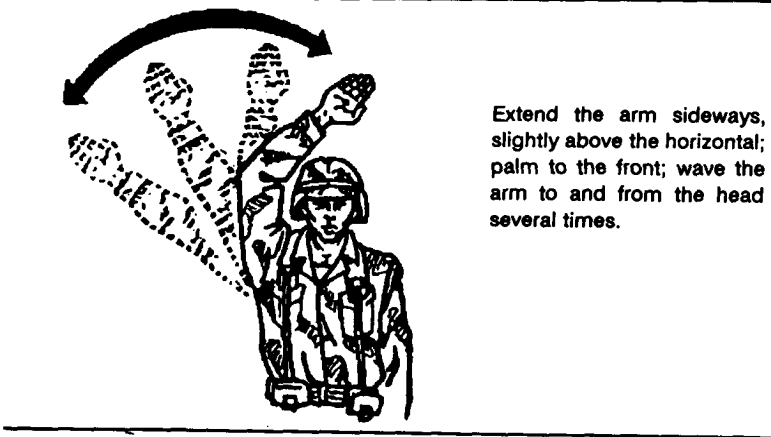
# Arm-and-Hand Signals for Ground Forces

### 2-1. General

Signals illustrated with a single arrowhead indicate that the signal is not continuously repeated; however, it may be repeated at intervals until acknowledged or the desired action is executed. Signals illustrated with double arrowheads are repeated continuously until acknowledged or the desired action is taken. Signals are illustrated as normally seen by the viewer. Some signals are illustrated in oblique, right angle, or overhead views for clarity.

### 2-2. Signals to Control Vehicle Drivers and/or Crews

These are the arm-and-hand and light signals used to guide and direct vehicles. Flashlights are used at night to direct vehicles. Blue filters should be used whenever possible in order to preserve the driver's night vision. Chemical lights can also be used and have less effect on the driver's night vision (Figures 2-1 through 2-22).



Extend the arm sideways, slightly above the horizontal; palm to the front; wave the arm to and from the head several times.

Figure 2-1. ATTENTION.

---

Extend the arm toward the person being signaled; then raise the arm slightly above horizontal, palm outward.



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Figure 2-2. I AM READY, or READY TO MOVE, or ARE YOU READY?

---

Two or three movements upward with the open hand, palm uppermost.



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Figure 2-3. MOUNT

---

Raise both arms and cross wrists above the head, palms to the front.



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Figure 2-4. DISREGARD PREVIOUS COMMAND, or AS YOU WERE.

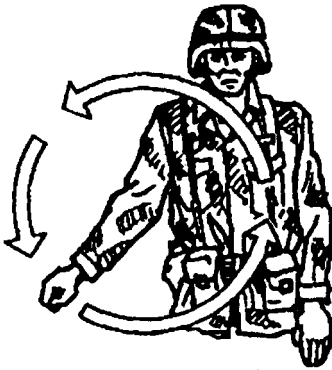


Raise both arms sideward to the horizontal; bend both arms at the elbows and place both hands across the face, palms to front.

---

Figure 2-5. I DO NOT UNDERSTAND.

---



**DAY**

Simulate cranking of engines by moving the arm, with the fist, in a circular motion at waist level.



**NIGHT**

Move a light to describe a horizontal figure 8 in a vertical plane in front of body.

---

Figure 2-6. START ENGINE, or PREPARE TO MOVÉ.

---





### DAY

Raise the hand upward to the full extent of the arm, palm to the front. Hold that position until the signal is understood.



### NIGHT

Move a light horizontally back and forth several times across the path of approaching traffic to stop vehicles. Use the same signal to stop engines.

**NOTE:** For alternate signal to stop vehicles, see Figure 2-17.

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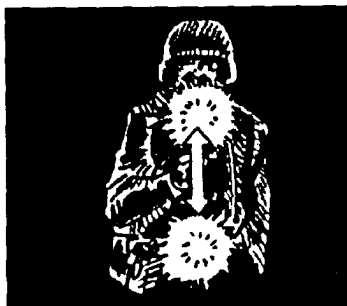
Figure 2-7. HALT, or STOP.

---



### DAY

Raise the fist to shoulder level; thrust the fist upward to the full extent of the arm and back to shoulder level (rapidly) several times.



### NIGHT

Move a light vertically several times in front of the body.

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Figure 2-8. INCREASE SPEED.



Face the direction of movement; hold the arm extended to the rear; swing the arm overhead and forward in the direction of movement (hold at the horizontal), palm down.

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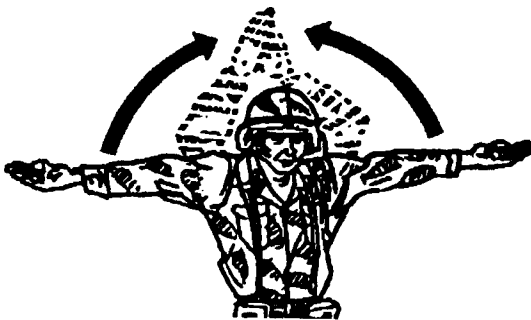
Figure 2-9. ADVANCE or MOVE OUT.



Extend the arms overhead, palms inward, then slowly lower arms to a horizontal position.

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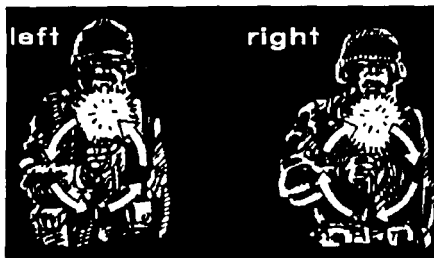
Figure 2-10. OPEN UP.



Extend both arms parallel to the ground, palms uppermost, then move the arms upward and inward toward the head.

---

Figure 2-11. CLOSE UP.



### DAY

Extend the arm horizontally to side, palm outward.

### NIGHT

Rotate a light to describe a circle 12 to 18 inches in diameter in the direction of the turn.

Figure 2-12. RIGHT or LEFT TURN.



### DAY

Extend the arm horizontally sideward, palm to the front; wave the arm slightly downward several times, keeping the arm straight. Do not move arm above horizontal.

### NIGHT

Hold a light at shoulder level; blink it several times toward the vehicle.

Figure 2-13. SLOW DOWN.



Move the hands and forearms backward and forward, palms toward the chest.

---

Figure 2-14. MOVE FORWARD.



**DAY**

Face the vehicle(s) (unit) being signaled, raise the hands to shoulder level, palms to the front. Move the hands forward and backward.



**NIGHT**

Hold a light at shoulder level; blink it several times toward vehicle(s).

---

Figure 2-15. MOVE IN REVERSE (for stationary vehicles).



Face the vehicle(s) being signaled, extend the forearms to the front, palms inward and separated (width of the shoulders). Bring the palms together as the vehicle(s) approaches. The vehicle(s) must stop when the palms come together.

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Figure 2-16. CLOSE DISTANCE BETWEEN VEHICLES AND STOP.

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Extend the arm parallel to ground, hand open, and move the arm across the body, in a throat-cutting action.



Figure 2-17. STOP ENGINES.

---



Extend the arms, make two or three movements up and down, hands open toward ground.

---

Figure 2-18. DISMOUNT.

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Cross the wrists at the throat; point the index finger in direction of steer. Make a fist of the other hand.



Figure 2-19. NEUTRAL STEER (track vehicles).

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Clasp the hands together, palms facing, at chin level.

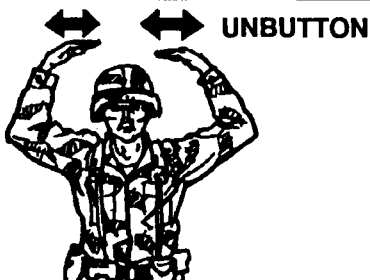
**NOTE:** Alternate signal to stop vehicles, see Figure 2-7.

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Figure 2-20. STOP (alternate signal to stop track vehicle).

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**BUTTON UP**



For **BUTTON UP**, place both hands, one on top of the other, palms down, on top of the helmet. The arms are back and in same plane as the body. For **UNBUTTON**, give **BUTTON UP** signal, then separate the hands, moving them to each side in a slicing motion; repeat.

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Figure 2-21. **BUTTON UP** or **UNBUTTON**



Hold the fist out with thumb up.

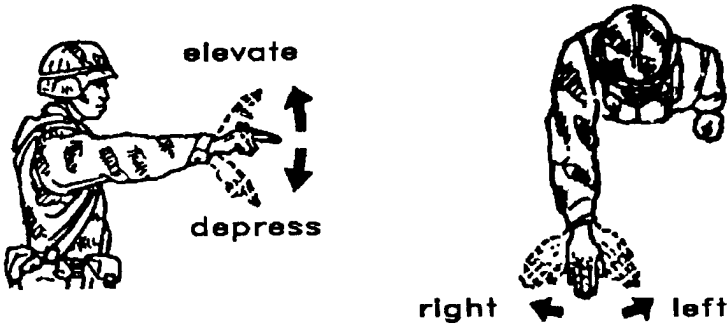
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Figure 2-22. **MESSAGE ACKNOWLEDGED.**

### 2-3. Signals for Crew-Served Weapons

Members of crew-served weapons must communicate. Often, this is in environments where visual signals are the best means of transmitting information (Figures 2-23 through 2-28).

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Extend one arm in the direction of the gunner concerned. Move the hand vigorously in the direction of desired correction (elevate, depress, right, or left). Flex the arm at the wrist and extend one finger for each mil (or for each 100 meters of range) of desired correction. For machine guns, an extended finger indicates 1 mil for tripod guns and 1 meter for bipod guns.

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Figure 2-23. TRAVERSE RIGHT (LEFT), or ELEVATE (DEPRESS).

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Raise the hand (on the side toward the new direction) and move it across the body to the opposite shoulder, palm to the front; then swing the arm in a horizontal arc, extending the arm and hand to point in the new direction. For slight changes in direction, move the hand from the final position to the desired direction of movement.

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Figure 2-24. MOVE OVER, or SHIFT FIRE.

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