

FISTS DOWN UNDER



Newsletter of the Australian / New Zealand chapter of the International Morse Preservation Society

June 2014

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This month:

- Editor's awards
- New member profiles:
Trevor VK5ATQ
Jock VK3BAA
- New tools for old skills
- Survey results
- Beethoven of the
Cootie Key
- Seefunk
- First CW QSO on new
band

Editor's awards



In June each year, we announce the winners of the Editor's Awards for the best two articles published in FISTS Down Under. As I have only recently taken on the role of editor, I asked former editor, Nigel ZL2TX #9040, to decide on the winners for 2013-14.

I'm pleased to announce that first prize has been awarded to **David VK3DBD #3756** for his article 'Hoarders and Collectors' published in February 2014. Second prize goes to **Gilbert ZL3GIL #14102** for his article in the 'Shack Visit' series, published in July 2013.

Congratulations gentlemen!

Chris VK2CTN #9057

Members' news

Chris VK2CTN #9057 - A storm on 27 May brought down a large gum tree branch, which just happened to be the same branch that was supporting one end of the inverted vee antennas. The tree was declared unsafe and has since been removed. A new support is actively being sought!

David VK3DBD #3756 - To escape the cold Victorian winter, David has flown north to spend a few months at his English QTH, where he will be QRV using his G3SCD callsign.

Derek VK3KX #14125 - In response to the closing comments in the April FISTS East Asia newsletter, Derek writes: Many years ago I moved to Japan to further my career in the Japanese electronics giant NEC, in the early days of digital pagers and cellular phones in the back blocks of Yokohama. Needless to say I had to learn Japanese to make any progress there.

I made quite a lot of progress though, finding my wife in Tokyo in 1989 and getting married soon after. On the other hand, living in a company dorm where amateur radio was not permitted, was the beginning of 15 years away from AR. I was away for about 4 years and stayed with NEC for 25 years.

I do find Japanese Morse quite fascinating, mainly because it is unobtainable... Learning another 52 odd characters seems hard, even harder if they are learned in the order intended as they conform to an old Japanese 'alphabet' order called 'i ro ha', if you care about their construction matching the Western alphabet order. For example, our < A B C > is < .- / -... / -.- > Their < I RO HA NI > is < .- / .-.- / -... / -.- > You can see the similarity. Trouble is, everyone post 1950s learned Japanese in A I U E O order which makes the Wabun just random. Oh well, I guess I need to get over it because it will be easier to learn 52 Morse characters than 'unlearn' the order of 52 Japanese Hiragana!

Les VK4BUI #9617 - After nearly 14 years of living in Australia, Les and his XYL are returning to England. Les will be QRV using his M0BUI callsign.

Ralph ZL2AOH #1073 - Pleased to report that the recent hip replacement operation was successful and is being followed up by several weeks of rest and physio.

Dan KB6NU #9342 - Has recently become the editor of the North American KeyNote, and has started working on the next edition. One of the articles will be a memorial for Nancy WZ8C, and he would like to include your remembrances of her. If you have something that you'd like to share, please jot it down and send it to him: keynote@fistsna.org



Les VK4BUI



Dan KB6NU

New members

We warmly welcome three new members: **Trevor Quick VK5ATQ #14176** from Paracombe, **Jock Mackenzie VK3BAA #14177** from Cohuna in northern Victoria, and **Brad Satterly VK4BJS #14178** from Townsville.

*My boyhood
beginnings would be
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the usual crystal-sets
and one valve
regenerative receivers*



Trevor writes: My boyhood beginnings would be common with many, the usual crystal-sets and one valve regenerative receivers. I managed to pass the Limited licence (VK5ZTX) in 1962 but took another ten years to get back into radio after setting up house and starting a family. My Morse was slow and difficult. The method of learning was by gradually increasing speed each time I practised.

In the 70s, the exam at 5 wpm was a problem as I could not determine the difference between a 'dit' and a 'dah'. The tape was simply a 10 wpm recording slowed down to 5 wpm. The dits were too long! Later on I decided to make a determined effort and at last passed in 1990, after I decided to not become a Morse expert before the exam but focused on passing the exam. The idea was that I could improve after I got on air. Now I come across the Koch and similar methods and I wonder why I wasted so much time. My advice is to learn the characters at between 12 to 20 wpm and have greater spacing between characters during the early learning period. If possible, keep up to speed with 10 minutes of practice each day. (If only I could do as I say! Hi)

I do spend more time constructing QRP equipment than operating, and I have spent many years in various office positions with radio clubs, including a term as Director with the Wireless Institute.

Hope to catch you on air one day.



Jock writes: I was first licensed as an amateur in 1980 as VK3VXO and later about 1985 upgraded to a limited callsign VK3KMJ. I was working in the electronics industry at the time (apprentice radio tradesman from 1979 to 1983) later some contract work in the mines in WA, some with Telecom Australia (Telstra). Then ran my own business in general electronic repair (TV and radio mainly) until 1995 when I branched out into I.T. where I still am today.

I was inactive on the amateur radio scene for quite a while, when in 2012 I re-discovered SWL and listened to hams, it rekindled my interest in amateur radio. I made enquiries into re-obtaining my old callsign but it was unavailable but was told I could have a full call (advanced) callsign. When they told me CW was no longer a requirement, something stirred me into finishing what I had started in 1980 but felt I had not gone on with (the Morse requirement at 10 wpm). So I started a relearning process into the world of Morse with the aim to send and receive at least 10 wpm on my own homebrew gear!

I must say it has been more challenging than I first thought, but it has brought me a lot of fun and enjoyment too. I am also enjoying making ham related projects, QRP rigs, antenna tuners, electronic keyers and general station accessories. I even found some of my old books, my old speed-x key! and some homebrew projects from my earlier ham days.

I am now at the stage where I can comfortably do 12 - 13 wpm but I am never satisfied with my sending on both straight key and paddles. Always trying to improve and practise a little each day with the hope of increasing my speed and accuracy - hi hi. I generally find CW ops the most well mannered and kind people on and off the air! I live in Cohuna in Northern Victoria with my XYL Sandra. Our two adult children have left home to further their education in Melbourne.

Thank you for the opportunity of joining FISTS and hope I can have a QSO with some members shortly!

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FISTS Europe Ladder

Graham G3ZOD #8385

Join us in the FISTS Europe Ladder sessions each 2nd and 4th Sunday at 1400 - 1600 and 1800 - 2000 UTC. These include friendly, conversational QSOs with a minimum exchange of RST, name, QTH, member number (if available). Logs are welcome but not essential - the main objective is to enjoy the QSOs.

More information: <http://fists.co.uk/activitiescalendar.html#fistsladder>





As a FISTS member I am interested in improving all aspects of my sending and receiving skills. I have not had a lot of practice over the years and I am sure my abilities could be improved.

Receiving practice requires on-air time or use of practice tapes, but in this article I want to look at a method for *sending* practice.

At first, sending practice seems to be easier than receiving; the traditional advice has been to take your practice oscillator and sit down with the phone book and start banging away.

That is certainly FB to a point, however as with any training, practising on your own can lead to developing undesirable habits. Sending cleanly without any 'swing' or poorly formed characters is clearly the desired goal.

But how to achieve this without a personal coach to comment and correct your 'Fist'?

One solution is to record your sending and conduct some analysis of your own. Morse is analytically a very simple code and is best sent 'according to the book'. Of course some small individual defects will still creep in and give us a personal 'Fist', but ideally these should be small and unobtrusive.

I have found that the software audio recording programs such as Audacity or Wave Pad (my favourite) are useful tools for recording and inspecting my sending.

*As a FISTS member
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receiving skills.*

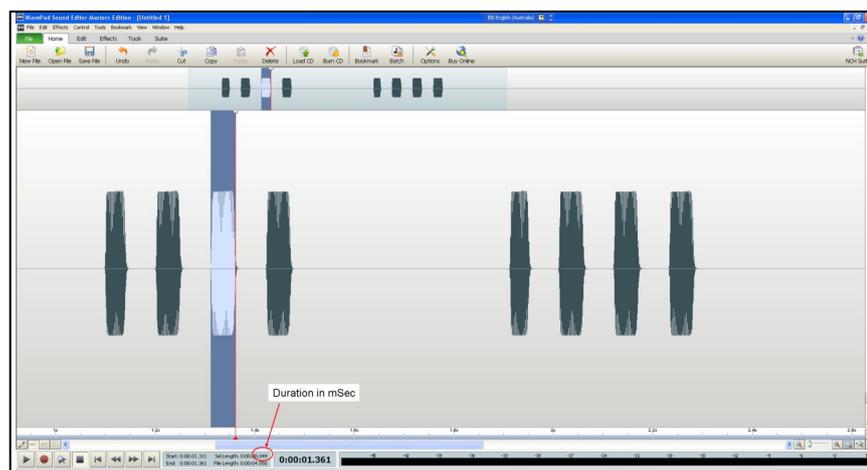
Method - The idea is to record your practice oscillator output into the recording program and then view, measure and listen to your sending.

Plug your practice oscillator into the line input socket of your PC. Adjust the option in the recording program to connect the appropriate input (mic, line in etc.) and don't worry too much about the line level. If you are going to make practice 'tapes' (MP3 files) using this method, the levels and sampling quality become important, but not so much for this exercise.

Record and look at some characters to check that all is well, and we are ready to start. You may have to set the zoom level in a bit so you can see the individual dot and dash characters clearly. Also work out how to use the cursor to measure the length of a dot or dash. Although programs differ, usually clicking in one spot then doing a 'shift+click' on a second spot will highlight a length of audio and a duration will be available at the bottom of the Window.

First Tests - If you have a bug (semi automatic key), one of the initial adjustments is setting the dot-space ratio. Previous articles have described using a multimeter and other methods for this setting, but you can also use this audio method.

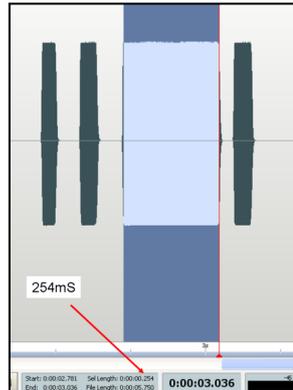
Simply send a series of automatic dots (I send some H characters) and inspect the recording. In the example below (Figure 1) I sent two H's at minimum speed for my keyer (about 20 wpm). First I measured the time from start of one dot to start of the next, at 105ms. Then I adjusted the usual dot contact screw until I had a dot length of 50ms, achieving the desired 50% duty cycle.



1. Two H's at about 20 wpm.

With dots tuned up, or if you are using a hand key or keyer, we are ready to go.

Typical faults - You may already have a suspicion of a particular sending fault that you want to inspect. For me, recently, Chris VK2CTN gave me some feedback that my dashes were too long. Of course dashes should be 3 times the length of dots and a good character for checking this on is F. Let's see how I went:

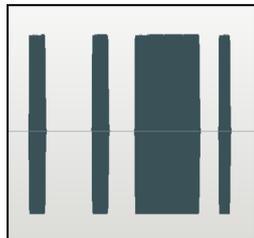


Sure enough, my dash is 250ms long (Figure 2), when it should only be 150ms. Keep practising Derek.

If you are sending on a straight key, you might like to look at your dot spacing also, it should be equal to one dot of course. Figure 3 shows a rotten 'F' sent on my straight key. In self defence, I had to try a few times to mess that one up enough for the example!

Next we can look at inter-character spacing (Figure 4), which should also be 3 dots long. Just send a word like PARIS (the speed test) and measure between the characters. I tend to be short here, that is I tend to rush through forming my words.

2. Dash is 250ms long.

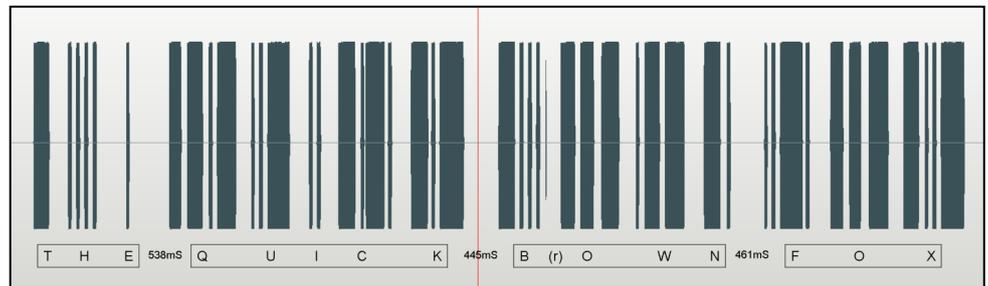


3. The rotten 'F'.



4. Inter-character spacing.

And finally, we need correct spacing between words. This should be 7 dots, and perhaps sending 'The Quick Brown Fox' is a good test (Figure 5). Let's see how I went:



5. 'Quick Brown Fox' test.

Again I am slow, the spacing should be 350ms and I am over at 538, 445 and 461ms. This corresponds to about 15 wpm spacing rather than the 20 wpm the bug is set for. I guess you can see I can't spell either, missing the R out of BROWN somehow.

Correcting faults - Identifying faults is one thing, correcting bad habits is quite another. I don't really have any sage advice on this, but one method I am using is 'play along' with a text-to-Morse translator program like this one: <http://morsecode.scphillips.com/jtranslator.html>

What I do is enter a short piece of text in the box and set the speed and tone frequency to match my practice oscillator. Then I play the converter and try to keep up with my own sending. As the converter repeats at the end of the text, you can practise in quite a repetitive fashion, hopefully learning correct rhythm as you go. If you have trouble with particular characters (like 'F') put lots of 'F' words in the converter (nice ones please!).

Good luck tuning up your 'Fist' and I hope to hear you on-air soon.

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**Beethoven of the Cootie Key
- Doc VK5BUG #14136**

It was back in the late 1960s that I practised sending Cootie, bug and straight key CW by



'phantom' keying to mimic various taped CW activity from the shore stations where I worked (VHK and VHM), particularly when assigned the CW Broadcast to ships watchkeeping role.

I would punch up the autohead tapes that keyed the station transmitters and with the aid of a monitoring Murphy B40 receiver and the original message copy at hand, I was able to practice my hand sending, aiming for precise sync with the outgoing broadcast.

This was to ingrain both rhythm and spacing, usually at 22 wpm which was the basic Royal Australian Navy operating speed at the time.

Once back at sea, I decided that practising along with a metronome, and also music of diverse tempos to match keying speed, would assist in providing a sound timing base. I still do that from time to time, though I thought it was much more necessary back then.

When some of my Navy colleagues saw and heard what I was doing, someone publicised the concept and referred to me by the nickname 'Beethoven' which has stuck ever since.

I am 'Doc'...
Operator of Wireless Telegraphy station VK5BUG
"Beethoven of the Cootie Key!"
On CW since 1964

Email signature.

Survey results

Chris VK2CTN #9057

Last month we asked: 'What is your favourite Morse key?' Here are the responses:

Callsign	Make / manufacturer	Model
FO5MD	GHD	GF501A - Sideswiper
G0JLX	Marconi	PS-213
VK2CTN	Bencher	BY-1 iambic paddle
VK2GAZ	Hi-Mound	Manipulator Paddle
VK2KJJ	Amplidan (M.P. Pedersen - Danish copy)	Straight
VK3DBD	Bendix	USA Air Force flameproof
VK3FGE	Homebrew VK3DBD	iambic paddle
VK3KX	Vibroplex	Blue racer
VK4BCM	Silverstone Telegraph	"Pounder"
VK4CC	Baumuster	T1
VK5ATU	Vibroplex	Deluxe Keyer
VK5BUG	Both Homebrew	Bug & Cootie key
VK6MX	Begali	Pearl
VK6PG	Bencher	Hex Magnetic Paddle
VK7CW	TW Electronics/G3HGE	TWanger Sideswiper
VK7JB	Alberto Frattini	iambic Chrome
ZL1CDX	K8RA CW KEYS	P-2
ZL2AIM	Marconi	Naval 365?
ZL2AKW	N Z Post Office	Standard hand key
ZL2AL	Begali	Signature
ZL2AOH	Czech army key	DNK
ZL2AUJ	home made	paddle or electric
ZL2BJC	Marconi	365B
ZL2TX	Bencher	BY2 iambic chrome paddle
ZL4IM	Bencher	BY1

Table 1. Keys favoured by FISTS members.

You may have never heard of some of these keys either! It's great to see such a diverse range, including hand keys, paddles, bugs and the less common Cootie key. Of the 25 responses, only two members listed the same make and model. Doc VK5BUG listed two keys because he ranks them as equal favourite, HI.

Thank you to everyone who participated!

Part of the VK5BUG key collection:



Homebrew Cootie key and VK5BUG QSL card.



Assortment of keys, complete with plastic bugs!



Simplex auto bug (left) and homebrew bug (right).

More photos and information about Doc VK5BUG and his keys can be found at:

<http://www.sideswipernet.org/keys/vk5bug-keys.php>

Key dates

FISTS Activity Day

Every Tuesday

Send CQ on the FISTS calling frequencies and hopefully you will quickly be answered by a fellow FISTS member!

VK Shires Contest

7 - 8 June

0600 Sat - 0600 UTC Sun

Amateur stations around the world to contact as many VK shires (defined by Local Government boundaries) during the contest period.

More details: www.wia.org.au

Winter VHF / UHF Field Day

21 - 22 June

The Field Day provides operators with the opportunity to 'head for the hills' and see how far they can work.

More details: www.wia.org.au

Note: The correct link is embedded in the abbreviated website address.

Donations

Many thanks to the following members who included a donation when renewing their membership:

Joe VK2KJJ #9689

Peter VK3FPL #14144

Trevor VK5ATQ #14176

Justin VK7TW #9077

Trawling the web

Ian ZL2AIM #9683

Seefunk (German for *marine radio*). This site is more for those folks who have an interest in the old coastal stations around the world. I got this site from my friend in Cape Town, Adrian ZS1TTZ: <http://www.seefunker.de/homepage/seefunk.htm>



Click on 'International' on the left hand side of the page (unless you speak German). Click on Coast stations. Then click the area of the map that interests you and click on the coastal city. You will be able to hear some CW from each station. I am not sure if they are authentic recordings, as I doubt if the station during it's working day would be calling CQ! Anyway, it's a bit of fun.

ZL to VK: First CW QSO on new band

Jim VK3PC #9679

After a lot of research, the claim of the first QSO between the two countries is verified as being by ZL1ZLD and VK4QC in September 2013.



The logbook of ZL1ZLD reads that on 5 September 2013, a contact with VK4QC was the first in CW with VK. After ZL1ZLD sent a test, a reply was received from VK4QC. Then ZL1ZLD acknowledged the call at RST 339 with much QRN, and thanked him for being the first VK QSO. VK4QC gave RST 539 and thanked him also as the first.

At ZL1ZLD was Paul Chamberlaine ZL1BBR, of the Musick Point Radio Group. It uses the original Dansk transmitter at the home of the last New Zealand coast station ZLD that closed in 1993.

Peter Hewitson VK4QC is an ex-Merchant Navy Radio Officer and Coast Radio Station operator. In pride of place acknowledging the achievement on the new Amateur Radio band is a special QSL and pennant, from the Musick Point Memorial Radio Station ZL1ZLD.

Peter VK4QC advises that his station is a Skanti TRP-8250 solid state marine transceiver originally from HMAS Waterhen, an Australian Naval Shore station near Sydney Australia. The antenna is a Marconi T, with 3 horizontal wires, 10m high and 30m long with 8 radials, via an ex-NDB (non-directional beacon) aerial coupling unit.

Last year I had a two-way QSO with ZL1ZLD on 475 kHz CW on 5 September at 1055 UTC and also received a special pennant and QSL card from the Musick Point Memorial Radio Station.

Meantime the popular VK3FI 473 kHz CW beacon at Mildura in northwest Victoria is being heard regularly throughout Australia, New Zealand and perhaps beyond. The nightly beacon with a 12 wpm CW identification, followed by 20 seconds of carrier, has helped to stimulate activity on the 472 to 479 kHz band.

The CW may be copied by ear without special equipment or software programs, while its burst of carrier allows those with programs such as Spectrum Lab to detect its presence. It has been heard from 0900 to 2200 UTC.

Noel VK3FI invites reports. Can you hear it? Then email a report to vk3fi@wia.org.au

Membership renewals

Ralph ZL2AOH #1073

The following memberships are due for renewal to the end of June 2014. Some are well overdue.

9023 - 9052 - 9066 - 9073 - 9078 - 9566 - 9674 - 9675 - 9677 - 9679 - 9690 - 14118 - 14119 - 14121 - 14134 - 14135 - 14138 - 14142 - 14145 - 14157 - 14158 - 14161



If you are listed incorrectly, wish to receive a replacement reminder notice or would like to discuss your membership with us, please email us at: fists-down-under@ihug.co.nz

Until next month, 73