

**Newsletter of the Australian / New Zealand chapter of the International Morse Preservation Society  
July 2018**

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**FISTS Down Under Sked Page** <http://n8fq.org/sked/index.php?board=fdu>

**Facebook** <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1765058520392148/>

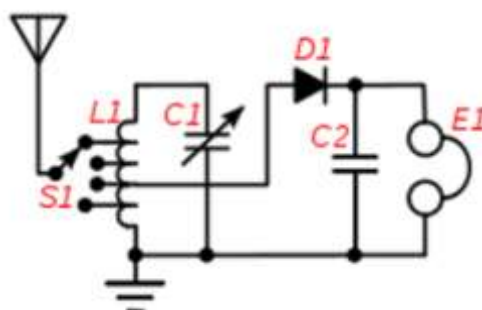
**CW Practice Sessions:** 10, 11, 12, 13, 17, 20, 23 & 26 WPM. [http://fdu.org.au/cw\\_files.php](http://fdu.org.au/cw_files.php)

**Recommended FISTS calling frequencies (MHz):**

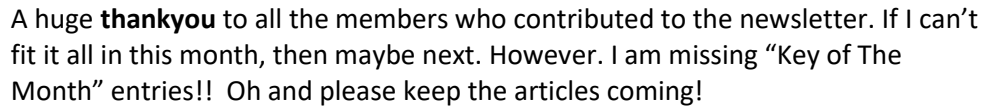
1.808	3.528	7.028	10.118	14.058	18.085
21.058	24.908	28.058			

**LETTER CHASE** words for July are: **LIGHTNING, SIDESWIPER, CHAMPION, CAMELBACK** (Rules and Info on our webpage). Results from the June Letter Chase and contest appear later in this newsletter.

**July Contest!** July will see the running of the **Radio Active Contest** on Saturday, 21st July, 2018. All Amateur Radio Operators and Short-Wave Listeners are welcome to participate. Full details can be found at: [http://fdu.org.au/contests\\_open.php](http://fdu.org.au/contests_open.php)



## From the Editor: Bill VK1MCW #15215



Ladies and Gents, we are still searching for a VK volunteer to assist us with the **VK Membership administration**. The task involves maintaining the VK Membership database, manage all the VK subscriptions and renewals. Our VK membership is approaching 1000 and I am too busy to keep across all that he does for FISTS Down Under. I am appealing to anyone who can consider this important role. We were hoping for someone in or around Sydney – location not critical. In this on-line age it does not matter where you live – all you need is an hour a week just to handle the odd enquiry, process subscription renewals and maintain the database for VK.

**Club Callsign VK2FDU:** We have recently renewed our Club Callsign – it is available for use should you wish to run an additional net (such as the QRP). All you need to is check with Garry VK2GAZ first

**July:** VK2IAU, VK2IOW, VK4WM, JE1CLH,  
**August:** VK8FEET. VK5GG, VK3ZT, VK8CAW, VK2GDI, VK1CT, VK3DCP, VK3HJ, VK3JOB, VK3TP,  
 VK4AP, VK4EBP, ZL4SA

Our website [http://www.fdu.org.au/join\\_renew.php](http://www.fdu.org.au/join_renew.php) has all the details for making payments. **Don't forget that if you are paying your subs to include your callsign.** Please do not send cash in the post as this causes problems for us in banking.

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## Welcome New Members

### Kimberly Olsen VK2KMI #14171



*"I was first licenced in 2008 as VK4FOLO. I upgraded to standard call a few years later (VK4MDX) and then advanced call (VK4KIM) and since moving to Sydney VK2KMI. When I lived in Queensland, I had a large shack on acreage with no antenna restrictions. Since moving to Sydney, I have had to downsize quite a bit, especially with respect to antennas. My backyard is 1 metre by 10 metres. My main antenna is a homebrew 12 m vertical that uses an assortment of wires, a shed, an awning and a pipe as counterpoise. The same squid pole carries an inverted L for 160 meters. I love restoring old radios and have a collection of broadcast receivers and ham radios covering many decades from the 1930's through to today. I am a member of ARNSW, HADARC and ALARA. I am also a regular contributor to the WIA national News. "*

Welcome to FISTS Down Under! **Kimberley VK2KMI #14171**

### Welcome back Peter VK4QC - #9626

*"I started training as a marine radio officer at the tender age of 15 at the College of International Marine Radiotelegraphic Communications at Brooks Bar, Manchester UK. A grand title but the "College" was actually a run down 3-story suburban house with homemade wooden benches with splinters and cast-iron tables. It was freezing in winter. Our Morse keys were all Marconi 365A straight keys bolted to the steel tables. The keys were wired up so you could send and receive to the person sitting opposite and you plugged your headphones into a socket at the side.*

*The instructor could send to the whole class from the front and it would go out on speakers which were loud. You could actually hear it from the pub down the road! Occasionally he would call out someone to come and send to the class.*

*or the 2nd Class the pass mark was 20wpm and 1st Class was 25wpm. You had to send and receive plain language (PL), 5-letter code groups, 5-figure code groups and accented letters. For training the instructor used to mix up PL, code, figs and accented letters but that wasn't included in the final exam.*

*We would have an hour of Morse in the morning and an hour in the afternoon. The rest of the time was learning theory. The course was split into three parts: Elementary, Intermediate and Advanced. Every Friday we had a theory exam and Morse exam. The results of the exams determined if you were ready to take the final.*

*I passed my 2nd Class ticket in June 1964 at the age of 18. (Yes it took me 3 years - I was a lousy student and didn't do much homework!). I couldn't wait to go on for my 1st Class as I was longing to go to sea and discover the big wide world, so I joined Marconi Marine and waited for a ship.*

*My first ship was the Baron Kinnaird, callsign GXRS registered in Ardrossan, Scotland. I joined her at the Poplar Docks in London for a trip to Tampa, Florida. The chief R/O was only 21 and Scottish. I quickly learned that the whole crew was Scottish, except me. You can imagine the kind of one-sided joking around that happened. Most times it was no joke!*

*Sending my first on-air message was a thrill but also nerve racking. It was just a transit report (TR) to the nearest coast station, Niton Radio GNI on the Isle of Wight in the English Channel. However I got through that and from then on I looked forward to sending and receiving traffic from around the world, weather reports, navigation warnings and of course listening to 500 kHz, the international calling and distress frequency.*

*I had 2-hour watches spread over a 14 hour period. Hours were 08-10, 12-14, 16-18, 20-22 local time. There was a 500 kHz guard receiver used for monitoring 500 when on duty and an automatic alarm receiver to cover the off duty periods. The A/A receiver was configured to receive the alarm signal, which was sent preceding a distress. The alarm signal consisted of twelve, 4-second dashes, separated by a 1-second space. The receiver only needed to receive 4 dashes to activate the alarm which would ring bells on the bridge and in the R/O's cabin. If the alarm bells rang, you had to dash up to the radio room and see what was going on. Our main transmitter was a 100 watt Oceanspan and the main receiver was an Atalanta. You would be lucky to get 90 watts out of the old 'span due to salt build up on the aerial wire so periodically you had to drop it down and clean it plus all the insulators.*

*Well I spent almost 10 years in the merchant navy and served on British, Nigerian, Israeli and German flag ships with many different nationalities of crew. Then in '73 I came to Australia for a holiday. A holiday which is still going on, because I never went back!*

*I joined the Overseas Telecommunications Commission OTC and spent 30 years working on the coastal radio service at Sydneyradio/VIS, Townsvillerradio/VIT, Darwinradio/VID and finally Brisbaneradio/VIB.*

*The commercial Morse code service closed down in 1999 and the CRS closed in 2002. Most of us took the golden handshake and left.*

*Thirteen coast stations were replaced by two. One at Wiluna in WA and the other at Charleville, Qld. The control station is in Canberra next door to the Rescue Coordination Centre, RCC.*

*I got into ham radio in 1980 in Darwin with the callsign VK8PH. I had an FTDX-400 and an FT-101E with a homebrew 2-element quad and dipoles. I am almost 100% CW.*

*Then in 1996 I was transferred to VIB at Ningi on the Bribie Island Road and became VK4QC.*

*Presently I have a Kenwood TS-590, Anan-100d SDR, IC-7000 and a couple of Skanti marine radios. I used one of the Skanti's on MF (472-479 kHz) with a Marconi Tee antenna until it blew down in a storm and I never put it back up.*

*Antennas are a Coman 3 element 20m monoband yagi and a vee beam.*

*My all time favourite key is, naturally, my Marconi 365a but I still use the 40-year old Samson electronic keyer that I used at sea plus a Hi-Mound BK-1 "Coffin Bug" also used at sea, a Begali Signature, Junker and various straight keys, vibroplex bugs and sideswipers.*

73, Peter VK4QC #9626

### June Letter Chase Results:

Congratulations Steve **VK7CW #14164** and Ian **ZL2AIM #9683**

### Dit Dah Contest Results

Winners of our Dit Dah Contest – and again a huge thank you to Garry **VK2GAZ #14151** for organising! Did you see the short You Tube Clip? – Check it out!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JGwCHBLID1E&feature=youtu.be>.

**Tony VK3TP #15204** 18 points all QRP, **Michael VK2CCW #14198** 14 points and **Bill VK1MCW #15215** also with 14 points

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### From our Members

**Laurie VK2GZ #15218**



### THE BUMPY ROAD LESS TRAVELLED

I've been learning CW for a little over a year now, mentored by one of the members of my club (Waverley Amateur Radio Society), Skip **VK2ALR**. Skip learned as a lad in his native Canada and has tales of staying up late at night having QSOs with his schoolmates.

At our club over a dozen members turned up to a meeting to form a new CW learning group, but alas, just a few persevered and only two or three now remain. As we all know, the excitement of learning Morse can wane as people realise that there's lots of practice required and one can't achieve even a modest WPM speed overnight.

My 68-year-old brain found it difficult to absorb and retain the sequences. Hours of practice sessions a week would amount to nothing and each day would be like starting again. So it seemed, anyway.

But it turned out that the biggest step for me was to overcome my nerves and get on air and call or answer a CQ. I don't mind admitting that there were many occasions when I heard a nice slow operator calling but was simply too afraid to reply - fearful of revealing myself as a total newbie and sounding like an idiot or even a LID. I still have no idea what a LID actually is, but I didn't want to be one!

Skip started a QRS net, which helped with nerves, but then then they weren't strangers, were they! We plodded away and gradually gathered some confidence.

It was a while before I found the courage to "talk to a stranger" and I'm still awed by the kindness and patience shown by experienced operators. Without exception every operator has been respectful and understanding of my slow learning curve. All have taken pains to give me encouragement - and continue to do so.

What a great bunch of guys you've all turned out to be!

The other challenge has been getting to grips with all the procedural signs and abbreviations. Seems like every op has his favourite set of abbreviations and I found that they can be like road-blocks.

There I am copying nicely when a strange set of dits and dahs arrives and - brain freeze! The pen stops as I try a mental re-wind. No avail! I lose the thread and eventually abandon the unknown pattern till next time. TKS, TNX or even TU? Why not Ta? - shorter but perhaps not so international! Sometimes I jot the strange sequence down: \_ . \_ \_ . ? YE? NG? TP? Eventually I may or may not realise - of course! KN! Not everyone uses it.

There are people out there who go out of their way to listen for new operators and draw them into the art and I am constantly grateful for their encouragement and help, though perhaps feeling guilty not being "on" more often.

I'm probably no different from anyone else. Learning anything can be difficult and some folk find it easier than others. I'm a bit musical and people say that can be a help, feeling the rhythm and recognising patterns and so on, but with me it has been a hard slog.

The question remains: Why do I want to do it? All my non-radio family and friends naturally think it is the strangest skill to want to master in this millennium. The most arcane, peculiar, out-dated and obscure form of communication imaginable.

I agree with them entirely.

**Laurie Gordon VK2GZ #15218**

*Oooohh Laurie! That last sentence must surely generate a response from someone (other than me!). OK I can't help myself! Your last sentence IMHO should read "One of the most reliable forms of communication invented!" 😊. You also touched on one of my personal 'hates', the use of non-standard PROSIGNS. It is akin to those in voice ops not adhering to the International Phonetic Alphabet. A subject for another day perhaps! Ed*

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And *Courtesy of the Westlakes Amateur Radio Club*



## DOING THE MORSE

By Stan Simpson G4ITM

My first encounter with Samuel Morse was in 1935 at the scout hut at the bottom of the school road when, resplendent in short trousers and woggle, I presented myself for training as a second class Signaller. I could have chosen either semaphore or Morse but as the former requires the ability to tell your left from your right I opted for the Morse.

Morse at this level was sent with a flag on a stick. The stick was held aloft. A small movement of about six inches represented a dot and a big sweep down to the right was a dash.

The combination of a twelve year old boy and a four foot stick is full of exciting possibilities, and as we thrashed about trying to stop the flag wrapping itself round the stick we came very close to impaling the portrait of our founder, who was regarding us with apprehension from his nail halfway up the wall. Anyway, after a period of about three weeks we all passed out at 12 letters per minute. This may have been because we were skilful, it may have been because our instructor wanted to get home to his loved ones while he was still in one piece.

There was then a lengthy lull in my Morse activities until the outbreak of war and the formation of the Home Guard. I joined the signal section mainly because it was preferable to standing in the cold under a bridge three nights a week. We did frequent practice sessions with a buzzer and key although we all knew there was no possibility that we would ever be issued with a radio. On Sunday mornings we used to send messages with a lamp.

I could never see the military logic of this. With the rest of your platoon hiding in the long grass, it is not a good idea to stand on a piece of high ground flashing a light. It would make sense to use a flag. That way you would have a fighting chance that the enemy would think you were surrendering. Then, in 1943, it was the Royal Corps of Signals and the training centre at Catterick.

While the rest of the squad were learning the code parrot fashion, I was able to sit back with the indulgent smile of one who could do 12 wpm. Then suddenly, almost overnight, my colleagues were reading 18 wpm and I was still doing 12. I received my last army message in 1947 and after demob, I fully intended going for the amateur licence but trivial things like earning a living always seemed to get in the way and it was 32 years later in 1979 when I finally got round to it.

Strangely enough the Morse was still there after all that time. Like the man said, "You never forget how to fall off a bicycle." For the past twelve years or so I have been torturing my friends with Morse so that they can get their "A" licences. I am full of praise for their dedication to the cause. They have endured with fortitude.

Mind you, strict discipline does prevail during these sessions. I have a list of Norman knights who were at the Battle of Hastings and taking a few of these down soon brings the troublemakers back into line.

I have always enjoyed Morse without really being very good at it. I hear stories of those legendary operators who can send at 60 wpm while peeling a banana but this sort of thing is not for me.

*(Reproduced with permission of Westlakes Amateur Radio Club)*

Quite by coincidence, there is a theme of 'Learning CW' this month! Good stuff! (Ed)

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From Michael VK2CCW #14198



## TIMES OF THE PAST

Hi all,

In the old times of early telegraphy when there were no modern keys, no modern forms of learning CW except for being taught by those that already had learnt the code. In modern times the current operators seem to have forgotten the most important thing when making a mistake and this is to send the correct error signal.

Some operators seem to either send less or more dit's than is required. The thing to remember is that once a mistake has been made there is no need to send 8 dots at a million miles an hour. So long as you send it correctly that's all that matters.

Another thing is a lot of modern station operators don't realize that at the beginning you should send the CT signal and at the end the AR signal.

In early times an operator that made a mistake was taught that they should send 8 dots followed by the last correct letter then continue on. This was the way that I was taught and how others who were professional telegraphers taught me.

These days perhaps it's not all that important to use the old ways, but it is important to learn the correct way. Learning CW is not hard but very time consuming. I spend countless hours building, testing and converting CW for those trying to learn this mode.

For my efforts I expect no gratitude, no reward except to help those that need help learning. Advice is given by lots of operators whether it be good or bad it all helps in the long-term goal.



In the days beginning when merchant radio started out there were set procedures for calling and working stations. Things like CQD most operators would not know the meaning of this and its worth looking back into the history books to learn about how things were done. For instance, SOS is only a prosign and has no real meaning at all. It was used as just a signal to indicate a distress situation was occurring, so all stations stopped transmitting and assisted in the distress situation.

These days CW is still taught in schools in Europe and should be taught in Australian Schools because it teaches you literacy you simply don't have the time at 28 of 30wpm to think about it.

For those out there learning this wonderful exciting mode that just runs through my veins enjoy your journey and keep trying to excel at this mode because one day it will be required again and experienced operators will be needed to resurrect telegraph systems and marine communications. Sooner or later these modern electronics are going to fail in a big way and only those trained will be able to help those that have forgotten the old ways and means of communication none of us are getting any younger.

One last thing don't forget that the CW practice sessions are now on WWW.FDU.ORG.AU and can be downloaded or played from the site hope you get as much enjoyment out of listening as I'm having converting them.

73 de  
Michael  
VK2CCW #14198

*I hope none of you ever need to transmit a MAYDAY Call (I came close once) – but now is not the time for tin hats! When sending an SOS in CW (note the overline or bar across the top this means there is no gap between the letters). Sent as SOS SOS SOS de (your callsign) X 3, followed by your location, the nature of the distress and your intentions.*

Thanks Laurie, Michael and the Westlakes Amateur Radio Club. If anyone wishes to comment on these, or anything else that rattles their key, please write in – I am happy for a **Letters to the Editor** segment! I know I have a comment on one of these! 😊

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## Key Of The Month



I don't really have a Key of The Month, but Garry suggests this is the world's largest straight key! Hi Hi

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Please consider volunteering as the FISTS Down Under VK Admin. We do need your assistance!

That's all for now!

de Bill  
VK1MCW #15215

