

FISTS DOWN UNDER



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

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Recommended FISTS calling frequencies (MHz): 1.808 3.528 7.028 10.118 14.058 18.085 21.058 24.908 28.058

This month:

- Reporting RST
- Ragchewing with FISTS
- SOTA sparks new interest in CW
- Solar powering your workshop

Fists meeting in Melbourne

Derek VK3KX #14125 is trying to get a group together for dinner in Melbourne with Nao JO3HPM #15008, the Editor and Net Manager of the FISTS East Asia chapter.

Nao is visiting Melbourne for a conference in October and he would like to catch up with local members. This is Nao's first trip to Australia.

Derek has suggested dinner on Wednesday 21 October at 7pm. The location is to be advised, but will be a suitable restaurant in Melbourne CBD. All members are welcome to attend. Please RSVP to Derek VK3KX via email: dfdawkins@optusnet.com.au or phone: (03) 9884 6889.

Later this month, Ralph ZL2AOH #1073 will be visiting Australia for a few weeks. He is looking forward to meeting up with several members during his travels to Perth, Geraldton and Brisbane.



New maritime radio book

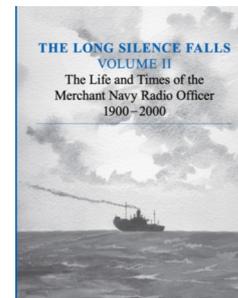


The Radio Officers' Association has advised us that they will soon be publishing 'The Long Silence Falls Volume II'.

This is a follow up to their first book which was published in 2012 and is no longer in print. The new book will be available at the discounted

price of £24 (includes postage) to FISTS members outside the UK. (Price is £30 for non-members).

FISTS members must include their FISTS membership number to get the discount. Please check their website for availability of the book and ordering details: www.radioofficers.com



Reporting RST

Regarding signal reporting, I thought I would share some feedback from a recent International CW Sideswiper Net.

A 2-2-9 report was given for one of the alternative frequencies used, as well as a 1-1-9 report from 20m. Information is still able to be exchanged, albeit with some difficulty, in such cases.

This may be a regular occurrence due to prevailing conditions at the time, but simply highlights the supremacy of CW as a communication mode, and a century of that ought not to be blurred by decision-makers with modern mindsets that happen to be SSB-aligned.

QRK and QSA exchanges would be a far more relevant and meaningful reporting system for CW communications, since T for Tone has become irrelevant with the improved equipment since the 1960s. The old chirpy and buzzing signals of yesteryear are long gone unless there is a transmitting malfunction.

From my experience these do occur from time to time, but seldom,

and certainly not frequently enough to warrant a special T suffix to the Readability QRK and Signal Strength QSA reports.

The CW operating signal QSD means 'Your keying is defective' and there are suffix numbers to be more informative as to how it is defective. For the rare, individual cases where this is so, the opsig approach would be more appropriate and more aligned to the ITU Regulations Appendix 3.

All the time it needs to be recalled that the Q-code (as for the Z-code) operating signals and prosign abbreviations were always designed for Wireless Telegraphy (CW) and not voice communications.

In my opinion it is nigh time that the RST reporting system be eliminated for Morse Code operation, as it is actually a mismatch and not relevant compared with QRK/ QSA data.

Over to you, members. What do you think about RST? - Ed.

Doc VK5BUG #14136



New member

We extend a warm welcome to **Nick Eichhorn VK2AOH**. His membership number is 14191.

Nick is from Bathurst in Central Western NSW.

We hope to publish his profile in a future newsletter.



Oceania DX contest

Our congratulations to **Barry Simpson VK2BJ** for winning the 'single operator all band CW' section of the contest in 2014.

FISTS Down Under will again be sponsoring the award this year.

Contest results are available at: <http://oceaniadxcontest.com>

CW survey

Lou VK5EEE #1124 recently conducted a survey of CW operators in Australia.

Over 100 people responded and provided some very interesting data.

The survey questions included asking operators how active they were on CW, their usual operating times, membership of clubs, age, QTH etc.

The results have been published in the September edition of the WIA Amateur Radio magazine.

Ragchewing with FISTS

Ian ZL2AIM #9683



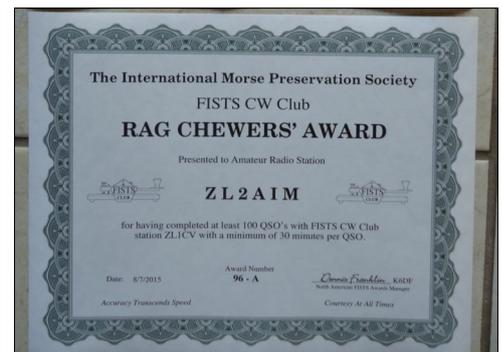
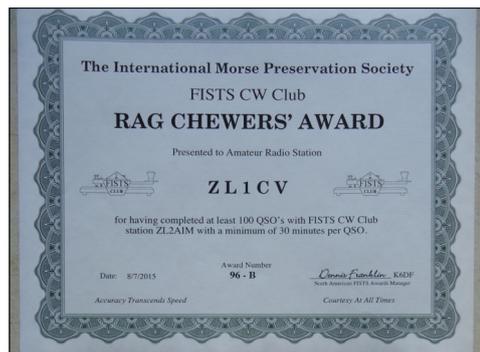
Whilst the DX bands have not been very good this past month due to the lower Solar Flux Index, I have been able to have some good ragchews with fellow Fists members. 40 metres during the day was fair and 80 metres has been exceptional and QRP worked well. My OHR100 has been earning it's keep.

I have mentioned before that it is worthwhile to have a look around the Fists websites. I have also mentioned previously that you might find that you already qualify for some of the awards. I was looking at the Rag Chewers' Award requirements and thought that I might qualify for that. You need to have 100 contacts of 30 minutes or longer with other Fists members.

So, I opened up my electronic log book (HRD Log) and put in a filter for Fists members. I am in the habit of writing down the Fists membership number in the comments part of the log during the QSO. Don't forget it's so easy during a conversation to send 'Fists?'. I have also kept a log of the length of the QSO, so it was easy to find those that were 30 minutes or longer.

I soon discovered that I have been ragchewing with Rob ZL1CV #9633 since October last year and with his callsign alone I had attained the requirements of the award. Yes, we had had more than 100 QSOs of 30 minutes or more over the last 10 months. I sent in my request to Dennis K6DF and within a few hours he had checked the log and found that both Rob and I would qualify for the award.

He told me that this was the first time that he would be awarding the certificate when all the logs were with the one station. He asked me if I was prepared to share the award with Rob. Of course! So now Rob and I have certificates number 96B and 96A (shown below).

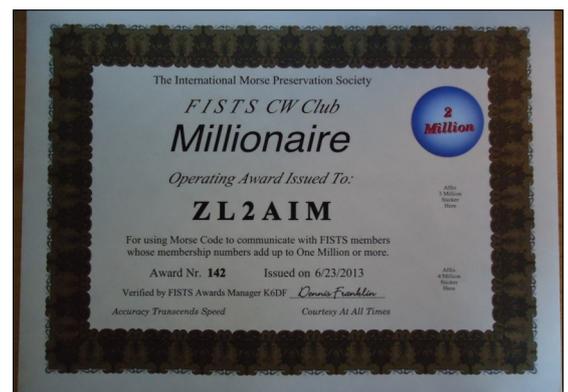


I didn't mention this to Rob, and Dennis thought it would be a good idea to surprise him. Rob tells me that this is his first award for CW. Rob has been an outstanding CW buddy and I have witnessed his willingness to keep working at his CW proficiency over those 10 months. He is now a very proficient ragchewer with both straight key (his preference) and homebrew paddle.

Whilst surfing through the Fists Awards, I realised that I was quite close to getting the 2 Million sticker for my Millionaire award. I attained the original award in June 2013. Whilst I have worked quite a few ZL and VK Fists members, there is a much bigger chance of working more members from the USA. I say this, as for me the 20m band is open more to USA than to UK.

So far I have only worked three UK Fists members. So it was a case of remembering to ask 'Fists?' for every contact that I made. It was not long and I had my required number. Dennis K6DF accepted my log sheet and the 2 Million sticker was in the post and attached to my certificate.

Please excuse the fact that I am blowing my own trumpet in this regard, but hopefully some of you will have a look in your logs and see that you are eligible for some of the Fists awards. Dennis puts a lot of his time into granting these awards and always sends a hand-written note with the certificate.



Pixie kits

Following the offer of free Pixie kits in the August newsletter, the lucky winners are:

Arthur VK2ASB #9082

Noel VK2CAO #14127

Steve VK7CW #14164

Dave ZL2AUJ #9668

Good luck with the kit construction and we look forward to reading about your experience of building and using this rig.

Note: Only one entry was received from New Zealand.



Silent key

We regret to announce that **Keith Sherlock VK2WQ** has become a silent key.

Although not a member of FISTS, he would have been known as a fine operator and friend to many members.

Keith was often heard on the VK Sunday morning CW net. He was only six months away from his 100th birthday.

His funeral was held at the Leura Memorial Gardens on 28 August 2015.

SOTA sparks new interest in CW

Andrew VK1DA

If you hear CW operators sending ref vk2/st001 or similar codes, that is a Summits on the Air (SOTA) contact underway and the portable operator is on a hilltop having backpacked his gear and antenna to the top. While SOTA contacts can be made on any mode, the need for lightweight equipment and low battery drain for activators has taken some operators to CW as their mode of choice.



The introduction of SOTA in Australia several years ago saw most contacts being made on 40 and 20m SSB and some on 2m FM. Then several operators, initially Wayne VK3WAM and Warren VK3BYD followed by Ian VK5CZ started to activate summits using CW only. Ron VK3AFW was also using CW on summits. The rigs used were mainly the Yaesu FT817 but then Elecraft and Mountain Topper CW-only rigs started to be heard.

When VK1 joined in SOTA, I also used CW and aimed to make at least four contacts on CW on the summits as well as SSB, thereby qualifying the summit on both modes. The use of CW started to look attractive to other operators when they heard about the European contacts being made on long path 20m in the hour or two before sunset.

... the need for lightweight equipment and low battery drain...has taken some operators to CW as their mode of choice.

Andrew VK2FAJG also started to operate on CW for SOTA contacts and after upgrading to a standard licence as VK2MWP is now a regular CW operator.

Ron VK3AFW runs a net for CW newbies and for refreshing SOTA contact skills. It is run on Thursday nights around 0930z on 80 or 40m depending on seasonal propagation. There are now usually at least three operators joining in and sometimes more.

Other CW operators in the SOTA scene include Nick VK2AOH #14191 and John VK2YW at Wagga who admitted to having not used the mode for many years but is now heard calling most of the CW activations. John also activated a summit using just a pixie one-board transceiver. This created quite a stir of interest within SOTA circles and a photo of John's setup was published in the August 2015 edition of AR magazine. (This is the same kit which FISTS Down Under has issued to several members. See the panel on the left side of this page for more info. - Ed.)

Other regular contacts in my log are VK6NU, VK5BIS, VK5EEE, VK2CCJ, VK2JAZ, VK3HRA and VK3PF. Peter VK3PF is another who had used very little CW since his original licence test for VK3KAI but when some activations were CW only, his CW skills developed and increased almost overnight. From Europe on 20m, DJ5AV and G4OBK are regulars and G4SSH is also worked often. CW is the mode of choice for SOTA in Europe and North America. Stats and other data are available from SOTA.org.uk and related websites.

The combination of hilltop portable/ backpack operation with CW is a happy one, especially if contacts are made with a minimum of equipment. A SOTA contact can be made with minimal conversation, like a contest contact. The report and sometimes the summit reference are all that's required.

But instead of a powerful home station with massive antennas, the SOTA activator is usually running 5 to 10 watts and a simple dipole or vertical. He may also be shivering or sweltering in wind, snow or hot sun.

The most popular SOTA operating times are weekends but an increasing amount of activity is heard during weekdays. On Sunday mornings, CW operation on 40m is usually between about 7028 and 7032, squeezed in between the CW net and digital operation.

If you hear CQ SOTA do reply. All contacts count and yours may be the contact that completes the activation. All VK call areas (except VK0) are now registered with SOTA and there is activity in all call areas.



Solar powering your workshop

Chris VK1CT #9057

Like me, you may also agree that 'no Aussie backyard is complete without a shed'. I wonder if this sentiment is echoed by our ZL friends across the water? This is the story of how I turned a small garden shed (at my previous QTH) into a workshop and rigged it up with low-voltage power.

The 2m x 2m colorbond shed had a generous roof height of 2.2m and had a cement floor. It was to become my electronics storage and work area, but it also accommodated bicycles and assorted bits n' pieces (which I refused to call 'junk', HI).

I had a solid table for use as a workbench, but this would often get too cluttered with tools and components. So I decided to make a shelf to perfectly fit within the available space on top of the table.

I constructed the shelf from pine timber, which had a width of 300mm. I didn't use any fancy joinery. I simply pre-drilled the ends and used hex-head coach screws to hold it all together. The result was a solid shelf with enough space for electronics and an area for holding A4 sized folders and books.



The shelf under construction.



The completed shelf awaiting power connection.

Encouraged by this achievement, I was ready to begin work on some projects that had long been on the drawing board. But there was a problem – not enough light, even during the day with the shed door wide open. The obvious solution was to install some lighting. After a few hours of Google assisted research, I concluded that solar power was the way to go.

Having acquired the necessary components from various sources,

I began putting it all together. The setup consisted of a 40 watt monocrystalline solar panel, a 12Ah SLA battery, a Morningstar SSL6 regulator, and a 12v LED light. I also made a control panel using Masonite board and secured it to a galvanised steel shelf. The panel sported an ammeter to monitor the output of the solar panel and had a separate dual voltage/ current meter to monitor the load on the battery.

The main LED light consumed around 1.7 amps. This was rather a lot when considering the small battery that was powering it, but the main light wasn't needed all the time and I had installed other lights which required much less power. These included a downlight above the workstation and LED lighting under the cabinet. The downlight was a very effective 3 watt LED globe, similar to halogen-type globes, but only drew 300mW.

To make the system even more useful, I installed a 12v accessory socket and a twin USB socket. The latter provided the standard 5v output and I found it useful for recharging my mobile phone, bike headlight, iPod etc. I also had a 12v / 240v inverter which I mainly used to power a low wattage soldering iron.



Another feature was a magnetic reed switch on the sliding door of the shed, which switched on the main light when the door was opened; very handy when accessing the shed at night!

The photo on the right shows the (almost completed) control panel. The switches control the shelf lighting and USB sockets. A digital meter shows both the battery voltage and current draw.



Unfortunately I didn't get to spend much time with my new system and work area because I soon had to pack it all up for the move to VK1. My new house is somewhat larger and there is enough room in the garage (with mains power) for my workbench, so I haven't re-installed the solar setup. It may come in handy in the future though and I think the experience and knowledge gained from working on this project was very worthwhile.

If you're facing a similar situation to what I had, I would encourage you to try solar power and make your own custom-built shelving.



The completed shelf and solar powered shed. This photo was taken at night and shows how effective the lighting was.

Shack news update

The arranging of my shack is an ongoing work in progress, but I think I have it all sorted out now (well, until the next time!) I sit at the left hand side of my desk and have my rigs in front of me. The other rigs and paraphernalia are to my right and angled in such a way for me to easily see them. This is important as one needs to be able to see the meters by a quick glance at the Linear and LDG tuner to make sure that you are putting out the required power at the lowest SWR.

Also, I have only kept out the paddles and keys that I use the most. The others have been put away until needed. I switched on all the radios for the photographs just to make it look 'pretty'! The rear of the shack set up is still a tangled mess of cables etc, but one of these days I may make the effort to tidy them up.



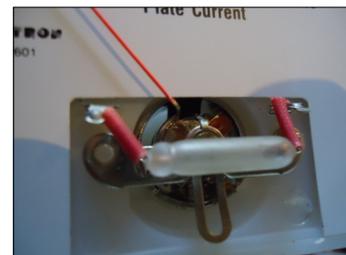
Ian ZL2AIM #9683

Recently I was confronted with my laptop freezing up when I was using Ham Radio Deluxe. I couldn't understand why this was happening – it didn't matter what rig I was using, nor what antenna. So I rebooted the laptop and it happened again. Of course, I did my normal thing and put the blame on Bill Gates. But why had this suddenly started and why with different rigs and antennas. Something must have changed...

The only thing that was different was that I had been listening to some music on You Tube and didn't want to disturb my wife who was in the same room. I had plugged in some ear buds to the laptop. Surely this couldn't cause the laptop to freeze? But, I unplugged them and sure enough, the software was working 100% again! I mentioned this to some of my Fists colleagues and Iain ZL2BJC #12 said that the earbuds were acting as unscreened directional dipoles! You live and learn. I hereby apologise to Bill Gates for any cursing he might have heard from Hikuai.

My Ameritron 811A linear amplifier was built in 1991. So that makes it 24 years old. A few years ago I put in three Chinese made (matched set) valves and they continue to work great. The previous valves were a bit old and the glue holding the tops on had gone brittle. But they were still good for about 300 watts out. (I have since re-glued and soldered the tops and kept them as spares.) It puts out the 400 watts with a drive of 35 watts from my TS570. It has never given me any problems.

However, in the past few weeks the two lamps for the meters (shown on right) have blown on separate occasions. Well, I suppose that I shouldn't complain, seeing as they have lasted 24 years and have survived the trip from USA to South Africa and then to New Zealand. Ameritron said they could supply me with the original type of lamps or I could update to LEDs. I have chosen the old fashioned ones and they should be arriving soon. I shall have to make sure that I have a steady hand when soldering! I had been worried that the lamps might be very difficult to get at, but that wasn't the case, as the rear of the meter just pulled away from the face.



Thoughts on CW

Here are some comments on things mentioned in the newsletter:

On speed, it's quicker to send a message once at 12 wpm than three times at 24! In contests 599 now means 'my computer defaults to 599' while 589 means 'you have a really strong signal'.

One bloke on SSB actually asked me to change the 57 I gave him because he didn't know how to type it in. To judge the performance of your station, log the number of calls you make before making contact. My 'worst' was 107 calls on 7 MHz to ZD7XF in BERU. On 21MHz it only took 2 HI!

On DX-ing I don't bother with DX clusters, I just listen for a lot of

Jakey ZL2JKY / G3JKY #6462

people sending 'UP UP' or 'LID' or 'IDIOT' or even worse. This acts as a marker for the frequency the DX is using and I just wait for a gap. I use two Ten-Tec Corsair IIs linked together for muting.

I leave the 'receiver' on the DX and use the 'transceiver' to hunt for the chap the DX is working so as to be ready to make a call when they sign off. With this set-up I can hear both sides of the QSO in stereo phones. No doubt some of the new expensive sets have a similar facility but I prefer to stick to gear I can still mend myself and which is not festooned with features I don't need. What I can't stand are rigs with menus. Menus are for restaurants not for radios HI!

FISTS Down Under nets

CW (around 18 wpm)

Tuesdays on 3.528MHz

1000 UTC

CW (QRS straight keys)

Wednesdays on 3.528MHz

1000 UTC



Mike's Mania Morse Display

Do you appreciate really well preserved radio equipment? Well, here is a chance to view 60+ exquisitely restored Morse keys and other heritage radio gear which is just part of the collection of Mike VK4MIK.

The next Mike's Morse Mania display will be happening at the Cardwell Telegraph Museum - The Bush Telegraph - in conjunction with the Cardwell Gathering on Saturday 3 October.

Located in northeastern Queensland, Cardwell is a small tropical coastal town with a population of 1250 people.

More details:

www.cassowarycoast.qld.gov.au/museums

New CW website

Lou VK5EEE #1124 has been very busy setting up a website exclusively for CW operating in Australia.

The site contains a wealth of information, including details of CW nets, clubs, operating tips and events.

Take a look at: www.vkcw.net

FDU nets

Chris VK1CT #9057

The weekly Tuesday night net has been enjoying good local band conditions on 80m over the winter months. Many thanks to everyone that has called into the net, and especially Arthur VK2ASB #9082, Joe VK2KJJ #9689 and Brian VK2EBN #14146 who support the net on a regular basis.

Unfortunately, activity on the weekly Wednesday night QRS net has faded recently. It would be great if this net could continue, therefore how about we make it a weekly straight key night? So dust off those hand keys and join in the fun.

The object of the nets is to encourage on-air activity. They provide a great opportunity to meet up with fellow members and you can develop your net skills at the same time. Below is a log sheet of the Tuesday nets since the beginning of June this year.

Date	Time (UTC)		Freq.	Callsigns	Net Controller
	Start	End			
02-Jun-15	1000	1100	3.528	VK2KJJ - VK2ASB - VK2RQ - VK7AD	VK1CT
09-Jun-15	-	-	-	No net	-
16-Jun-15	1000	1040	3.528	VK2KJJ - VK2ASB	VK1CT
23-Jun-15	1000	1038	3.528	VK2ASB - VK2KJJ	VK1CT
30-Jun-15	1000	1107	3.528	VK2ASB - VK2KJJ - VK2EBN	VK1CT
07-Jul-15	1000	1105	3.528	VK2ASB - VK7AD	VK1CT
14-Jul-15	1000	1104	3.528	VK2EBN - VK2KJJ	VK2ASB
21-Jul-15	1000	1105	3.528	VK2ASB - VK2EBN	VK1CT
28-Jul-15	1000	1100	3.528	VK2KJJ - VK2ASB	VK1CT
04-Aug-15	1000	1100	3.528	VK2ASB - VK2KJJ - VK2EBN - VK4QC	VK1CT
11-Aug-15	1000	1059	3.528	VK2ASB - VK2RQ	VK1CT
18-Aug-15	1000	1102	3.528	VK2ASB - VK2KJJ - VK2EBN	VK1CT
25-Aug-15	1000	1110	3.528	VK2ASB - VK2EBN - VK2KJJ	VK1CT

Homebrew key

Ian ZL2AIM #9683 has sent us this photo of a homebrew paddle made by a ham friend who was in a spot as he had no paddle available to him. So he made this one on the spur of the moment.

Ian says he actually had a QSO with him when he used this paddle and it sounded fine business! I suppose he enjoyed the French wine before building the paddle from the corks and his wife's nail file. But it does show you what can be done when in a fix.



Membership renewals

Ralph ZL2AOH #1073

Thank you to Luke VK3HJ #9697 and Dave ZL2AUJ #9668 for including a donation when renewing.

The following memberships are due for renewal by the end of September 2015:

9008 - 9023 - 9075 - 9608 - 9613 - 9644 - 9695 - 14111 - 14132 - 14133 - 14147 - 14149 - 14167 - 14169 - 14175 - 14178 - 14180

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



Until next month, 73