Key Note

SPRING 2013 Issue 23, Series 2

FISTS CW Club, Promoting Morse Code for over 25 Years

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... and more besides!

Left: Keyboard telegraphy in style! See page 17

Have you paid your 2013-2014 subs yet?

FISTS was founded in 1987 by the late George "Geo" Longden, G3ZQS

Club Goals

- *Further the use of CW*
- *Encourage newcomers to use Morse code*
- *Engender friendships among members*

"Accuracy transcends speed, courtesy at all times."

"When you've worked a FISTS, you've worked a friend."

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Centre of Activity Frequencies: 1.818, 3.558, 7.028, 10.118/128, 14.058, 18.085, 21.058, 24.908, 28.058, 50.058 from August 2014**, 70.158** and **144.058.**

We all tolerate it but try to avoid it if possible and, if evasion is not possible, we quickly try and remove the painful experience, but do we do anything to correct it? I would say with most experienced Morse Operators the answer would be "NO" because it is that far out of control that it would take a miracle to sort out the problem. What am I talking about? BAD MORSE!

I agree completely with the above paragraph but in Summer 2011, I bit the bullet and decided that I had to be proactive rather than complain. With a lot of negative comments from colleagues that it would never work, I started the Morse Crusade at www.themorsecrusade.g5fz.co.uk with the idea of trying to change the out-dated methods of learning Morse for Trainers and Students and hopefully work the bands without having to struggle with slow Morse and bad operators.

Before biting my head off about my attitude to Slow Morse, I consider acceptable Slow Morse to be around 12 wpm, which I will explain later; any slower Morse than this is usually Bad Morse and the learner will be struggling to achieve a higher speed of Morse and their sending will tend to be corrupt.

A fireman will tend to quickly attack a fire at the seat of the fire to put it out quickly making it easier to extinguish the outskirts of the fire. In Morse, one of the biggest problems can be pointed to Morse Trainers and old Morse Operators continuing to train people using methods that have been proved over the years to be derogatory to the student. I have discussed this in more detail on the Morse Crusade website.

There are too many operators without any real experience in teaching Morse, now trying to promote it with detrimental results because they do not understand the problems that some of the old methods can cause, mainly because of lack of research in teaching methods and inexperience in resolving students' learning problems.

When the RSGB were considering a Personal Morse Certificate of Proficiency, I argued with them that the certificate should start at 12 wpm and NOT 5 wpm. (It seems my arguments fell on deaf ears.) We are not the only country with the 5 wpm tests, and talking to amateurs from other countries who took a 5 wpm test, they have said that they wished they had never taken it and generally most

of them have had to retrain from scratch to achieve a higher proficiency.

Since starting the Morse Crusade I have had numerous enquiries by email from slow Morse operators wishing to achieve a higher proficiency but struggling and finding it very difficult to get over the 10 wpm barrier not only in this country but also America and Australia. (This is a common factor when learning slow Morse.) I have successfully mentored them by email and they are all above 12 wpm and increasing their speeds and most importantly ENJOYING THE MORSE EXPERIENCE.

Ian G4XFC at work

A recent success is Carl, who first contacted me via the Morse Crusade to enquire if there were any Morse Mentors in his area who could help him with his Morse. Replying to his request, I informed him that there were no mentors in his area but I would be willing to mentor him by email if he wished. To get a better idea of Carl's situation, I asked him to tell me where he was with Morse at the moment and what methods he had used to get there. Carl was doing 6 wpm with a struggle and had been learning for 2 years without any success and I was his last resort. Two weeks after our first contact, Carl was doing 12 wpm and trying to increase his speed to 15wpm. His story is told on the Morse Crusade website. This was all done through exchanges in emails.

So what's my secret? Well we have to return to the cradle when we were little babies and trying to utter our first words without success; our parents battered our poor little ears with the words "Mummy" and "Daddy" until we were able to say it properly much to their pleasure. This was later increased as we learned more words like "Chair", "Food" and "Dummy"; we were learning a language through listening and the repetition of words.

I try to persuade people that Morse is a language and not a code and you will not learn it with your eyes, but with your ears and your brain. Listen to the rhythm of Morse and enjoy the music.

My first experience with Morse was 47 years ago when I joined the Royal Air Force as a Wireless Operator Special and later becoming a Special Operator Telegraphy, being a Morse Intercept Operator during the Cold War. I was taught Morse using the Koch Method at 20 wpm and achieved a speed of 30 wpm in my time in the RAF and I still advocate the Koch method though the Farnsworth method is similar.

What's my answer to people that tell me they would like to learn Morse and would I teach them? My answer to this is "No". I will help them to learn Morse and also help them overcome any problems during the learning process. I will also recommend the software which will help them achieve good results but teach them—NO! Why should I sit at a key sending Morse to them when a computer can do the same thing? I then get asked about learning to send Morse, for which I advocate that if you learned Morse properly then the sound of the Morse is in your head and it is easy to transfer that embedded sound onto the key. (This is where slow Morse fails and ends up in badly sent Morse as the proper sound is not embedded into the brain.)

Recently when mentoring one of my club members, we were talking about the reflex action of characters embedded into the brain. He said "*It is easy to know which characters are embedded as they just seem to pop up in front of you without thinking*" and this is what you need with all characters to be proficient with Morse.

Learning Morse is a personal thing that can only be done by the person wishing to learn the language and willing to put in the time and the hard work to achieve a good result. Dedication to learning is important and at least 1 hour training a day is essential, though it can be broken down to two half hour sessions, one in the morning and one in the evening. One problem I do come across with students is that they are trying too hard, stress themselves out and start to struggle. You should be relaxed when learning Morse as you will certainly not learn if you are stressed out; giving Morse a break for a few days and relaxing will usually fix any problems you are having.

Most people struggling with Morse are usually Slow Morse Operators and my advice to them is re-train from the beginning using the Koch method. It may seem like a pain as they already know the Morse Code, but what they don't know is the Morse Language which needs to be a reflex action. Thinking about Morse is BAD! If you have to think about certain characters or count dots and dashes, you will never achieve a reasonable Morse Proficiency.

Koch program settings, to learn Morse from scratch?
- Character Speed 18 wpm
- Word Speed 12 wpm

This may seem fast but we are trying to limit the thinking time. Remember that thinking is BAD and if you miss a character, put a dot on the paper where the character should be and carry on. Don't think about the missed character, as you will lose more than 1 character if you think about it.

My definition of a good Morse Operator is one that is relaxed and enjoys using Morse, whose sending does not have to be 100% as defined in the book, but is easy to listen to without struggling. Every Morse operator has a different way of sending, or a "Fist" on a straight key, as it is commonly called, and you can normally recognise an operator by his Fist. (I send Morse with a Scottish accent/fist.)

If you would like to participate in the Morse Crusade, then visit the website where you can check out my views on Teaching and Learning Morse, and we do need mentors to make the bands cleaner.

Ian G4XFC, FISTS #13276, Founder of the Morse Crusade
Website: www.themorsecrusade.g5fz.co.uk

Active Elements   www.active-elements.org

Kelvin Marsh, M0AID is bringing together resources for disabled radio amateurs in a new web site to be found at www.active-elements.org. Working with Quentin, GW3BV and Chris, G5VZ, Kelvin is publishing accessibility evaluations of amateur radio equipment, spoken word manuals and audio demonstrations.

Kelvin says, "Blind and partially sighted radio amateurs often use standard equipment that might easily seem impossible to operate. They can be incredibly resourceful but do need to be informed about what's available. Amateurs with other disabilities also need to know if equipment is accessible or whether adaptations are available to make it so. Active Elements attempts to draw together experience and knowledge gained by disabled operators from all over the world and make it available to anyone with an interest."

Kelvin's team began work on the site during last autumn, building a range of evaluations, reviews and recordings plus links to resources available on other sites. The site is fully accessible and combines an attractive visual design with clear text while also being optimised for screen reader software like Window-Eyes or NVDA. Development of the site continues and the formal launch of Active Elements was 1st March 2013.

If you would like more information on Active Elements, please call Kelvin on +44(0)1823 412 087 or email kelvin@qti.org.uk.