



CW Today

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CW revolution

A review of the CW situation in Australian amateur radio over the past year provides for good news: there is most definitely a CW revival underway! The first half of the year, one could call CQ on 40 m for hours without getting a response, but by the end of the year the situation has very much improved. The 43 year old Sunday morning CW Net continues to attract good participation, and I had the honour of presiding over a new record number of participants in session #2173 on 2nd August, with 32 stations participating. In addition there is now a week-day evening short CW net on 7051.2 at 0830Z and some other CW nets including practice sessions run by Michael VK2CCW on 7115 LSB currently Mondays and Fridays at 0900Z. Latest schedules are on the www.vkcw.net site.

Perhaps a world first in amateur radio history – certainly since I've been a listener since the 1970s – Australian radio amateurs have successfully established a real CW Calling Frequency on 7050 kHz with some 60 stations using it on a regular basis, with the number constantly growing. This operates in similar fashion to the former maritime radio telegraphy CW calling frequency 500 kHz. A weekly CW news broadcast is sent in Morse code every Saturday afternoon at 20 wpm with repeats on Sunday morning at 17 wpm and Monday evening at 14 wpm in each case on three frequencies simultaneously, the schedule and the text of past bulletins is available at www.vkcw.net/qst – as far as I

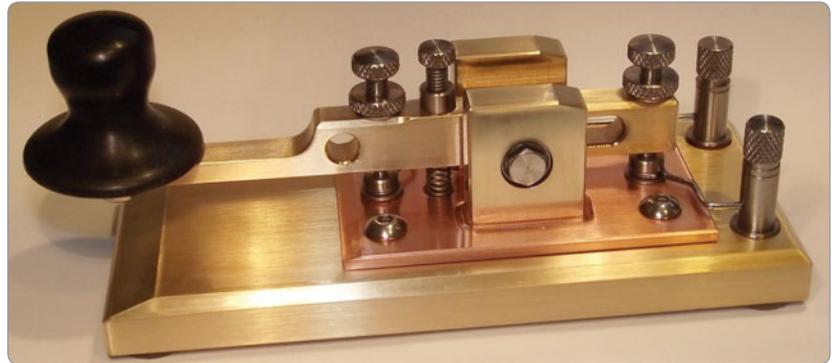


Photo 1: One of the many beautiful keys hand made by George VK2DLF who is one of the few current day Morse key producers in the world, and perhaps Australia's only regular manufacturer. Due to a backlog of orders and the slow speed of production, it may be a while before he can however take on new orders. Check his website www.morsekeys.com for more information.

know the only other CW bulletin in the world is the ARRL one broadcast from W1AW.

Certainly, with the requirement to know Morse code dropped from most amateur radio examinations around the world, the CW mode declined in popularity but in Australia at least, this situation is now reversed with the decline having halted and turned around. This is clearly evident listening around the bands during the past six months with increased usage of CW, more operators using the mode and more activities outside of contests. I am absolutely sure that because of the wonderful ability of human beings to talk with our fingers at speeds of up to 40 wpm or more even with a mouthful and the enjoyment that sending and receiving CW brings to those who have mastered the art, this unique mode of communication will always remain and may continue to grow.

Hardly a week now goes by without us coming across a new returnee or even newcomer to CW and I've had the honour of being the first QSO in a great many years for several old timers who are now

returning to the mode. The number of high speed operators who are happy to send very slowly for newcomers to CW is also growing, and especially on Tuesday and Thursday nights from around 0830Z for an hour or so, many QRS (slow speed) contacts can be made around 7050 kHz on 40 m. Some of us are also using our bug keys more often, and with great thanks to Drew VK3XU my favourite key is now the Simplex Auto, an Australian-made bug key by Leo Cohen, from the 1940s.

Talking of keys, in this 4th issue of **CW Today** our thanks go to John VK4TJ who reviews three of his Morse keys as follows.

Junker – The “Taste” of fine CW

German speakers will appreciate the pun. More correctly “Joseph Junker Elektroapparatebau Fernmeldetechnik GmbH model DBGM”. By consensus, this was “the one to beat” before a young upstart named Pietro Begali appeared on the scene. Perhaps it still is, if the Lotto Commission has been a bit remiss in contacting you

about your good fortune. Out of production for years, the Junkers are a regular feature on eBay, but even better bargains are to be had if you happen to have wooden shoe-clad feet “a terre” in der Nederland’s, where they routinely show up at ham car boot sales for about 15 Euro.

As you might expect for typically German craftsmanship, there is nothing junky about Junkers! With almost micrometre-like adjustments for both gap and spring tension, if you cannot find settings that result in smooth, crisp CW, rest assured that the problem is with you, not the key!

All is not sweetness and light with the Junker, however. Bucking the trend towards roller bearings, the pivot is a simple tapered pin/convex cone which is both more critical to adjust and subject to greater wear and “gunking”. The phenolic contact insulator is prone to breakage and misalignment.

I’ve saved the worst for last, however: The Junker employs a (relatively) complex “teeter-totter” tension adjustment assembly, which, in my view, adds considerable inertia. “Why has my code speed dropped by 5 wpm?” was my reaction after giving the Junker a solid workout on day one. Although a fine piece of precision craftsmanship, sadly, you will not be setting any new land speed records on this baby...

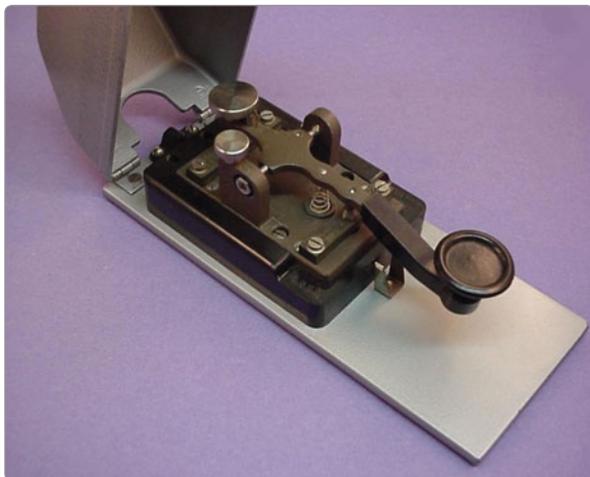


Photo 2: German Junker key.

Czech Army Key – The ugly duckling with swan-like grace

With typical cold war ruthless efficiency, not 1 Kcs was spent on the aesthetics of this rather homely key. With 90% of the works encased in a Bakelite “bathtub”, it’s not even apparent how it works! One is given the option to “Prijem” by lifting up on the knob or “Vysilani” by pressing downwards. Presumably, we want the latter.

In my quest for ever higher straight key code speeds, all I really ask of a key is:

- Fine gap control that stays put once adjusted
- Fine spring tension adjustment that stays put
- No lateral slop in the pivots
- No torsion of the main bar

“Is that all?” you say! “Mortgage the homestead, then, because what you are asking for don’t come cheap!” Wrong! The bad Czech comes very, very close indeed, and I think mine cost me the princely sum of about \$30 AUD, delivered to my door from the UK.

Do take the time to personalise the spacing and spring tension – as delivered, the key was only useful for cracking macadamia nuts betwixt the contacts. I’ve now got mine screwed down so tight that a single sheet of paper dropped on the operating console has my duckling attempting to Vysilani the old country, all on its own.

Cheap, great performing – there’s gotta be a catch, right? A couple of minor nits to pick, really:



Photo 3: Czech army key.

- The base. Well, there is no base, really. Eastern bloc transceivers tended to give the key top berth, with a weird, slide-in clamp arrangement that would be difficult for a capitalist war-monger to replicate. Resign yourself – you are going to be providing stability control by means of your non-sending hand. Fortunately, life over the bathtub is quite comfortable. Whilst you are at it, glue some shelf “non-slip” material to the base plate.
- If you are a “thumb and two fingers” knob-gripper like me, the knob is really too close to the bathtub. I have to send with the key at a 45 degree angle to accommodate my 00 gauge fingers. Even then, it is only JUST adequate.
- At VERY high straight key speeds, I think some ops “assist” the spring return with a bit of upwards motion. Get carried away with this on the bad Czech, and you might find yourself prijeming, when you wanted to vysilani.
- There ain’t any more. Δ Mike, G0CVZ sold thousands of these keys worldwide, but, alas, all good things come to an end. With that many out there, however, just put out the word that you are after one – some are bound to have fallen into the hands of non-believers or CW wannabees.



Photo 4: Russian "tiny" key.

Russian "Tiny" Key

No nomenclature appears to exist to describe this little comrade except "tiny" or "small". Rumour has it that these never saw military service, but rather, were produced en masse to allow children of the revolution to practice dobbing in capitalist oppressors for fun and (tsk!) profit. If you don't have a child, you might well need to obtain under lend/lease to adjust this key, as your

pre-metric double-naught gauge fingers will fail miserably at this task. If you should ever find yourself in a "sorta-SOTA situation" where every gram of baggage has to levitated at great personal cost to your aching backside, this key might just fit the bill. It *is* possible to send quite good, albeit QRS code on the wee beastie, but as a shack sloth main mill? Nyet!



Silent Key Doug Dowe VK3FDUG



The M&DRC has lost another old timer and as with the passing of some others we again have lost a lot of oral history of Australian RADAR in WW2.

Douglas George

Dowe was born on 5th December 1923 and grew up on a farm near Tenterfield in the northern NSW tablelands. As a school boy he befriended a local saddler who was known as 'The True Tenterfield Saddler' and who also owned the local radio dealership. He taught Doug some basic radio principles after the shop closed in the evenings.

Doug was enthralled by being able to pick up distant radio stations after the sun went down. As he became more knowledgeable he built a crystal set and then built a radiogram for his parents.

Like many farmers sons he was sent to a boarding school, St Johns Armadale, New South Wales. Here he won a scholarship to Mentone Grammar School where he matriculated.

Doug got his first job with Standard Telephones and Cables in Sydney assembling and testing radio equipment. When WW2 broke out, he joined the RAAF and was sent to the Radio School in Point Cook. Doug was top of his class so he was transferred to Richmond NSW to learn the new secret radar technology. By the time he completed the course he was a sergeant. During the war he had postings to various Early Warning sites in Australia, New Guinea and Borneo.

After the Japanese surrender Doug served with British Commonwealth Occupation Forces to investigate Japanese Radar systems which he believed were inferior to ours and British equipment. Doug continued to serve in the RAAF and was seconded to the US Air Force where he received instruction to train others back home in the newest developments in Radar and the Ground Control Intercept equipment. He worked on numerous RADARs and reached the rank of Warrant Officer. Doug left the RAAF in 1960 with highly regarded qualifications. The CSIRO Division of Atmospheric Physics at Aspendale snapped him up for a senior technical officer position. Here he built and continued to develop a specialised atmospheric research RADAR. After 20 years there, he left and formed his own consulting business.

When he retired he made time for restoring old gramophones and radios. Doug was a foundation member (number 2) of the Historical Radio Society of Australia and restored many a Bakelite radio to its former glory in appearance and working condition. He was also a member of the Australian Historical Telephone Society.

Earlier on when Television was first broadcast in Australia he converted about 300 American sets to the Australian standards; TVs sets were much cheaper in the US. He also found time to build two Holden station wagons from parts he acquired.

Several years ago at a RAAF RADAR reunion, Rolfe Fox (SK and an M&DRC member) suggested that Doug come to the Moorabbin and District radio Club. Doug had serviced some amateur transceivers in the past and the Club had a few WW2 RAAF radio men in it. At this time he also joined the RAOTC and

thoroughly enjoyed reading OTN News and attending the luncheons.

Doug typically became quite involved and served as vice president of the M&DRC and obtained his own amateur radio licence, VK3FDUG, one of the oldest ever to do so. He took part in many of the Clubs activities including presenting several talks on RADAR and his WW2 experiences. He would often bring in a piece of hardware, usually from a WW2 radar set for an impromptu show and tell much to the enjoyment of the members. He rarely missed a meeting or a function.

Doug made a determined effort to keep fit. He did weight training at home to maintain strength and up to two years ago he used to swim in the Bay with his wife Sarah. Their favourite beach was at Timaru in New Zealand.

Doug retained a keen wit, an impish sense of humour and was a logical thinker with extensive knowledge. He could be very philosophical and spiritual. He was a man with great determination, to the point of being obsessive but he could also be kind and generous.

Doug passed away on 9th November 2015.

He is survived by his wife Sarah and children from his first marriage, Robert, John, David, Peter and Wendy and four grandchildren.

Rest quietly old fellow.

Ron Cook VK3AFW and Sarah Dowe VK3SD from MDRC

(Sec. Note: Written in collaboration by Sarah with Ron's help.)

