

NORTH SHORE ARC



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From The Secretary's Desk:

Here are some items contributed by members of the Club for our information:

From Ray VE3OUB:

January 8th 2004 ONTARS is 32 years old.

Check out: <http://www.tpn7055.ca/>

From Bill VE3CRU:

ARRL Kid's day was January 8th. There's another one coming up in June.

Check out: the ARRL Web Site

From Bill VE3CRU:

ARRL VHF Sweepstakes: January 24-26th.

From our Club Members:

From Howard VE3TYQ:

The Camp X web site:

<http://www.campxhistoricalsociety.ca/>

From Howard VE3TYQ:

Aerial photos of WW2

<http://www.evidenceincamera.co.uk/>

From Howard VE3TYQ:

Central States VHF Convention July 23-25th
Planned to take place at Humber College.

Tales from a newer HAM:

Comfortable Code.

Morse code isn't the easiest thing in the world to comprehend. It's probably the one thing that kept me from trying to get my License for so long. I can remember being told by HAMs that you had to practice; that you had to "hear" the music; that "all of a sudden" it would click. Well, in a way, all of it is true.

Here's a little story on how I achieved one of my life-long goals, namely getting my "ticket".

Thanks to a change in the type of employment I was involved in (I got a life of my own back), I had an opportunity to study for and pass the exams. Thanks to the Industry Canada for revising the exam structure to make it more attainable, I was feeling pretty good about the whole enterprise. Having more time to be with my family and do things around the house meant that I also now had time to do some things I really wanted to do. After reading the requirements for the 3 exams on the Industry Canada web-site I decided that I'd tackle the basic exam first, then the advanced exam next and save the dreaded Morse code for the final challenge. I figured that my interest in SWL and radio / electronics would be a help.

At the end of June of 2003 I purchased the study guide for the Basic Amateur Radio License at the local "HAM store". The local HAM store recommended Peter VA3PWH as an examiner. I talked with Peter about my plans and he indicated that they seemed more or less reasonable, but a little on the ambitious side. As I was starting out I told Peter that by year-end I wanted to have all 3 exams done. It was the discussions with Peter via email that alerted me to the fact that the Morse code test was only 5WPM.

While the basic and advanced exams weren't easy, they weren't that tough either, all it took was study time. It took about a month's worth of reading the basic guide and other reference books to prepare for the basic exam. In addition to the learning for the Basic exam, it took about 5 more weeks for prepare for the advanced exam, because it is more involved and because I had to do a lot more checking in reference books. A colleague at work who holds all 3 qualifications was a good source of information and encouragement. But truthfully, some of the questions relating to the advanced exam stumped him. At one point he asked me if I was pulling his leg with one of the questions. Even stranger still was that fact that I found the answer for one question in a very old HAM textbook from 1964. By mid-September I was staring down the barrel of the Morse code test.

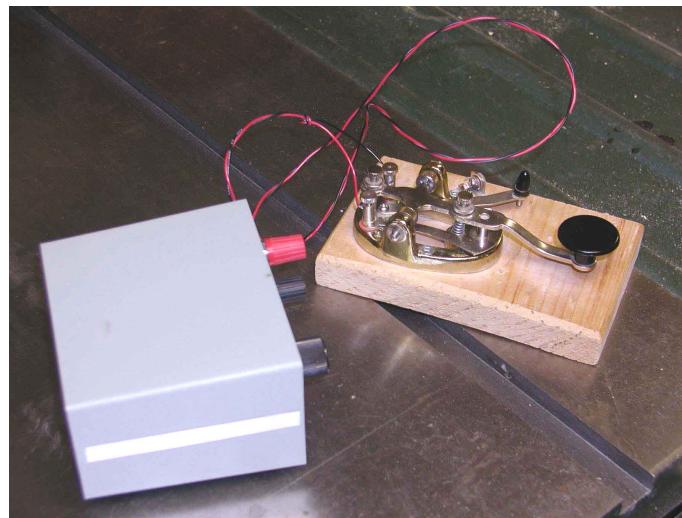
I printed off a copy of the Morse code tables and started to memorize the "dits" and "dahs". All of the sage advice of those who had encouraged me in the past flooded into my mind. One of the toughest things was "putting everything into Morse code", license plates, street signs, bill boards, etc.. My wife wasn't always that understanding when I appeared to be "lost in thought" while driving, especially when she was talking to me and I wasn't answering in a timely fashion.

I soon discovered that memory work alone didn't cut it. I also realized that with my receivers packed away or under "tons" of stuff in my workshop that I needed help. Help came from a discussion at our local HAM store where I got a MFJ Pocket Morse code Tutor. I found I could easily use it at lunchtime, at home, or travelling. I was pleasantly surprised at how quickly I picked up on "the code". In retrospect things went pretty well, although at the time I wasn't always that confident. I know some purists will not be impressed by this approach, but it worked for me.

My study regimen consisted of 20 minutes a day using the tutor to make sure I could identify the codes. The old saying about practice-practice-practice really pays off. As the year ticked away I started to get concerned that the goal I'd set for myself was as Peter said "a little on the ambitious side", but I soldiered on. I do know that the 20 minutes most days was a big help, only because it got me used to listening to code. Some days I didn't get the full 20 minutes in because I was tired or just couldn't get my ear. On those days I just skipped it. I also found that for learning code, I did better in the mornings. I've been reading that the KOCH method is perhaps a better way to start. I think I'll try this to get my speed up for the RAC certificates for higher code speeds.

Things continued to go well. My wife was very understanding (thankfully). I was still able to get things done around the house although not as quickly as she would have liked. Then the "random deafness" set in. I noticed that at the end of November I started "dropping" dits and dahs. It usually happened at the beginning of the character. H became S, O became M, V became U and so on. This became really frustrating. Because I was working on random words it was very tough and disheartening. I tried slowing the speed down, speeding it up, and changing pitch. Nothing worked. I stopped studying for 3 days. When I came back the problem had gone away. To say I was relieved would be an understatement.

Now when it came to sending, I really set myself up to fail. I guess that's the point of this message. Give yourself every advantage! You can see in the picture below what I was working with. It's OK when you're calm and relaxed sitting down and trying to set your dits and dahs to the right lengths while sending recognizable letters. BUT, this first picture is absolutely the worst thing for taking an exam. When you're already nervous and trying to send clean code, trying to hold on to the block of wood on top of everything else is really tough. Things were REALLY tense when I was taking the send portion of the exam. You can just imagine what it was like chasing this around the kitchen table (try not to laugh too hard eh?).



The second picture is the result of the constructive comments from the examiner, my own quest for sanity and clean code. I can use my arm to hold the board and the key so I can work on my "fist". It may not be used for long, as a friend of mine is trying to get me to use a keyer. But, I'm told I should be able to get to 12 WPM with a key, maybe even 15 WPM. So I'm going to stick with this for now.....



Here's what I've learned:

1. Practice, practice, practice
2. If you're having a bad day stop and come back at it tomorrow (I stopped for about 3 days in a row once. Things got way better after that break).
3. Work at a higher speed than is specified for the test (this was a godsend for me when it came to test time).
4. Work at a higher character speed than is specified for the test (this is big help too for combating nerves).
5. When practicing for the test, work on longer sets of words than the test specifies... (if they ask for 3 minutes try 5) .
6. You will really get tired and frustrated chasing the key all over the table. Find a way to hold it in one place....
7. Once you're sitting comfortably the rest is easy.
8. Accept the fact that you're going to be nervous for the exam. Don't let it stop you.
9. Try as much as possible to arrange to take the test when you're at your best. Take every advantage you can.
10. Your local HAM store (Durham Radio) is a good place to go for help. Because it was summer time, I wasn't able to take advantage of the Club and the fall of 2003 was very busy. Now that I'm able to attend

more Club meetings I can see the great resources available to new HAMs.

Oh, by the way. I did pass the exam on December 15th 2003. If you want info on the board, let me know. If you've got a better board, let me know. I'll take all the help I can get.

Ken
VE3RMK

From The Chair in the Shack.

Yet another month has slipped by in frigid conditions. We all are anxious to see warmer weather, even skiers. At the last meeting you were treated to some recollections of past events and to a graphic display of the wildfires in California. I'm hoping that you enjoyed it even with my miscalculation of the Moiré patterns that result from discrete bands on a screen and discrete dots in a projector panel.

As winter winds on, we need lots of operators for the Guides on the Air event. GOTA is one of those events where we have a chance to "wow" youngsters and promote at least understanding of our hobby if not some recruits too. Amateur radio is at a crossroad where we either increase public awareness and participation or perish as our spectrum becomes desired by commercial firms who can make money and can persuade government that commercial use will benefit more people than ham radio can. In some respects, they are correct. The cell phone and the wireless network are busy helping countless citizens to be more productive and to keep in touch more easily. Both border on the ham bands and both will feel a need for more spectrum.... soon.

How can we fight the trend? First, we can show the public that our use of the bands is enjoyable and is accessible to them too. Second, we can demonstrate that we are available and our skills are unique in the field of emergency communications assistance. Third, we can show that hams have invented a great number of concepts that enjoy commercial success now and that we continue to invent techniques that nobody else has yet thought of. Yes, that is a difficult job, but we must be working on that or sell off our rigs now.

Nobody else can contact so many far-away places with no service charge as hams can. Nobody can show how to talk over as much as 100 km with a simple handheld device with no monthly fee. Nobody can send e-mail from a device, which is battery powered in the middle of a grassy field. We can do so much and yet we don't draw attention to ourselves. I think it is about time that we all get into

the act and let people see what it is we do. We can only do that if each of us makes an effort to be involved in activities that demonstrate our skills. We have a strong core in our club that does just that. We need even more members to try out the activities. Several are not only enjoyable but take place on weekends and in good weather. Sure, a couple make us glad to be indoors (like GOTA), but even that is pretty cushy once we set up. Make a promise to yourself that you will be out more often for events. It is great fun to have folks thank you for being a ham.

73 de Pete

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I don't know about you but I'm planning to attend at least one of the February events, even if it's just to help step up. I'm looking forward to hearing from the Club members who attend these community outings. Jot down your thoughts and impressions. Take a few pictures (of Mike even). Then you can send them to me for inclusion in the Bulletin for the next month.

And, if you have the time and the motivation, why not submit an article on your favourite antenna or a good home made tuner.

I'd love to get some of the "neat" things from Club members front and center for the whole club to see.

Your humble scribe.

Ken
VE3RMK