



## Morse code

You may have read the *Getting Started* article about Morse code on the RSGB website and still pondering, is Morse code for you? A listen at the bottom end of

most HF bands tells you it is surprisingly popular, even with the advent of weak signal data modes. Well, it is the original weak signal mode and can be fun - that's why.



On my return to the hobby, I was surprised just how much Morse was still used. But time for my first admission. After forty years of not using Morse, I found it very difficult to re-learn. It was particularly frustrating as after I'd passed my test in the mid-seventies (not *my* mid-seventies), I'd helped train others to pass theirs.

Back about two and half years ago, I'd spent some time on the HF bands with admittedly a simple wide bandwidth receiver just trying to listen to CW transmissions but found it very difficult to concentrate on just one signal and thought, will I ever be able to master it again? So a bit demoralised, just what made me improve my CW? I'd built my first QRP transmitter/receiver for 20m and guess what mode – CW. My Morse key was made out of a broken hacksaw blade and some pieces of wood to make the base. (I have upgraded a little since).



I had seen the G4FON Koch trainer online but didn't know if this would benefit me and there were plenty of other Morse software downloads online. It wasn't until I'd met up with a few other amateurs through clubs and rallies that I ventured to give it a try. Now, I'm not a very disciplined student at the best of times, I found I would practice a little and gradually I could listen to CW signals albeit at a moderate speed and understand most but my concentration would lapse and dismay would set in. Anyway, madness got the better of me one evening and I called an Italian station with my 1W radio and he replied. You'd be surprised how much you concentrate under those circumstances. There was a real sense of achievement, one - the little radio had worked, two - I had my first CW QSO for

over forty years and three – I had his details to put in my log book. I still occasionally use the G4FON trainer for practice. I have since found an RSGB video with a presentation by Ray Burlingame-Goff, G4FON that may be of interest to you at <https://rsgb.org/main/blog/front-page-news/2019/01/18/two-more-convention-videos-online/>

Could I have made it easier on myself, yes. The *Getting Started* article quotes the book and CD by Roger Cook, G3LDI, *Morse Code for the Radio Amateur*, could well have helped me further at that point. I note that Roger prefers the Farnsworth method over the Koch method. Who am I to argue with someone of Roger's experience? Have a read of his training insight on the RSGB website at <https://rsgb.org/main/operating/morse/certificate-of-competency/appendix/>

What else could have helped me? Well, I'd found the ARRL code practice files online at <http://www.arrl.org/code-practice-files> and made use of them but what I hadn't found was GB2CW – and that's an embarrassing second admission. Where can you find the broadcast schedule? <https://rsgb.org/main/operating/morse/certificate-of-competency/gb2cw-broadcast-schedule/> Find a broadcast that will work for you. I will now be making use of our own service, again for practice.

I mentioned the word fun. Gradually, I became more confident as I focused on just making simple contacts. My receiving speed improved and my concentration improved a fair bit but it's not perfect. So I do enjoy it now, though I do marvel at the skill of some of the CW operators and want to improve further.

This leads me to CW Boot Camps, I must admit it sounded a bit ominous to me but I do believe when we are all allowed to meet again, they will again play a big part in helping people learn Morse at all levels. I learnt Morse in a small group with other beginners, then progressed to another group and it was a good way to learn. There was a good article on CW Boot Camps in June *RadCom* and what makes for a good CW Boot Camp, so keep an eye on announcements and may be we'll meet up.

Finally, I happened upon *Lockdown Morse* by Matt, MOPTO on the RSGB website at <https://rsgb.org/main/blog/news/coronavirus-updates/cv-support/2020/04/14/lockdown-morse/> and followed the link about the course onto YouTube. May be that appeals to you?

I hope my journey - even though as a returnee to CW - inspires a few of you to have a go even if you haven't used Morse before. Persistence is the key! (Pun intended)