

CHARLIE'S WHISTLE
by
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It's been about 30 years since the FCC took the 11 meter band away from amateurs in order to create some exclusive space for a new and user simple service called "Citizen's Band". It would be a huge understatement to say that the folks in Gettysburg had no idea what a monster CB would become. Hams at the time were severely bent out of shape by losing frequencies to what quickly became an outlaw band. All that was needed to raise blood pressure in the ham shack was to tune the station receiver through the 27 MHz region. The language, lack of discipline, rock crusher signals, and self styled experts expounding on the virtues of an absolutely flat SWR or their newest amplified echo microphone (beep) was all old timers needed to hear. With that, they walked out of the shack muttering colorful adjectives about the FCC and its vision of a citizen's radio service.

All that was then. Today, CB has long passed its popularity peak and settled into an unlicensed, unregulated and questionable corner of spectrum that attracts a seedy mixture of pirate operators speaking in many languages and from many countries. Listening to their chatter sketches the outline of ham wannabe's who can't/won't study enough to obtain a license but enjoy pretending, like so many kids at play mimicking their adult heroes. Of course, problems arise because they don't know what they're talking about much of the time and think far more of their own competence than they should.

Now, if all former CBers who since have become hams haven't stopped reading this story yet, I must hasten to say that thousands of our most active and proud hams of 2001 have come to us from the ranks of CB. To their great personal tribute, although they enjoyed communicating on CB channels, they recognized the need for more legitimate privileges, opportunities, heritage and prestige. Hopefully, some Elmer introduced them to amateur radio and possibly they found their own way. Regardless, they found a VE session and joined our ranks. Congratulations and welcome! We're glad to have you all with us. In a very genuine way, CB is a major entry path into our beloved hobby.

Old timers like Charlie were licensed long before FCC suffered its lapse of judgment and conceived of CB radio. But enough time has passed to heal most of the wounds inflicted and present hams don't resent CBers too much any longer unless or until a non-radio person sees their mobile antenna in a parking lot and asks if that is "for his CB?" or a former CBER says his "personal" is Ed. The hair on the back of the old timer's neck bristles and it's all he can do to not bark something rude at the well meaning but uninformed person. Ex CBers are well advised to leave their CB trappings on 27 MHz when they upgrade.

ARRL's President, Jim Haynie, has signed a memorandum of understanding between amateur radio's ARES and CB originated REACT. Jim's daring leadership vision makes formal the wink and nod relationship that the two emergency radio services have lived with for many years. President Haynie has illuminated the path between the two groups and may, over time, serve to unify and synergize our services into a larger and more efficient pool of trained and adaptive communicators.

One evening just before Christmas, something happened to Charlie, which was a first for him. He was actually asked to help a group of CBers. Charlie's telephone rang last week just before 8 PM. The caller introduced himself as the president of a CB club in a town about 30 miles away. He introduced himself as Joe Goodman, a.k.a. JoJo, "Good evening, Charlie. My son is at MIT, studying engineering with a friend of yours named Brian. The word that I hear is that you are the best speaker on amateur radio around here." Charlie laughed and said, Not quite. Brian tends to exaggerate. He's a special friend and on his way to being a great engineer. Tell your son to follow him and he should do very well. But, how can I help you?"

Joe explained that some of his members want some straight scoop on ham radio. He explained, "Not the official stuff that you can read on the Internet but just discussion to answer questions we have. I guess you guys in ham don't think too much of us in CB. Well anyway, we're going to have an 'all holiday' party just after New Year's and invite the members of a few other CB clubs. We'll have a couple hundred there. I was thinking that time has come for both of our groups to see if we can work together and figure out how we all

might benefit from some coalition of our members. You might want to start some classes to teach us code and theory and we might want to help your guys in emergency preparedness."

It sure sounded like a good idea but Charlie had some reservations. "You should be congratulated for your courage and insight, Joe. But, I'll bet not all your members are in favor of this kind of coalition, are they?" Joe admitted that he was right and pointed out that he was darned sure that all hams weren't in favor of befriending CBER's either. Charlie chuckled and assured him that was safe to assume. None the less, it seemed like an idea whose time may have come. It was at least worth a try even if some won't see it that way.

They settled on the date, time and place for the meeting. Before ending the call, Joe told Charlie that he would e-mail the agenda so there would be no details forgotten. Charlie placed the phone down and thought of what he had just agreed to. He wondered if this would be too much for him, despite his experience. After several minutes, he picked up the phone and called the Signal Hill District Emergency Coordinator. Russ owned one of the big trucking terminals on the turnpike and knew one or two things about CBERs and truckers. Of course, he was a ham also. Russ wasn't a DXer like Charlie but they both love CW. His interests were focused mainly toward CW contesting, like Sweepstakes, Field Day, etc.

Charlie and Russ discussed the idea for well over an hour that evening. Russ liked the plan but he saw several opportunities for Charlie to come up short, when compared to the successful history he is used to chalking up with his usual audiences of hams. After all, this large crowd may actually be unfriendly to a big DXer ham. Especially one like Charlie with gray hair and from a different generation. It was getting close to 10 o'clock and Russ suggested that Charlie stop by his office in the morning to finish up their talk. Charlie agreed and took ole' Rufus for his walk before heading for bed. This routine gives both of them time every night to unwind before sinking off into dreamland. Rufus looks forward to this time for more than the biological needs it satisfies. He actually cannot settle down unless he gets at least one tour around the tower and a trot down to the big pine tree by their neighbor's mailbox, about a half mile in all.

Charlie slept very well considering all that was on his mind. He awoke at his normal time of 5AM and headed for the shack after a quick stop at the coffeepot for a caffeine pick up. Tuning the low end of 40-meter CW is Charlie's morning ritual. It's a rare morning that it doesn't provide an interesting contact for him. The hours just prior to dawn are magic, exhibiting rapid change and strong grayline paths to the dusk regions on the opposite side of the earth. With seasonal changes moving in opposite directions at these points, the optimum path terminal points are always different. You would think that after so many years of grayline study, Charlie would have this down to a routine and getting on the air would be boring. Not so at all! When you add in the sun's effect and the variable incidence of ionospheric reflection, no two mornings are ever the same. That's why amateur radio is magical for thousands of devoted hams.

After an hour or so, Charlie saw the sun's brightness building in the eastern sky. Usually at his location, that signals the peak of the morning window for grayline signal strength. The beam was looking over the North Pole, the direction that has highest potential for interesting DX. He swept between 7.000 and 7.035 quickly and then more slowly back down. At 7.020, he heard a strong warbler. It was a steady carrier that persisted for about four seconds. The strength was characteristic of a signal affected by polar flutter and was bounding between S5 and 8 on Charlie's meter. When the carrier went off, he sent a question mark and his call letters at about 30 wpm. Then he just listened. After another few seconds passed, he heard "QRK Charlie? de Martti" Charlie sent "Q5 OB. Whr R U?" All he heard was "P5 testing QRT nw 73".

Oh my Gosh!, Charlie thought. Am I dreaming? Was this really Martti Lane in North Korea? P5's sunset was about four hours earlier. He was so strong! It was probably a pirate but he knew me. That's possible, I guess. Heck, I'm on 40 every day....they ought to know me. He had a good fist like Martti. Was it really him? We'll just have to wait and see if OH2BH shows up from P5. Charlie listened for another half-hour before heading for the kitchen to replenish his coffee cup. His faithful pal, Rufus was sitting there waiting for his walk and Charlie didn't break tradition. He took his coffee with him and grabbed his warm jacket. The two headed out into the brightening morning.

They walked for nearly an hour, enjoying the new day and smelling the fresh chilled morning air. There was no wind and the hilltop was silent as usual. All this while, Charlie was wondering if it was really Martti in P5 that he had heard. What a pileup that will be when he finally starts serious legitimate operating.

Well, the evening of the holiday party arrived and Charlie got there early. As suggested, the crowd was large, easily a couple of hundred. Charlie found himself surrounded as he poured a cup of coffee. He expected to encounter a few hostile people and sure enough, the first comment was far from one of respect, "Well, are you the big ham that's going to honor us tonight?" Charlie took a sip of coffee and calmly turned to face this person. Charlie is quite tall, well over six feet and when he turned, he saw an arrogant smirking face on a very short and wide fellow with at least three HTs hanging from his belt. Each of the units had long antennas on them. He was so short that the HTs nearly dragged on the floor. He was quite a sight to behold. Rather than just laugh, Charlie smiled and said, "10-4 Good buddy. I guess I'm the big guy without an HT on his belt. That must make me stand out." That unexpected greeting disarmed the group assembled around him into a laugh. Then, Charlie extended his hand to each one with a smile.

The meeting was a pleasant experience for everyone, including Charlie. He described his contact that morning with someone who might have been a bootlegger claiming to be in North Korea. He pointed out that DX contacts around the world are common on the ham bands but illegal on the CB frequencies. A few snickers and hoots were heard. There are large groups of CBers who consider themselves DXers like Charlie. I'll bet they haven't heard of Riley Hollingsworth yet. Over all, he had expected an adversarial shouting match during his entire talk but instead, sensed a sincere desire by most attendees to work together with hams, especially in emergency preparedness. For sure, there were a few outbursts by one or two militant folks who have no room in their heart for compromise, least of all with an old time ham. None the less, Charlie came away feeling that with the new experience, he had grown that evening and ham radio's future may well be assured by the support of the large contingent of CBers who with a bit of encouragement will easily join the ham ranks.

We never know how and from where solutions to problems will be found. It's true in every day life as well. It's a very good reason to be open to all options. Don't come to a conclusion until all your input has been considered. You'll be pleasantly surprised just as Charlie was.