

CHARLIE'S WHISTLE
By Bob Beaudet, W1YRC

It's been a very short night for Charlie, getting up at 5 today to tune 40 meter cw, the same way he has just about every morning for a great many years. But, last night was different from most others, he was invited to meet and speak with a good sized group of Viet Nam veterans and before he realized it, the post-presentation story telling which inevitably develops in this sort of setting, continued until well past midnight.

You might think that Charlie would sleep in this morning but like a clock, his eyes always snap open on queue and his thoughts turn to DX regardless. As he took his coffee cup into his comfortable shack and started his slow sweep of strange weak signals below 7.025, he felt unusually tired with only a bit more than three hours sleep. He was sure he would take a nap after lunch today. But, maybe his residual adrenaline from last night will carry him through the day.

Forty meters appeared quieter than it had been recently. He quickly checked twenty and fifteen and found little activity there either. This early, fifteen would be closed but twenty should show more activity. Band conditions must be off today. He flipped on his backup receiver, a Super Pro, and tuned it to WWV so he could catch the propagation numbers at 18 minutes past the hour, about 10 minutes from now. That gave Charlie enough time to listen in on the few QSOs going on. There were some watery sounds coming from the north...some UA9's and an HL but signals were very weak. He recalled what any successful old timer DXer will tell you, that declining band conditions discourage the casual DXers. They're the ones who need S9 or better signals to work any station, never seem to know who the pileup is for, what call area is being asked for or where the DX might be listening. These operators drive plenty of DXers to question why they're there. When only serious DXers tune around, bands become very quiet, giving the indication of a dead band because serious DXers **NEVER** call CQ or make unnecessary transmissions, do they? Serious DXers spend most of their operating time listening, transmitting only when necessary. Other ops seem to follow the reverse proportion. Serious DXers listen, listen, listen and since technology made using regenerative receivers obsolete; no one has ever heard the signal from the DXer's receiver.

WWV just announced the latest propagation numbers; SFI:197 A:26 K:9. Ugh! Terrible conditions for 10 and 15 meters and not too good for 20 either. Forty will be a little squirrely but signals will get through if the noise isn't too high. The best kind of band conditions for Charlie. Of course, just about any day of DXing is perfect for Charlie. He's also a fisherman and claims there's no such thing as a bad day spent fishing. I guess that's why he feels as he does with what some consider bad conditions. But, our old mentor isn't as alert as usual because of last night. His eyes and ears are half open. As he tuned from one weak warbly signal to another, his mind remained on last night's meeting with the vets. Golly, they're interesting people and we owe them a lot for what they've done.

I suppose, it might be best to start the story at the beginning since most good stories start there. One evening just after dinner a few weeks ago, Charlie answered his telephone, ready to greet another overly friendly telemarketer. Instead, he was greeted by an extremely deep and articulate voice, "Good evening, Charlie. I hope I'm not disturbing you," the party said to Charlie. Of course, being the gentleman that he always is, he assured him that he was not being disturbed even though he expected the next line to speak about his investment strategy, long term nursing care or donating to the society for protection of aardvarks. Instead, the caller explained that he was an attorney working with a large group of Marine Corp. veterans and he was told that Charlie knew all there was to know about communication in Morse code. Charlie chuckled and assured him that his information was exaggerated but regardless, was curious to know what this stranger was leading to. Like most of us, Charlie is cautious of lawyers asking questions for very good reasons.

After a while, the gentleman gave his name as George Youngblood. He said he was a full-blooded Choctaw who served them in a variety of matters such as the one concerning this call tonight. He went on in his deep professional voice; "The Navajo Code Talkers of the Second World War are a very proud group of Marines. Their numbers are few today since the youngest of their survivors are well into their mid 70's."

Charlie interrupted him, “Mr. Youngblood, excuse me but didn’t you say you were from the Choctaw Nation? Why then, are you representing Navajos?”

The caller chuckled and said, “Yes, that’s right. They told me you were sharp. You caught that right away, didn’t you? Yes, Charlie, you probably know that the Choctaw Code Talkers in World War I were the first Native Americans to be used in strategic military applications. A Company Commander named Lawrence in the Mousse-Argonne campaign near the end of the war overheard two of his men speaking in their native Choctaw and upon further investigation, learned that the battalion had eight Choctaws deployed in different companies. They were quickly gathered up and reassigned to communicate sensitive messages between company and battalion commanders and the front lines. At that time, traditional communication systems had been compromised and the Germans knew everything that was happening, even what Americans had for rations and when relief watches were deployed. Literally, within hours of their reassignments to handle communications in Choctaw, the Code Talkers turned the tide of battle and gave US troops the upper hand, quickly driving the Germans back and leading to eventual victory. There are many who believe that we were heading for certain defeat in the Argonne until that single turn of events.”

Charlie was becoming more intrigued with every new word he heard from this fascinating, almost charismatic gentleman. He continued, “The Navajo Code Talkers of World War II are generally well known but most don’t know that other tribes like the Choctaw and Cherokee had Code Talkers as well, whose service was sought in both World Wars.” Mr. Youngblood pointed out that it is widely held that had it not been for the Choctaw success at Mousse-Argonne a quarter century earlier, it is doubtful that the strategic wisdom of using Native Americans in WW II for message encryption would have ever been contemplated.

He went on to explain that Mr. Philip Johnson, the son of a missionary to the Navajo tribe, recommended the use of Navajo Code Talkers to Marine Corp. Major General Clayton Vogel. Only after demonstrations of the technique and the simplicity of the nearly fool proof system to the brass, the Navajo Code Talkers were born in September 1942. Again, only by chance and a narrow thread of coincidence, were our forces able to embrace the method for foiling the Japanese in every major Pacific campaign, including Guadalcanal, Tarawa, Peleliu, and Iwo Jima. The 5th Marine Division Signal Officer, Maj. Howard Connor is quoted, “Were it not for the Navajos, the Marines would never have taken Iwo Jima.” Those are extremely powerful words about an event recognized as virtually synonymous with the US Marine Corp, and now we learn that but for the work of Navajo Code Talkers, the stars and stripes would not have been raised on Mount Suribachi!

Charlie listened patiently to the entire interesting story and became increasingly curious why this lawyer has picked him to call this evening. He decided to indirectly get to that point by asking, “When did you graduate from law school, George? Where did you do your undergrad work? Do you know the young man from the Choctaw Nation who is currently studying Electrical Engineering at MIT?”

These questions made George laugh heartily and asked, “Who do you think suggested that I contact you, Charlie?” There was silence and then George told him, “Your friend Brian’s room-mate, Stan Youngblood is my nephew. His father is my brother. I was speaking with Stanley just last week about coming to the Boston area for this meeting and would like to take my favorite nephew out for dinner. I told him that we’re holding a special meeting of surviving Navajo Code Talkers and want to feature their skills as secure communicators in a special presentation event for the Marine Corp veterans and all other service vets of the Viet Nam era. The Navajo people are proud of these fine men and want present day heroes to see them for the honest role models they actually are.”

George explained, “It was Stanley who told me about you and what his room mate Brian thinks of you. I couldn’t find a better person to help me show our veterans the value of code.” Charlie was pleased to hear about Brian and the connection to Stan Youngblood. Brian was teaching Stan CW when he last heard from him. He asked, “George, did Stanley happen to mention that Brian was teaching him code? How is it coming along?” George replied, “Well yes, he did talk about that. He said Brian got him up to 15 words per minute. That’s pretty good, isn’t it?” Charlie assured him that it certainly was, especially since both students were primarily studying in a very intense EE program that demanded all their time.

George remembered the other questions and added, "Oh, I was in the Harvard Law class of 1968. I completed undergraduate studies in communications at our tribal college in Oklahoma and earned some small scholarships to Harvard Law School. I earned the rest of my way through as an announcer for different media advertising agencies in Boston. God gave me gift of a clear communications voice and I used it to earn a good education." Charlie knew he had heard that professional voice before. Now, he knew where it was. It was a remarkable voice, strong and deep. The kind that you would remember. Even deeper than James Earl Jones and his famous expression of "CNN".

Charlie agreed to attend the veteran's meeting after George described the program to him. He will show how the Code Talkers baffled the enemy totally and illustrate how the Navajos needed to be proficient in Morse Code as well as creating new vocabulary for things like aircraft, submarine, tank, bomber, torpedo plane, and many more objects unknown in the North American plains. George will end with reflection on the fact that communications by code is still regarded to most reliable under marginal operating conditions and introduce Charlie to help demonstrate skills in sending and receiving CW with some of the Code Talkers.

Vets of all ages and sizes heavily attended the meeting and it was plain that many could never fit into their uniforms again. After enjoying a terrific dinner, it was even more certain. During the dinner, Charlie and Mary sat at a table of WW II Army and Marine vets. The men enjoyed talking with each other, some of whom hadn't seen one another in years. Mary and Charlie were enjoying listening and speaking only briefly, like the good DXer does. They listened to several stories being told at once.

George Youngblood approached the podium. He's very tall, was dressed in a perfectly tailored suit but most noticeable was his very long wavy gray hair. It was tied in back and draped over his shoulders. His facial features were strong and had piercing dark eyes. He looked over the audience slowly and gradually; the roar of after dinner chatter subsided further and further. Eventually, the entire room of several hundred people was quiet. George looked straight-ahead and powerfully called, "GAH WOL-LA-CHEE BE TKIN A-KHA". Several elderly Navajos sitting in front behind "Reserved" table markers responded with different words and phrases. Charlie and Mary had no idea what was said, of course, but remained politely quiet.

George Youngblood, in his extraordinarily deep voice said, "I just said the name of what has brought us together tonight. In Navajo, I said Rabbit Ant Deer Ice Oil. The first letter of each word in English spells RADIO. Because there are many more words for each letter, Navajos can spell English words in many different ways. Our Nation is proud to have contributed our peoples' skill and resourcefulness to serve our country's military needs. Please show your appreciation to the Navajo Code Talkers here with us who just responded to my call."

There was thunderous applause for the ten elderly men who stood to acknowledge the ovation. When it subsided, Mr. Youngblood introduced the district Commandant of the Marine Corp to present medals and certificates to these brave men who wrote history. When the ceremony was over, a table was brought out and placed next to the speaker's podium. It had two straight keys on it facing each other, a code oscillator and connecting cables to the PA system.

Mr. Youngblood again looked out into the audience in Charlie's direction. "Ladies and Gentlemen, one of your country's most proficient operators of Morse Code, a skill which our government as well as the governments of most other countries has deemed obsolete will demonstrate how Morse Code is used by sending and receiving messages with our Code Talkers. Most people don't know that Navajo Code Talkers actually used Morse Code as well as voice transmissions to exchange their own created code. Add to that security clearances as high as could be defined at the time and you have the remarkable men we honor here. Now, let me introduce a young man who hadn't even started school when these Navajos were communicating commands and reconnaissance orders in World War II. Please come up here, Charlie."

There was polite applause for this stranger the veterans were meeting for the first time. Charlie was overwhelmed by the honor being bestowed on him to be on the same stage with men who single handedly

directly contributed to the allied victory by simply using their native language, a most powerful weapon indeed. As he arrived at the podium, he shook George's hand and thanked him. George used both hands to return the greeting, "We are ones honored, sir."

Three of the Code Talkers, dressed in native clothes approached the table and sat as Charlie also sat awaiting a signal to start. One of the Navajos reached over to his straight key and sent, "Hello Charlie. How's DX?" Charlie was surprised and laughed. He sent, "The bands are always good for a DXer." The Navajo laughed and turned his key over to another who sent, "What are the Red Sox's chances this year?" Charlie grinned and replied, "Same as always. Good until All Star break, then (BT BT) wait till next year." The last Navajo sent, "Charlie, we are pleased that you honor us this evening. Thank you from the Navajo Nation." Charlie nodded to his counterpart and sent, "It is a pleasure, my brother. CW lives. AR."

The evening was memorable in many ways. The war stories lasted well into the night and early morning. Exchanging intelligence by messaging is an ancient form of art, used by Egyptians and Greeks, many centuries ago. Our modern society has dictated it to be necessary that we communicate certain vital information in manners and by means not easily penetrated by opposing interests. The true expertise and beauty of the Code Talkers' system is its extreme simplicity, reliability, versatility, and impenetrability. A motion picture titled, "Windtalkers", starring Nicholas Cage was being released as this story was being written. The movie is based on the Code Talkers and emphasizes how vitally essential our command felt it was to prevent any Code Talker from falling into enemy hands. Whatever measures necessary would be taken to prevent that from happening.

Code Talking will eventually die with the last skilled Navajo some day and many among our ranks as Amateur Radio Operators believe that proficient communication by Morse Code is already as much as dead. With luck, I and everyone reading this story will be long gone before that prophecy is realized and none of our ranks will operate on the bands using code to communicate. CW Lives!