

CHARLIE'S WHISTLE

By

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As many of us have been doing lately, Charlie has been reading up on what the agenda items for WRC 2003 were and how various member countries might be leaning to favor their own needs and interests. His primary personal interest is to follow what affect its decisions might have on his favorite bands, especially 40 meters. All segments of our Amateur Radio spectrum are seen with great concern these days when so many deep pocketed commercial interests and influential politicians seem to have their hands buried into the overall process of spectrum harvesting. Naturally, none of us have any desire to give up any space and at the same time, we'd love to see new allocations for propagation tests and new communications challenges. Charlie has read that the 7 MHz allocation is the big-ticket item on the table in Geneva and of course, we all know he's more than a little interested in that band.

Our 40 meter allocation here in Region 2 which includes North and South America as well as Hawaii, Johnston and Midway Islands is different from the rest of the world, which is designated Regions 1 & 3. The entire 40-meter band in Region 1 is only 100 kHz wide and Region 3's upper allocation from 7.100 to 7.300 kHz is shared on a secondary basis in Australia and New Zealand. It's surely open to question about secondary usage in general and expansion of the band edges.

As this Charlie's Whistle story was being written in mid June, the members of the actual WTC conference had just begun their work. There are several agenda items to cover and it should take them a full month of long days to complete their work. Charlie was personally sad to see noted as an almost inevitable action, the removal of CW as a qualifying element to operate below 30 MHz. Administrating agencies such as FCC may retain the CW requirement for a while but eventually, it's widely felt certain that they will drop it if WRC acts to do so.

Charlie was lying down on his living room couch one evening recently, reading some lengthy documents about IARU processes and agendas submitted from the Region 1 and 3 delegates. Golly, he jokingly thought as he flipped through the small print of the many pages, "These lawyers must be paid by the word." Then he realized that they may actually have been paid that way and he wondered how many of these pages and legal fees could be eliminated if they simply got to the point. He closed his eyes for a moment or two just to rest them when the telephone rang, surprising him. It was his friend Mike excitedly reporting that the WRC had taken our bands away. He said it was just announced. "When they decided to take away CW as a requirement to operate below 30 MHz, they voted to take away the CW bands as well. They decided that CW had become obsolete! They're deciding next what to do with the upper end of all the HF bands! Can you imagine this happening, Charlie?"

Charlie was speechless! No, he couldn't imagine that happening. It was outrageous to even contemplate. Charlie asked Mike just exactly what he heard. Mike replied, "Charlie, wait till you hear what they're going to put there. They auctioned off 40 and 20 meters to broadcasters in all three regions! Amateurs will also use most of the phone bands below 30 MHz on a secondary basis with broadcasters."

Charlie could feel his pulse and blood pressure climbing and pounding in his ears like a drum beat. Then, he bellowed into the telephone, "Well, what in tarnation are they deciding to do with the low end of the bands, Mike?" He paused and replied, "Well, in their infinite wisdom, they've roped off the low end of every band for every other digital mode except CW. They're allowing FSK, PSK31, Pactor, Amtor, all of them but not CW! They said they were voting to allow only progressive modes and not obsolete ones."

To say that Charlie was in shock was a great understatement! He was enraged! This was idiotic! CW is a narrow bandwidth digital mode with superior features over the more complex and computer dependant modes. The beauty of CW is in its simplicity and reliability. How could they be so short sighted? What morons these people are! He was wondering who he could call first to yell at. No one he thought of seemed high enough. Then he wondered how long it would take to get to Geneva? He asked Mike, "Well, who from the US was speaking for two thirds of a million Amateur Radio licensees here in the US?" Mike replied that the FCC attorneys were in charge.

“WHAT!” Charlie bellowed. He swung his arms over his head in frustration. He felt something shaking his arms and heard, “Charlie...Charlie...wake up, dear. You’re having a terrible dream.” He opened his eyes and saw Mary who was holding his hand. Charlie had indeed been dreaming. None of this was true, thankfully. He quickly realized that he had simply dreamed what most CW loving DXers and contesters really fear most, the loss of their favorite mode and their favorite bands. Mike hadn’t called and 40 meters was still allocated with CW space. None of this actually took place other than in Charlie’s imagination.

What Charlie’s nightmare brought into realization was that without a team representing all of us and drawn from our own ranks of Amateur Radio operators, our fate could very well be decided by bureaucrats or politicians motivated by whatever influences they deemed suitable to their needs or expedient to their purposes. We would have no say in the band planning nor would we likely have much future at all as hams.

Fortunately for us, the United States team at WRC-03 is made up of experienced and trustworthy Radio Amateurs from the ARRL, which serves as the International Secretariat for the International Amateur Radio Union. They prepare themselves very thoroughly for these conferences and actively legislate for retention of our spectrum and maintaining sense in its administration, while keeping pace with technology. Trusting this authority in the hands of any team other than the one empowered surely would be unwise.

But, the large majority of Amateurs in the US are not ARRL members, leaving support of the League as well as the WRC-03 team to the 155,000 members to carry the burden for all 680,000 licensees. That’s fewer than 1 out of 4. Hardly seems fair, does it? Charlie is a Life Member of ARRL and feels that if they do nothing else but serve as our representative within the IARU and to the FCC, they would be worth every cent of the \$39 dues they ask per year. As Charlie says to the nay sayer’s of the League and membership, If not them, who?