

## CHARLIE'S WHISTLE

By

Bob Beudet, W1YRC

Do you place a high value on your Amateur Radio license? Sure, you do. Nearly everyone who has worked for the privilege to do something he or she loves to do such as operate radio equipment or fly an aircraft or even drive an automobile does not take that privilege for granted. Without exception, our beloved mentor Charlie holds his license privileges with great respect as well. In his days of DXing, he's seen times when rules and regulations administered in other countries become entirely a political platform and in some cases, even become a life threatening issue. Burma in the 60s and 70s was so closed to the outside world that even though some of its citizens had government issued Amateur Radio licenses, if any of them were ill advised enough to actually transmit a signal, their life or their family's would mostly likely be placed in significant jeopardy. Fortunately, that situation has changed and now, obtaining an XZ call sign and license isn't an overly dangerous issue.

Recently, Charlie was reminded of just how much some people actually do to endanger their own privileges and by example, our privileges as well. About a week ago, he began one day in much the same way as any other. Before dawn, he slipped into his warm and cozy ham shack, carrying his coffee in one hand and flipping on the lights with the other. Rufus had just patrolled his yard while Charlie was waiting for the coffee to finish brewing its last drop into the pot. So, old Rufus was patting along at Charlie's heels waiting to crawl under the operating desk and nap until breakfast time. What a life this dog has... Someone actually coined the expression; "I worked like a dog" many years ago but one thing is certain, that person never lived on DX Hill or knew any dog like Rufus.

As Charlie scanned the low end of 40 meters, he heard the usual variety of signals, a couple of VKs, an HL, and an LU. In other words, the same sort of signals he hears every morning. Suddenly, a booming signal started calling CQ. It wasn't on a very clear frequency but no matter, he hadn't even checked the frequency by sending 'QRL?' as he should have done to see if anyone was using the frequency. This signal was huge, reading 20 to 30 over S9 on Charlie's very frugal S meter. The average strength of signals in this gray line propagation window is normally S5 to S8 and often S2 or 3 and less. DXers are used to listening to noise and extracting signals from it.

But this signal was way too strong to be DX. It had no gurgle sound on it or fading like other signals. He was sure that it was a local until the station ended his string of 20+ CQs followed by his call. He signed XZ2AT. That was Myanmar or what used to be called Burma. It's short path bearing is a little off due north. Regardless, Charlie instantly knew that this was impossible. This simply couldn't be a station in XZ land. He immediately started swinging his beam around as the station started sending and found that the signal peaked smoothly at about 225 degrees, well off any likely 'short' path to Myanmar. It could possibly be a long but crooked path azimuth but that's nearly impossible because of its extreme strength.

No, it was none of these. Immediately, Charlie knew this was a pirate or bogus station. The signal was just too strong, had the wrong sound, and came from the wrong direction. Charlie hadn't transmitted yet this morning and decided not to so not to announce his presence. This may be a local pirate and nothing would please Charlie more than to nail him. But, if the pirate heard Charlie or even suspect that another local was listening, he might shut down to avoid detection. So, silence was the best policy.

It was about 5:30 AM. He knew that his DX friend, Mike on the north side of the hill would be in his shack. He's as rabid a DXer as Charlie. Mike's place is only about 5 miles away but maybe a bearing check from there would let him know how much of a 'local' they were dealing with. Of course, if this were actually a DX station, Mike's bearing to the signal would be the same as Charlie's.

Mike always leaves the shack telephone bell activated and the bedroom bell deactivated so Charlie knew that he could call without disturbing his entire family. He's done it many times at this hour of the morning. Mike answered on the first ring. "Good morning Mike. Are you on 40?" Mike replied, "Hi Charlie. No, I was listening to 80 and then to 20 CW. Why?" Charlie responded, "There's a 'slim' on 7.010. Just swing your beam around and tell me where he peaks, would you?"

Mike said he'd be happy to. "XZ2AT" was working stations regularly; 4s, 8s, VEs, some So Americans. He wasn't working them very quickly. This guy wasn't very skilled in managing a pile-up and he was sending fairly slowly, not more than 7 or 8 words per minute. His fist was fairly slow and sloppy and he didn't show much skill or technique.

Mike's big 4-element 40-meter beam showed his signal peaked at about 200 degrees. Charlie pulled out a local asmathal map of the five county regions that the local sheriff's department had distributed a few years ago to track missing children and downed aircraft. He hand drew lines showing his and Mike's bearings. Their bearings intersected at a point about 10 miles west of Charlie's location.

After thinking collectively for a few minutes, Mike shouted, "Say, that's right where Alex lives." Mike explained that Alex was a new member in the club in Central City. He had volunteered to help teach the next tech class. He's a technician with Alcove Associates, the company that services the police, fire and EMS radios in the area. Charlie asked Mike the obvious question; "Do you think he's the pirate?" Mike hesitated for a moment and replied, "Well, it's possible I guess but I'd bet my Collins collection that it's not him."

Now, that's some confidence since Mike has a barn full of Collins gear. "Well, what's the plan? We can't just walk away from this," asked Charlie. Mike suggested that Charlie call Alex and determine for himself if he thinks we ought to start calling Alex a pirate. Both had the club's roster and his phone number. About the time they finished their work, the pirate called it quits also. He had been on the air for about 30 minutes and had worked at least 40 stations, some of which probably thought they had worked a new entity instead of Myanmar Slim.

Later in the morning, about 9, Charlie called the phone number listed for Alex. A lady answered. When Charlie asked for Alex and told her it was Charlie from the Amateur Radio club that was calling, she very politely said, "Oh Charlie, I'm sorry. I'm his, ...let's see ...what do you call me?... his XYL?" Charlie laughed and said, "yes, that's right." She went on, "Well, my name is Ginny and Alex is in Illinois going through some training at the Motorola Co. labs. He'll be back on Friday evening. Do you need him before then? I can give you his cell number." Charlie's primary question was answered by that information. The pirate couldn't be Alex. Regardless, Charlie said, "No, that's OK, thanks. But when he gets home on Friday, would you please ask him to call me over the weekend?" She said she certainly would and wished him a pleasant day.

Later, Charlie was helping Mary in carrying some preserves up from the basement when the phone rang. It was Alex. He started, "Ginny told me that you had called, Charlie. How can I help you?" Charlie explained that he shouldn't have called now. He didn't want to disturb his

training. Alex explained, "Oh don't worry. It's only a required refresher. I've had the course before anyway. I'm on a break now."

Charlie explained what had happened early that morning. He and Mike, a fellow DXer triangulated the location of the pirate to somewhere close to his home. He explained, "We were hoping you might have an idea who it might be. The operator had some CW ability, although not terribly proficient or fast." Alex said he had a suspect in mind immediately and asked, "Charlie, I'll be home tomorrow evening about nine. Could you and Mike come to my place for breakfast on Saturday morning about eight? I think we can put an end to this problem in short order."

The following morning was Friday and on almost the same frequency, the same pirate station appeared again, this time signing VU4AT. When an operation suddenly appears from a super rare location like VU4, you can immediately conclude that it's not the real thing, in fact it simply can't be. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands (VU4) are probably the rarest and most needed by DXers around the world. No one has operated from there in many years and all attempts to secure landing permission have been turned away. The Indian government has been absolutely adamant for years in denying anyone landing rights to the islands.

Why do some operators choose to operate illegally? Pirate radio operations are illegal everywhere. Pirates, bootleggers or "Slims" as they were labeled by the famous editor of the West Coast DX Bulletin, Hugh Cassidy, only bring discredit to our wonderful hobby. Violating rules in any country are never to be condoned and we never should validate it with a "wink and a nod". Pirate DX operators surely cannot profit from it, since QSL or other mail routes would only lead back to him if given correctly and that's certainly something that's not desired. Pirates customarily give false QSLing instructions as well.

Appearing as an extremely rare DX station must simply give these misguided operators a rush feeling of power and just for their own fun. But in these post 9/11 days, anyone in the US thinking that bootlegging like this is just an amusing prank truly needs some serious mental adjustment. The Homeland Security office can see transmitting false signals in these times as a most serious offense.

On Saturday morning about 5:30, the S9 +30 bootlegger appeared once again on 40 meters signing VU4AT. An enormous pile up was awaiting him this time. The word of yesterday's appearance had made the circle of astute DXers around the world. Of course, they knew better but they were following the DXer's rule of WFWL (Work it First and Worry Later). So many stations were calling that VU4AT didn't reply to anyone. Ridiculously, instead of just sitting there quietly until he could pick out a call, he called CQ again! The next pileup was huge and once more, he couldn't pick out any call sign. Being able to pick a call out of a massive pileup is a great art and only the most skilled operators can do this very well. VU4AT's operator was surely not one of them.

Mike pulled into Charlie's yard at about 7:30 to pick him up. Armed with some muffins and a couple of jars of wildberry preserves for Ginny and Alex, they headed for the Interstate highway and the short ride just about straight west from Signal Hill. As instructed, they took exit 14 and turned right at the third traffic light past the county line marker and looked for the address. Within minutes, they were pulling into the driveway of a beautiful large Garrison styled home. Charlie and Mike climbed out of the truck and headed for the front door. Alex opened it and greeted them with a warm handshake. He led them through the house to the kitchen where Ginny was filling a plate with toast and donuts. "Good morning guys," she called out as she continued preparing the table.

After getting settled and adding the blueberry muffins to the table, they talked about their neighborhood pirate. Alex said, "Well, we have this guy a couple of miles from here who calls himself Primo. We're not sure if that's really his name or just what he wants to be called. He's a fairly strange sort of guy, pretty big on himself if you know what I mean. He's a CBER and a member of the same CB club I used to belong to before I had my fill of that stuff. At some point, Primo decided to study to become a ham and he bought some tapes to learn the code. Some others in the club made fun of him and his plan to follow all those government rules. They called him a Boy Scout and Radio Cop because as soon as he started studying for his ticket, he tried to correct everyone's operating procedure and tell them how they should do and say things. Well, it didn't win him any friends and he didn't seem to understand why. About the same time, I picked up my Tech ticket and soon after, my General. Then, I quit the CB club."

Ginny had been sampling the blueberry muffins that Charlie brought along with the wildberry preserves while her husband was telling his story. As Alex refilled his coffee cup and took a pause from his report about Primo, she said, "Oh Charlie, these muffins are absolutely delicious. You must ask your...XYL..is that right?" Charlie smiled and nodded. "Yes, you must ask her for the recipe for me, please." Charlie pointed out that Mary's technique might have something to do with it because others have tried and can't copy them. Ginny said she'd surely like to try. Charlie wrote their home phone number on a paper napkin and gave it to her. He said, "Here, call Mary now. You'll probably catch her before she goes into the yard. Ginny said bye and smiled at getting away from all this ham talk and went into the den to make the call.

After everyone refilled their cups and plates, Alex continued, "Have you ever heard of freebanders?" Regrettably, both Mike and Charlie were quite familiar with freebanders. Alex said, "Well, these folks have been getting into DXing and expeditions lately. They all run lots of power, some several kws. I lay odds that the guy you heard on 40 meters is Primo." Mike asked if they could drive by Primo's place. Alex said he'd be happy to show you where he lives. He pointed out that he hadn't seen or spoken to him since he resigned from the CB club several months previously. Charlie and Mike assured him that would be OK since they had no intentions of speaking with him.

The three finished their coffee and headed for the truck. In just a few minutes, the truck brought the trio into view of a small white house with a very tall tower behind it. A four-element yagi was perched at its top. By counting the sections, the tower was determined to be 120 feet tall and the yagi was probably an 11 meter antenna, although viewing it so high above, they couldn't be completely sure. But, it was the most likely choice. They parked in front of the house next door and looked the place over. There seemed to be a few wires strung from the tower toward the edges of the property. They guessed the wires were slopers toward the west, south and northeast and as far as they could see, looked like they were about 125 feet long between large dog bone insulators.

The next door neighbor saw us and approached the truck. He asked, "You guys friends of Primo's?" All three answered no and they just want to see the antenna. The neighbor looked all three over and added, "I hope you're here to take it down." With that he walked back to his house.

Charlie, Mike and Alex were surprised to hear such candor from his neighbor. They drove forward to the house beyond Primo's and found another gentleman. They parked and got out of the truck. The gray haired neighbor was doing yard work, trimming bushes and cleaning up autumn deposits.

Alex spoke up, "Pardon me sir. Do you know if your neighbor is home today?" The gentleman thought for a moment and asked, "And who might want to know that?" Charlie replied for the trio, "We're Amateur Radio operators and had some questions for him." The man chuckled and asked, "Don't tell me he's interfering with your sets too! He rips up everything around here; TVs, stereo, telephones, even my weather station." Charlie didn't feel comfortable talking further, offering what they believed to be true about Primo. There was no way to tell how this gentleman was connected to Primo.

They just looked into the back yard and studied that 120-ft tower. The neighbor invited them into his backyard; "You can see it better from my garden back here." They all walked together. Charlie offered his hand and said, "My name is Charlie. These are my friends, Mike and Alex. We're all hams." The neighbor shook Charlie's hand and said, "I'm Fred Aldrich. I retired as a power engineer 12 years ago. I watched him putting this tower up a few months ago. I told him that he did some things wrong but he just told me to mind my own business. So you know what? I did. When that tower falls into my property, he'll regret saying that to me. Oh, you asked if he was home. No, he's off to some sort of job at a rock broadcast station. I don't really know what he does there."

Alex asked Fred if Primo ever had received formal complaints about his interference problems. Fred nodded and said, "Oh you bet! I called the police a few times myself when he wouldn't stop. I know Joe on the other side of him did also. Also, the Springer sisters across the street. I'd say he doesn't have any friends around here."

Of course, all three knew that calling the police wasn't the proper remedy for RFI issues but they had become curious. "Did the police do anything?" He replied, "Oh they surely did. They served an order to him that he couldn't use his station whenever the neighbors were using their TVs and if they complained any more, they'd take further action against him."

Charlie asked if they had ever filed a complaint with the FCC and Fred said that as far as he knew, no one had. Charlie explained that they should since the FCC was the licensing authority for everyone who transmitted a signal in this country. What the police did is well meant but it wouldn't hold up since they have no authority over transmitter operations.

Fred said that he knew for sure that lately, Primo has been transmitting very early in the morning and he's been sending Morse code. "I guess he thinks we won't know it's him that way." Fred added and chuckled.

Before leaving, they got Primo's last name so they could verify whether he had any license when they got to an Internet access later. All three were certain that he had no license at all. The Internet name search verified that. The basic CW he had learned was obviously part of the study Alex knew about.

Charlie and Mike reported what they had found to the FCC through their e-mail address, [fccinfo@fcc.gov](mailto:fccinfo@fcc.gov). Of course, they could have called them just as well at 1-888-225-5322 (1-888-CALL-FCC). Within a few weeks, the pirate operation had stopped and Alex reported that Primo was advertising his tower for sale on E Bay. Further, Alex learned that Primo had also listed an FT-1000MP transceiver and a commercial Harris 5KW linear amplifier.

That surely explained a lot. Whether Primo was actually sanctioned by FCC or not isn't known. But that was certainly down the road for him if he had continued. Transmitting a signal without a license is illegal, of course. But, operating using false or misleading signals can really spell serious trouble. Bootleggers have been around since Marconi's days. In fact, Marconi himself

was probably our first bootlegger. But, we can't be too severe on him since there was no licensing requirement at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when he set up his transmitting station on Cape Cod in Massachusetts. He simply assigned himself the call MCC, signifying Marconi on Cape Cod.

Amateurs have dealt with pirates or bootleggers as long as we've had licensed hobbyists. Some folks simply ignore regulations and assume an identity, such as Marconi did. Then, they activate a transmitter and pretend that it's OK. No rational person can believe that it's permissible to ignore a license requirement and common sense would tell you that transmitting a signal over great distances simply has to be regulated by a licensing procedure.

The pirate operation in our story assumed the identity of a rare DX station. That is a very serious offense. It is malicious and deliberately misleading. There are serious fines and jail time sentencing awaiting perpetrators in this country. Freebanders are Cbers who operate above their channels and often operate in our 10-meter band using Amateur equipment, including KW amplifiers.

If you ever come across an illegal operation such as we've described here, you should never try to take action yourself. You can't possibly know what may be behind it. You can't be sure how the perpetrator will react if confronted. Let the professionals take care of that. You should document the essential information such as date, time, description of the signal, the frequency and if possible, a tape recording. Then, turn it over to the FCC via the contact information provided earlier.

The staff and friends of Charlie's Whistle certainly wish you all a very happy holiday season or hope you've had one, depending on when your newsletter is publishing this.