

## CHARLIE'S WHISTLE

By

Bob Beudet, W1YRC

Radio Amateurs, by their very nature, are inclined toward helping the public. During emergencies, amateurs are ready to serve. They train and prepare themselves at their own expense of money, time, equipment, even lost wages. You'll never hear a ham complain about it either. Its part of a ham's basic spirit, it seems, to stand tall to help to satisfy an urgent need in the community. One of Amateur Radio's major strengths and its defense to even exist is actually written into the opening words of Part 97 FCC rules, which govern us all.

[§97.1 Basis and purpose](#). says in part, "The rules and regulations in this Part are designed to provide an amateur radio service having a fundamental purpose as expressed in the following principles:

- (a) Recognition and enhancement of the **value of the amateur service to the public as a voluntary noncommercial communication service**, particularly with respect to providing emergency communications."

So, right up front in part (a) of paragraph 1 of our rules, it says in effect that we're licensed with the understanding that we'll be a value and service to the public's need.

Now, that doesn't mean that we can't merely entertain ourselves by rag chewing or competing in a contest. The FCC's intent is simply to state that we're expected to give back to the public in service to their needs. There's no measure intended, just a basic concept that we're expected to follow. That's the deal in return for giving us the privilege of transmitting.

Well, that's no problem, is it? Every month, the ARRL and club websites as well as QST and CQ magazines report on the service our fellow hams have provided during some natural disaster du jour in some part of the country. Hams are always ready to serve if and when needed. In fact, hams often become frustrated when regular opportunities to help aren't presented. As I said, it's in their nature to help. They will look for scheduled events like sponsored bike rides for charity or parades to enhance and maintain their proficiency as communicators and put their emergency equipment and plans to the test in preparation for natural disasters where efficiency of stations, operators and plans must be smoothly put to work in service to the community.

In past times of war and other major national and world events, when our military personnel were deployed to foreign lands, Amateurs and MARS operators exercised great resourcefulness in developing traffic networks, phone patches and dedicated circuits to serve the morale needs of the service person. How many thousands of phone patches were run for our Viet-Nam fighting men and women? It was countless. What about the regular Antarctic deployments of Navy and scientific teams back in the 60s and 70s? Many an old timer who is reading this will recall many, maybe hundreds of patches that he or she was involved in conducting for different people who could not call home any other way.

In those years, from the late 40s through the 70s, National Traffic System and MARS handled hundreds of thousands of messages into and out of APO and FPO addresses. There was such volume of messages that entire networks were built around servicing this type of traffic. Of course, during WW II as most know, US hams were taken off the air by a nervous government concerned with clandestine use of shortwave stations that might be used to aid the enemy and even the unintended use of stations acting as a beacon as the Japanese did at Pearl Harbor.

During the Korean and Viet-Nam Wars, our troops were served very well by thousands of dedicated hams and MARS operators who manned their club and dedicated personal stations like the one owned

by Sen. Barry Goldwater K7UGA in Arizona that was run on a twenty four hour, seven day basis at his own expense just to assure that message and phone patch traffic waiting overseas would always have portals to count on to get the words of our fighting men and women through to their homes and loved ones.

By the time of the Gulf War, the world had changed a great deal. By 1990, our fighting men and women could use e mail to communicate with their families back home, on a daily basis if they wanted to. They could surf the Internet to check sports results back home. Through the Internet, they even stayed in touch with their favorite talk shows via satellites and streaming audio in real time. The world of technology had done a major shift.

By the 90s, cell phones and long distance phone calling became so inexpensive that phone patches weren't needed or wanted. E-mailing was so popular and technologically superior that traffic handling went the same way. So much so in fact, that today the National Traffic System is under scrutiny and question by some of having become obsolete. Much of the message traffic generated today serves as practice material by networks that are dedicated to emergency communications practice.

Emergency Communications stations and networks are being criticized (by some who don't understand the need for practice material) as worthless and wasteful of resources. Things have come a long way, haven't they? Some call it progress.

Before Thanksgiving last year, Charlie's club was talking during a meeting about what they could do to be of service to the current military units that were deployed in Iraq. They were frustrated by not knowing what to do. Local reservists were being rotated to and from Iraq on a regular basis. From the looks of things, it appears that we'll have our military units over there for a lot longer than we originally expected. The old timers in the club were telling stories about the way things used to be. One member who was obviously out of touch with current reality wanted to set up a phone patch station to let the troops call home. No one supported his idea and he was upset, concluding that the club didn't want to do anything to help the troops. He just didn't understand the power of what's available today or how out of touch his idea was. The dictum is true that those who do not understand the past are doomed to repeat it. Of course, I suppose it's even worse when someone is stuck living in the past and can't do anything but re-live it forever.

Charlie's radio club concentrates on supporting public service programs and they spent most of one meeting talking about what they might do for our military personnel now that the traditional things hams have done in the past appear to have been OBE'd by technology. (OBE = overcome by events)

The club President held up the local newspaper. It said that a local reserve unit of Military Police had just returned from a year on active duty and expected to return to Iraq in rotation later in 2004. All the reservists' homes were within a 50 mile radius of DX Hill. One of the club members in the back of the room made a motion that the club hosts an appreciation party over the holiday season for all the men and women of the reserve MP unit who had returned home. In presenting his motion, he pointed out that we too often take the service of our military for granted and in doing this for them, we Radio Amateurs could provide service that they and their families might really appreciate.

It was a brilliant idea. There was some silence as many members were obviously deep in thought. Gary Thayer, a retired Marine Colonel with experience in Korea and Viet-Nam, spoke up after a little while, "You know, when we came home, the public didn't know how to treat us. Some thought we were baby killers and some thought we were enemy agents. Very few were

happy to see us. It was tough time to be proud of what we did and who we were. We actually were doggoned proud but we couldn't share it with many others. Even some of our families didn't understand." Gary thought silently for a while longer before saying, "I'd be very proud to second this motion. I'll also volunteer to contact the vets that are in the other clubs in the valley too. This ought to be a multi-club project."

The member in the back of the room amended his motion to say that this club would serve as organizer and contact other clubs to have them join in. The vote was unanimous to put a grand party together. Some members even applauded and everyone was pleased. Charlie asked if Gary could contact the MP Reserve unit's Commander and inform him of the plan and see if he can arrange to use the huge training armory for the event and Gary said he'd be proud to do so. Charlie suggested that we notify the best cooks in the area and ask them to warm up their ovens for some serious action. Many members laughed and commented that Charlie only needs to tell Mary when he gets home and she'll take it from there. Every good cook for miles around knows Mary and her cooking skills are legendary. Everyone laughed again and Charlie smiled knowing how true that was.

Just before Christmas, the event took place. It was far over the top of anything the fellow in the back of the room had ever envisioned when he made the motion. It was obvious that doing this was a huge hit. The MPs all came in their Class A uniforms and even some hams that could still get into their old uniforms came dressed in them. Gary looked as though he hadn't put on an ounce since he was discharged in 1980. In fact, he looked like a recruiting poster for the Marine Corp, with service stripes from his wrist to his elbow and six rows of ribbons on his chest, many with clusters indicating multiple awards of those recognitions.

The unit's commanding officer had sent invitations up the chain of command and lots of upper brass attended. They said that word of world class cooking expected to be present did nothing to hurt attendance either. Even the state's Adjutant General, a two star, came along with an entourage of press reporters and photographers.

It was a proud evening for our country's defenders as well as the hams and their families to be part of this. It was the right thing to do and it was done at the right time. We all have so much to be proud of and thankful for. Telling our young men and women how much we appreciate what they're doing for us gives them greater realization of what they're fighting for. Running phone patches and handling stacks of APO/FPO messages may have been OBE'd over time but saying thank you to our heroes and demonstrating your gratitude for their sacrifice to protect you and your home is still very much in style. Please say thank you to the next military person you see in an airport. You'll make someone very proud to be an American. No, make that two people. You'll feel great in doing it.

Our wishes go out for a happy and healthy 2004 to all of our Charlie's Whistle readers around the country.