

## CHARLIE'S WHISTLE

By

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Charlie has been licensed for a very long while, well over fifty years, in fact. Many readers of Charlie's Whistle are also in the multiple decade club. Regrettably, not every ham that starts off in our hobby with enthusiasm and boundless energy lasts very long. I suppose that the fall-out rate is comparable to lots of other hobbies so we shouldn't become too disturbed, I guess. How anyone who has been truly bitten by the ham radio bug can ever walk away from it is simply beyond my understanding, though.

Amateur Radio isn't just one hobby, I'm sure you'll agree. Some licensed hams have never transmitted a signal or even owned a radio. For them, it was a notch on their gunstock, merely an achievement that they wanted. The bug never bit them to progress further. Others enjoy operating and talking to people all over the state, the region, or the world. Still others like DXers and contesters have filled their station log books with thousands of call signs of people they've contacted, sometimes frequently, but have hardly ever exchanged more than a dozen words with them. Then, others prefer to design and build equipment. There are special interests by band, mode, operating purpose, and lots of other discriminators. The choices go on and on.

Truthfully, Amateur Radio is a hundred hobbies within one. Unlike golf, fishing or hunting that have a few special interests within them, Amateur Radio has avid followers widely differing fields; operating VHF or UHF repeaters, weak signal detection, EME, DX, digital modes, nets, contests, CW, mobiling, emergency preparation, restoration of boat anchors and literally hundreds more special interests.

Some even have subdivisions within themselves. For example, DXers might choose to achieve DXCC or WAS using QRP, less than 5 watts of power or on each of many bands or as a ham in California, N6WG recently achieved his WAS on 160 meters with every contact being QRP which is a very major achievement.

One may see it as a disadvantage by lacking tighter focus or offering a smaller selection of interests but actually, that's the great advantage of our terrific hobby. By offering so many choices, the nearly four million licensed Amateurs in the world can pursue their interests with minimal disruption from or to others. Think about it. What if we all liked the same thing within ham radio? It would be total chaos and self destructive.

With so many achievement standards to measure up to, some of us become quite open in expressing our impatience with others who don't measure up to some standard that others have reached. But, not everyone can or wants to copy CW at 20 words per minute or copy it at any speed for that matter. The World Radio Conference has come to consensus that proficiency in CW shouldn't be necessary for being permitted to operate a transmitter on any mode below 30 MHz. Eventually, the world's licensing agencies will all come to some sort of recognition of this agreement. Some HF operators look down their noses at VHF operators. It's all so unnecessary and silly in their view. Even Charlie who deeply loves 40 meter CW would agree that we should be delighted that all hams don't also love to chase DX every sunrise on 40 CW. As I said earlier, can you imagine the chaos if every ham you know plus every ham he or she knows got up at dawn every day like Charlie and cruised 40 meters looking for DX? If a single DX station called CQ, hundreds would answer regardless of its rarity. It's a very good thing that our interests are spread over so many different things.

No, as among baseball players, we all prefer to play different positions where our skills may be a bit better or where we have greater opportunities to play. Some like long path DX on 20, some like 160 QRP, some prefer to work friends on different repeaters, etc. There are different things for all of us to like. That's ham radio and why we love it.

Charlie attended the meeting of a club last week on the other side of the valley with his friend, Mike. He went over there for no particular reason other than Mike had called him earlier and asked him to come along. Mike had been Elmering a retiree who belonged to the club and he was simply curious to see what the club was into. It was an old club and had become quite large, well over two hundred members according to Mike.

The club met in the very large basement function hall of the All Saints Community Church. About fifty members and guests were in attendance this particular evening. The club President gaveled the meeting to order at 7:30 and asked guests to introduce themselves. Beside Mike and Charlie, there were four more guests and they said that they gave their membership applications to the Secretary a few minutes earlier. Both Mike and Charlie were well known by some club members who were DXers, but as expected, no one outside the DX world knew them at all. From all the HTs hanging from belt holsters, many appeared to be repeater users. With half of all U.S. licensees holding a Technician ticket, not knowing Mike or Charlie shouldn't surprise anyone, I guess.

The meeting covered the usual reports and discussion about Field Day assignments and a few PR events that they were going to support in the area; the Memorial Day parade, the MS 10K run, the simulated Search and Rescue mock plane crash being coordinated by the county ARES organization. By 8:45, all the items on the President's list were covered and after a last call for "items for the good of the order", someone moved to adjourn. It was seconded and immediately, everyone headed for the door. Mike had been told that lots of the members held their meeting after the meeting down two blocks at the American Legion Post. Several members also held memberships with the Legion and it was a long standing tradition to enjoy a few pitchers of ale after the meeting.

Mike asked Charlie if he cared to drop in and see what the informal grapevine had to say. Charlie was game and by the time they stepped into the Post, the crowd had become very loud with many pitchers half empty already. They sat with a few DXers who they knew and listened to the pileups coming from different tables. One group over in the corner seemed to be really ripping up everyone who didn't match whatever it was that they preferred, the nature of which wasn't at all clear. However, it surely wasn't contesting or DXing. That was all too evident. Mike and Charlie weren't offended by anything they said although if Charlie sipped too much ale, that could change. He'd be sure to behave.

One fellow who was especially vocal seemed to have it all figured out. From the size of his beltline, it was clear that he and pitchers of ale were good friends. Mike nudged Charlie and pointed out that the other six at that table were sharing two pitchers but this one fellow had his own personal pitcher which was already empty. He yelled to his friend at the bar to bring over a fresh one for him and then he said, "Oh yeah, all contesters can do is say that you're 5-9, QRZ. If they tried to actually talk with someone, they wouldn't know how to do it. The biggest joke of all is DX. Some rich yuppie spends a fortune of money people give him just to go sit in a lawn chair on a rock with a radio somewhere and pretend he's someplace else just to tell anyone that can get through that he's 5-9. Heck, everyone's 5-9 even if he can barely hear the guy. It's all a fraud just to collect money from suckers like those guys over there." He pointed at the table where Charlie, Mike and the club's DXers were sitting.

Most of the others in the room didn't say anything. A few laughed, probably not understanding what the fellow said or why. They simply wanted to be part of the crowd. One of the club's DXers just glared at the loudmouth and said, "Most people who knock what thousands of fellow hams enjoy have no idea what they're talking about."

Charlie and Mike told their DXer friend to please sit down before they started a bar room brawl. He just shrugged and said not to worry. "That loudmouth is Alex. He's the club know-it-all. He does this kind of thing after every meeting. If it isn't DXer or contesters, it's why Field Day costs so much or why we need to appropriate money for something. You may have noticed that he didn't open his mouth in the meeting. He waits until he gets here and is surrounded by his weaker fan club. Here, he has an audience he can control. He's been a ham for 25 years and has never gotten above Technician. The FCC's rule change a few years ago converted him to a General but he'll never go any higher unless more rule changes come along."

The wind-bag kept it up, picking on every group who worked to achieve WAS, WAZ, DXCC, IOTA awards or any recognition of operating proficiency. Finally, Charlie had heard enough and motioned to Mike that it was getting late.

Driving home, Mike and Charlie discussed the attitude they had just witnessed. Some hams find it necessary to criticize the preferences of others for some reason. Maybe, they feel it reflects positively on them since they're the one who revealed what they view as fraud perpetrated by others. Possibly, it's only their insecurity or lack of personal self esteem and they feel the need to call attention to themselves. One thing is for sure, it's a shame that some have so little understanding or acceptance for other people, whether hams or not.

In current societal interaction, the popular reference to this behavior is called intolerance and it applies to just about anything; different religious or political beliefs, ethnic and racial heritage, what sports team others follow, what college they graduated from, what branch of the military they served in, company they worked for, and as our friends witnessed this evening, even what part of Amateur Radio we prefer to enjoy more than another. Political correctness dictates how we are supposed to interact with our fellow man in just about every situation. It's unbelievable, isn't it?

Charlie believes that we shouldn't strive to "tolerate" one another. Would it make you happy to know that your neighbors merely tolerate you? Of course, I suppose that some hams that have a hundred foot tower, poor attitude and selfish habits toward his acquaintances should be grateful that his neighbors tolerate him. But in a better society, we should strive to understand and even try to support a fellow citizen's preferences whether different from ours or not. In our great nation, we must fight to the death our fellow citizen's right under protection of law, the freedom to choose and celebrate his or her diversity. I suppose, as we said earlier, life would be impossible if we all preferred the same thing. Although this may seem an oversimplification, realizing one another's differences and our willingness to accept them is certainly not oversimplified and in fact, it forms the basis of our democracy.

Mike and Charlie are, of course, serious DXers, and had been on the receiving end of those verbal arrows being lobbed at the Legion Post by the vocal DX critic and his cronies. The loudmouth didn't know them but likely assumed them to be just another couple of DXers since they sat with the club's DX group. In a large club like this one, sub-groups find comfort with others with similar likes and hang together. Smaller clubs don't have that luxury and potential members who are made to feel unwelcome at one meeting don't come to any more meetings.

They chatted more about how much they had actually learned this evening. In fact, the loud mouth correctly pointed out the way some DXpedition participants like the infamous Don Miller of the 70's can take advantage of their fellow hams and perpetrate hoaxes claiming to be "roughing" it on a rare island and actually was a thousand miles away sitting by the pool of a luxury hotel spending donated money of DXers hungry to generate activity from a "new one". He also pointed out the irony of what we call a QSO. "You're 5-9 on Banaba Island, QRZ" hardly equals a QSO. In a contest, we are even worse, "59 05" repeated thousands of times hardly equals thousands of QSOs. Charlie commented using these as examples that the fellow had a good point. He went on, "Other than to a DXer or Contester, this logic doesn't fly at all." Mike added, "Nearly every DXpedition I know about is careful to guard against the kind of fraud he talked about." Charlie added, "Yeah Mike, but we all have to be over the top in proving things are in order because of the damage done to DX by the 'good' Dr. Miller."

They talked all the way home and concluded that they learned quite a bit from their visit. It is essential that we try to always realize that not everyone gravitates to the same sub set of Amateur Radio that has fascinated them for decades. It's equally important to understand that expecting Charlie or Mike to become consumed with interest working grid squares on 2 meters during a summer meteor shower would be hopeless and isn't going to ever happen.

Our interests in Amateur Radio are all different and all are positively the ingredients that combine to form the greatest hobby in the last century. We need to relax our feelings aimed at criticizing the interests of others. Without all the pieces assembled, we wouldn't be able to praise Amateur Radio for its extremely varied diversity and "something for everyone."

Support your club and get ready for Field Day.