

CHARLIE'S WHISTLE

By

Bob Beudet, W1YRC

How long have you been reading Charlie's Whistle? Have you been following him and his family and friends from C.W.'s earliest columns here in your newsletter? Of course, I realize that may not be a fair question since your newsletter may not have carried it from its first yarns back in mid 1996. On that score, I have to honestly admit how incredible I find that last fact. In my most wild moments, I never dreamed that Charlie would be filling any space eight years after simply serving as a topic for a "one time" article. It was only a means of stirring up club activity in story telling and thereby creating timely, interesting and relevant Amateur Radio stories every month. I envisioned this as a project for my club's members to tell their own stories with a little writing help from the newsletter editor or myself, nothing more than that! Look at what became of this little project.

If any current readers wish to thumb through the early stories, they may do so by going to BVARC's website, <http://www.qsl.net/w1ddd/> on the Internet and clicking on the "Charlie's Whistle" button. The current stories from mid 2002 to the present ones are not uploaded to the website yet but if you want any story in MS Word format, just let me know the month and year and I'll gladly send you your own personal copy of the needed 'Charlie' file.

Creating these "Once upon a time...." stories has been surprisingly simple for me as well as being a great deal of enjoyment. I've never felt lacking for material, despite rarely knowing what I'll write about from one month to the next. In fact, the most difficult part of my monthly writing assignment is usually keeping the story from becoming a novel and too long for the available space in three newsletters in which it appears. Finding Amateur Radio story material in itself is very simple.

In 1996, our literary mentor, Charlie had just retired from his career as an engineering manager for a large government equipment developer and had plenty of time on his hands to pursue ham radio to his heart's content. Working was no longer getting in the way of his favorite past time, chasing DX and the pure pleasure of operating CW. Even though my own retirement came a few years after Charlie's, my experience over 50 years hardly compares to Charlie's but regardless, they serve as a fertile garden to generate basic ideas for story telling and tutorial pieces.

When this literary adventure began in mid 1996, sunspot cycle 22 had just ended and cycle 23 had just started. This present cycle is expected to bottom out at about the end of 2006 or mid 2007. DX conditions will decline until then and start improving as we move into the early part of the next decade when cycle 24 will begin to show some indication for how high it will travel up the index chart. History has shown that we're usually wrong when we try to predict any part of a new cycle's performance.

As Charlie has reminded us so often, some of the best DX you'll ever work will be at the bottom of the sun cycle, so don't store that linear away and take that tower down. There's still plenty of DX coming along. You might plan a visit to your friendly ear/nose/throat clinic however and get your ears checked and tuned up for maximum ability. You'll need all the hearing strength you can find to dig out the DX signals. They are generally weak at the cycle bottom and bury themselves in the noise floor like clams burrow themselves into the bottom of Narragansett Bay. But some of the best DX is there, maybe no better than S3 but it really is there.

Charlie can recall interesting DX experiences over nearly five sunspot cycles and claims that he's learned operating tricks at the bottom of every single cycle. Far more so than at the upper

halves of the cycles. Many different things present themselves at the cycle peaks, when DX conditions are wide open for all of us.

- More people are on the air, hence more QRM
- More inexperienced W/VE DXers populate pileups, hence unnecessary QRM
- More DX stations are active on all bands, hence more QRM
- Generally, all signals are strong. Much of the QRM is over S9
- Because of heavy QRM and many strong signals, working DX needs high power to get through pileups and QRM

When the cycle approaches minimums, different things happen and the game changes:

- Fewer stations become interested in chasing DX. Only serious DXers are active
- Generally, signals are weaker. We must listen more carefully.
- Lower power often allows us to get through because often, often only one station at a time is calling a DX station. You may be the only station to hear the DX
- You must learn the skill of listening “deep”. Look for the station that’s S3, under the Caribbean station that’s S6 who’s 500 hz away from the W4 that’s S9.

These methods are DX skills and knowledge that Charlie assures all his students that they can master, but skills very difficult to learn without relevant experience but entirely obvious to anyone who has worked DX through an entire cycle. Learning these skills will improve your DXing ability and give you more enjoyment. So, there’s the answer...

Survive an entire cycle and with hard work, not only will you likely have attained the upper reaches of DXCC but have become a skilled DX hunter. You will use what you’ve learned to attain membership in the Honor Roll when the next cycle racks itself up. For certain, your technique and DXing abilities will be much improved. Congratulations and thank you to all who have been loyal to Charlie’s Whistle since 1996. Charlie still has many stories to tell and we still have good band openings before cycle 23 bottoms out. Go listen for that new one you need, but listen deep and listen long. Avoid wasting time calling CQ. Spend time carefully creeping around and listen for watery weak signals that suddenly pop up. Stay and listen, ready to call.