

## CHARLIE'S WHISTLE

By

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The club held its usual holiday party again this year but they did one even better than usual. Instead of putting together its normal pot-luck buffet and invite members and their families, Charlie's board contacted the board of the other club across the valley from them to discuss holding a combined party. These other folks compete seriously with Charlie's club every Field Day and even try to recruit members away. All's fair in survival war, I suppose.

Anyhow, some members of each club grumbled a bit at the decision but the two boards took note that the grumblers were the same ones that always complained and rarely volunteered whenever anything resembling work was being discussed. The two boards met together for dinner at the VFW Post where several hams from each club are long term members and by the time they finished their lasagna and just about ready for a tray of homemade cannolis for desert, they had worked out a plan to hold a combined holiday party. They were also thoroughly enjoying their fantastic dinner. Charlie suggested that the two boards should meet more often if only to have dinner. Agreement with that suggestion was unanimous.

By combining their clubs' parties, they attracted about 75 people to the party, not all club members but all from members' families. It was held at the same VFW Post that the Boards used for their meeting. It was pot luck as usual but with so many people involved, the danger of having a green bean casserole overload was high. One of the club's Board members offered to coordinate who was bringing what. This is a difficult sort of challenge however since tickets aren't sold and he couldn't be sure he had contacted everyone. With more than his own club involved, he lacked the security of being able to simply call all the regular club members and sort out any problem. Despite his worry and whining, a good variety of offerings appeared on the tables. Charlie and Mary brought an Italian vegetable casserole, covered in melted cheese along with a few trays of cookies, muffins and mini cakes. As Charlie wheeled in the several boxes of food, several friends laughed. "Mary has done her thing again", someone was heard saying.

The pot luck dinner was great fun and there was plenty of talk and laughter. The majority of members in Charlie's club were old timers, active in building and collecting equipment, contesters and DXers like Charlie. The other club's members had some different interests such as VHF, radio controlled models, public service, digital modes and many other recent interests such microwave data transmission using 802.11 wireless LAN technology. The membership of the club includes many digital engineers who work in the dozens of new companies that have opened up across the valley, serving the medical, avionics and volume manufacturing industries. Charlie's club membership includes retired engineers from the defense industry who worked in radar, sonar, signal processing, etc. In other words, the two clubs were separated by a wide valley but by a generation as well.

Mary's food offerings were very popular, of course. That's something noticed by the spouses of the young digital engineers who weren't familiar with her legendary blueberry muffins. Mary, being the outgoing person she is was busy working the room, going from one lady to another, distributing cards that she had prepared on her computer with the recipes of each of her signature dishes.

Charlie, on the other hand, kept busy talking with the other club's members, learning more about their interests in ham radio. Oddly, he didn't find a single member who was the least bit interested in DXing, at least traditional DXing as Charlie knew it. At this stage of his life, little

surprises Charlie very much but this caught him in disbelief. He realized and was even happy that every ham wasn't an avid DXer like himself. Can you imagine the chaos on all the HF bands if every single ham with a General or higher ticket only chased DX every time he or she turned on the radio? It would be total bedlam. It's very healthy that every ham doesn't pursue the same interests. Thank Goodness that we don't.

Charlie sampled a little bit of just about everything on the several serving tables. There were a few purple smelly things that he passed on but took a taste of everything else. After a few returns to the table, he noticed Mary nearby and went to her. She was speaking with a smiling lady, talking about her craft work. When there was a pause, Charlie offered, "Excuse me ladies. I know I'll offend someone but I've sampled everything and vote for Mary's cooking." The new person laughed and said, "That's the right answer, Charlie. Mary has told me about how much you enjoy her meals."

Mary jumped in, "Thanks Charlie. Cindy is Steve's wife. Steve is the data transmission engineer over there", pointing to a tall fellow sitting with several others who eating some of Mary's cookies. Mary told Charlie that Cindy doesn't understand why Steve has a ham license at all. Cindy explained, "a few years ago, he studied a manual and then took a test. But, he doesn't even own a radio. Other hams I know about have radios and talk to other hams, don't they?" Charlie admitted that most hams he knows would fit that description but it's not a requirement to be a ham.

Cindy admitted that she's probably acting odd for a ham's wife but she said she'd feel better if Steve at least had a radio. Charlie said he'd go talk with Steve. By now, he was curious as well.

After filling another plate with cookies and a piece of cake to go with his fresh cup of coffee, he spotted Steve and wandered over to introduce himself. Steve had been drawing out some network diagrams with a couple of younger hams from his club and asked Charlie to hang on a minute while he explains this data protocol. Charlie agreed and sipped his coffee and offered his cookies to the group. Eventually, Steve finished and asked Charlie, "OK, now how can I help you?"

Charlie just smiled and said, "You can't help me with anything. I just came to say hello and wish you a pleasant holiday season." Steve looked a bit embarrassed and turned a little red. "Oh, I'm sorry. Thanks for that. I hope you have the same. Are you into 802.11?"

Charlie pointed out that he wasn't and that he enjoyed chasing DX on CW. Saying that was as if Steve had heard the words in Swahili. Steve just stared at Charlie not knowing how to reply. After several seconds, Charlie said, "I apologize, Steve. It's apparent that our ham interests are worlds apart. I probably know as much about 802.11 protocol as you do about DXing on CW. We're both hams, however. That's what matters in the end." Steve's expression didn't change. He didn't know Charlie or ever met anyone like him. His world was one of digital data and transmission speeds.

Charlie admitted, "My wife Mary and I were just chatting with Cindy over there by the food table. She can't figure out why you took the test for an Amateur license but don't get on the air. I was puzzled but it's beginning to make a little more sense now."

Steve unlocked his statuesque expression and explained, "That's why I joined the club also. We use the UHF bands to transmit data from point to point and I use my microwave setup to link to the club link. It's all experimentation so we can learn new technology.

A lot of the club members are data engineers and technicians from the half dozen computer companies in the area.” Charlie nodded and just had to ask a question, “Do you have any interest in carrying an HT to work repeaters or in setting up a radio in your home and contact other hams on anything but high speed data?” Steve thought for a few seconds and said, “I doubt it, Charlie. Why would I want to do that?” Charlie replied, “Well, mainly just because you can.”

Steve thought again and said, “Well then, there’s no difference between that and what I do with 802.11. We only experiment to see what we can do and how we can improve our network. We’ve never really used it outside of our group. It’s a learning thing.”

Charlie smiled and said that he was probably right. Then, he suggested that Steve call the District Emergency Coordinator for the valley. “I know they’re looking for help in setting up data links between different regional EOC’s and emergency shelters. Oh I’m sorry Steve, they’re Emergency Operating Centers for their ARES program. More alphabet soup...sorry. Anyway, you could really contribute something needed by your community and use your skills in a very practical way. It’ll probably help your club with some real challenges too.” Charlie wrote the DEC’s name and phone number on a clean paper napkin and gave it to Steve. “Your ham license could serve a very good purpose if you called him and I’d appreciate it as well. I suspect Cindy might understand a bit more about your work also.”

Steve, thought about it for a bit and said he would like to do that. Then, he asked Charlie if he thought this DEC person might be home right now. Charlie laughed loudly and said, “No, I’m sure he’s not at home because he’s standing right over there next to the blueberry pie. Come on, I’ll introduce you.” With that, he walked over and introduced Steve. ARES in the valley took a major leap forward at this year’s holiday party.

Combining two clubs to hold the party was a great idea as well to bring people together.

Not all hams are the same. Thank Heaven for that! Being interested in one niche of electronics is fine. In fact, it’s more common than finding a ham who is interested in every possible aspect of our wonderful world of Amateur Radio or to find that everyone is interested in the same thing. If you think about it, we’re all much more interested in a certain variety of the hobby, not all parts.

More than half of all licensees in the US hold a license below that of General. You might conclude from that factoid that 348,000 or 52% of US hams mostly operate on repeaters. Have you listened to repeaters lately? There’s usually very little activity on them. With the remaining 321,000 or 48% being Extras, Advanced and General, you’d expect more activity on the HF bands than we see. It’s been conservatively estimated that only about 40% of our Amateurs are active in any way. More than half of our licensees are not active at all with many not even owning a radio. The related shame of all this is that if you’re reading this story, it means you are a member of one of our clubs since Charlie’s Whistle is released only to club newsletters. Club membership count in this country is between 15 and 20 percent of all licensees or about half of what we consider “active”. Indeed, this is sad.