

CHARLIE'S WHISTLE

By

Bob Beaudet, W1YRC

As most of you know quite well, Charlie starts nearly every day by rising before dawn and cruising the bands, usually forty meter CW looking for interesting DX. There are many days when he doesn't work anyone and merely listens. That's fine with him. He certainly doesn't need to announce his presence to his many morning colleagues who are also on the air. Sometimes, the bands are totally silent with each old DXer fully aware that a hundred fellow DXers are also tuning carefully for an interesting signal. "Receivers do not put out a detectable signal", Charlie reminds his students, "so you won't be heard". He also preaches that calling CQ is nearly always unproductive for a serious DXer who is far more selective over what part of the world or what specific station he's looking for. Just sitting there morning after morning filling his log pages, working anyone and letting the other continents know that you're on the air like the DX Hill beacon doesn't make the grade in Charlie's book. It's not in his interests as a DXer at all.

Well, this one morning started for Charlie about 0900 UTC. Forty sounded odd. The noise floor was low as usual, only about S1 and a few weak watery signals could be heard, scattered about through the first 25 kHz of the band. But, it was unusual in that he heard a W6, an LU, a few JAs and even a YB0, a very wide geographical spread to hear. It's odd to hear so much of the world at once. Signals were uniformly down however, about half of normal levels but so much of the world was coming in that it was fine with Charlie.

It was about a half hour before sunrise and Charlie could see the warm glow of the arriving sun on the eastern horizon. Band conditions on the HF bands are usually best just before and after sunrise and sunset. As the sun's magic starts working on the ionosphere, the different layers separate and if other conditions permit, the 14 MHz band possibly the 17 and 21 MHz bands prepare to entertain us with DX opportunities. Of course, we're nearly at the bottom of sunspot cycle 23, so band openings are scaled back from what we see when the cycle is at its maximum. In fact, these days the 14 MHz and higher bands are sometimes all but shut down with the exception of sporadic openings during the daylight hours. It makes us appreciate good band conditions.

Charlie rarely complains about the bottom of the sunspot cycle. This next cycle, #24 will be his fifth sunspot cycle to ride from its bottom to its peak and back to its minimum. He doesn't work as many stations at the bottom mainly because there are fewer stations to work. Some feel that DXers trying to pursue their chosen activity at the cycle bottom are in a contact "slump". But as the famous Yogi Berra once said, "Slump? I ain't in no slump... I just ain't hitting."

A DX legend, W1FH once said he worked his best DX at the cycle bottoms because the casual DXers aren't there causing QRM and only serious DXers are on the air. It's true that the DX is much weaker and you must listen deeper but like other challenges in life, digging out the call and report builds up your skill as an operator. W1FH is likely correct.

So, Charlie listened to the band this one morning recently and when the YB0 signed with the JA he was working, he called him with one snappy call and got him. They exchanged 549 reports and sent 73. Total QSO time was about 20 seconds. Charlie knew that his "window" on forty is always limited but never as much as during unstable and unusual conditions such as existed this morning. So, he tuned up from his frequency; 7007... 7008... 7009.... At 7012.5, Charlie heard a weak W3 calling a JA. The JA didn't respond or at least Charlie couldn't hear the JA. Then, the W3 came back and gave a 559 report. Charlie just wasn't hearing the JA, even using a yagi antenna set in a westerly direction. He was just about to turn the beam further north when a fairly strong series of a few V's started up. He stopped to listen. Crisply, the V sender signed its call, YJ0YL. Oh yes, Charlie recalled that a couple of YL DXer operators were traveling in the western Pacific. Charlie snapped off a call to the Vanuatu station and received a 579 report and she sent "Hi Charlie, opr hr Gwen. Tks es GL.". Suddenly, he realized that this was VK3DYL, who sits at the top of the DXCC Honor Roll, an elite group of DX royalty. He wished Gwen success in her travels and also gave her a 579 report. By that time, someone had heard her call and entered it into the world wide DX Cluster. In a few seconds, a hundred stations converged on her frequency and Charlie merely left the pileup and tuned up the band.

Tuning the band every morning like this is quite therapeutic and a great way to slowly break into a new day of life's challenges. He's been doing this for many years and never finds it routine or boring. Like the fisherman that he is, he never finds a single moment of time spent fishing to be boring. That's probably why he wears a smile all the time, even when no fish are nibbling at his line.

This morning, most all of the world that was still in darkness was coming in, except north near the polar path like the JA or eastern Siberia path. This was very interesting but understandable after thinking about the affects of the old coronal ring that old 160 meter DXer Stu Perry, W1BB used to talk about. Now a Silent Key, Stu taught us that HF RF cannot easily penetrate the edges of the charged area around the pole that he called the Coronal Ring. That's what he theorized to make it so difficult for a W1 to work JA on 160 meters.

Charlie spends an hour or so just about every morning cruising around forty CW. He wouldn't have it any other way. He's worked every entity, zone, continent, hundreds of prefixes, and all sorts of DXpeditions over the years. You might conclude that it would be boring by now. Well, it's not.

Answer this for me, if you would. A lifelong fisherman spends hours casting his line into the water, year after year. Does he need the fish for his family's dinner? Likely not. Does he really care if he catches a fish? Maybe. But, even after not catching any fish, is the fisherman happy with his day and looking forward to returning tomorrow or next week? Absolutely!

That's why gets Charlie up before the rooster every day. That's what makes his time worth while. DXing isn't just having a certificate on the wall or your call in the DXCC list. It's a lifestyle that's deep within hams like Charlie. Those who can't understand are to be encouraged to try. Being addicted to DXing is better than other things that might alter your mind and it's perfectly legal to boot. Go have some fun tomorrow at dawn. CU on 7.005 while the rest of your neighbors are asleep.