

## CHARLIE'S WHISTLE

By

Bob Beaudet, W1YRC

Charlie retired from his career as an engineering manager several years ago and quickly settled into a fairly comfortable life of retirement. Neither he nor Mary has experienced any major health problem for which they are grateful and they've been able to live the life in retirement that they had planned and hoped for. There's plenty of time for Mary to work in her garden and kitchen. Likewise, Charlie is able to spend all the time he wishes doing projects in ham radio and fishing. Like all retirees, they're concerned about the increasing cost of fuel, heat, health care, taxes and just about everything else. They need to plan shopping trips to combine errands just as we must do.

The member of the family who enjoys every moment of these long shopping trips is their 'ole hound, Rufus. He's getting up in years now and walks more slowly. That sounds familiar for many of us, doesn't it? Mary and Charlie plan several shopping stops together, sometimes making six or seven stops before heading back to DX Hill. One day a week and sometimes more than one, they'll load their ice chest in the back of the truck to load perishable purchases into and help Rufus climb onto the center of the seat and get strapped in. Yes, Rufus uses a seat belt. With Mary and Charlie aboard and belted in, they'll start out about 9 AM and often not return until 2 or 3 in the afternoon. DX Hill is several miles from shopping centers so even a simple "run to the store" for a loaf of bread is at least 12 miles and gas for the trip will cost as much as the bread. But, by combining trips to hardware, cleaners, market, crafts store, pet store, gas station and whatever other needs may dictate, a significant amount of fuel is saved as well as the time that would be lost to do each trip by itself.

On about half of the stops, Charlie stays in the truck with Rufus and for the other stops, Mary stays with him. He never tells who has given him a treat so he often gets more than he should simply by looking hungry. Of course, it takes a few hours but when you're retired, what's a little time? It gives a great opportunity to stop at some spot for lunch as well. There's a very nice burger place at the bottom of DX Hill where Rufus can sit with Mary and Charlie on their outdoor patio and enjoy his own special burger that they offer for dogs. It has soy meal and protein powder mixed with some very lean meat.  
Ruff-yumm!

Charlie brings all his reading material along on these trips. He's able to sit quietly and read all the articles he wishes and mark them for further reading later if necessary. He usually takes notes on a legal size yellow pad. This month, he noticed the heavy concentration of articles in our various Amateur magazines on emergency communications related stories and reports. Of course, EmComm, as it's popularly referred to, is a popular topic now due mainly to the Gulf disasters last September. Charlie thought for a while about what DXers contribute to the overall support of Amateurs to the effort. He couldn't think of anything at all.

Let's be honest, chasing DX is largely self serving. A DXer doesn't provide any public service when he does his thing. Reaching the DXCC Honor Roll or winning a contest doesn't serve anyone's interests in the community and can't possibly be something that could help the victims of the Gulf disaster. It was making Charlie feel pretty selfish. So, as he read these emergency reports while waiting in the truck for Mary, how on earth could he feel justified when compared to so many others who are spending considerable money and time preparing to serve their community as emergency communicators?

It's a valid question to be sure. He quietly thought about it for most of the time they spent on their last shopping trip. His concentration was only interrupted occasionally by Rufus' snoring.

Nothing ever bothers that 'ole guy, except being hungry and needing to visit the flower bed. He needed neither one during their trip, thankfully.

Charlie pondered the matter after dinner and before going to bed. He didn't mention it to Mary, he just wondered to himself if he had been selfish or at least, self serving all these years while he was enjoying chasing DX. The following morning began like all the others, well before sunrise with coffee in hand, tuning 40 CW. He quickly worked a few stations coming through on the south polar path. He was listening to several stations that were transmitting close to the same frequency, well within his wide 2.1 kHz bandpass receiver setting. His easy ability to copy all four of them simultaneously made him realize something to note for further consideration, after the sun rose and he was more awake.

A few hours later, Charlie was sitting in the kitchen with a nice fresh blueberry muffin and a new cup of coffee. He thought about what had hit him earlier. DXers and contest operators have to be very good operators. Those who aren't generally don't achieve their goals nor do they compare very favorably with their peers. Competition divides them based on their abilities.

In emergency communications, the ability to copy a noisy signal or in noisy conditions is essential. An operator who requires many repeat transmissions or simply copies the message incorrectly can cause serious harm and is surely no asset to the Em Comm team. A contest operator or DXer is proficient in multi-tasking like copying many stations at once and phone operators have learned the art of speaking slowly and articulately. Top operators have mastered how to remember schedules, sun set times across the globe, frequencies and especially how to speak with even intonation, volume and articulation. They provide a wonderful example for our Em Comm brethren to emulate. Even on 2 meter FM repeaters, clear speech is essential. Mumbling, uneven speech patterns like randomly turning away from the mike or failing to maintain a consistent speaking pattern will cause errors or at least cause repeats to be required which waste valuable time.

While Charlie was churning all this mental processing, he had the kitchen radio quietly playing in the background, tuned to one of the syndicated sports talk/call-in programs. He subconsciously noticed the way the program's callers spoke so rapidly and excitedly that they were difficult to understand, only to be replied by the talk show "experts" talking on top of the caller and one another. It sounded like a 20 meter pile-up and was most annoying.

But, listening to it succeeded in showing Charlie how an uncontrolled or untrained speaker could be unintelligible or at least confusing to listen to. It was indeed a good illustration of the problem, he thought.

So, what does all this mean to a DXer or Contest operator? That DXers and Contest operators should turn their skills toward becoming volunteers in their local Em Comm team? Or that Em Comm folks should spend some time learning how to be a competent DXer or Contest operator? Well, both sound like terrific ideas to Charlie but probably not ideas that would be on meeting agendas any time soon. The principle is sound, none the less. Listening to local ARES or RACES drills or radio talk shows will illustrate the wide spectrum of abilities the general public have in their talking skills. Some young folks speak so fast and run over their words so that they're virtually impossible to understand while others take such long pauses between words or aimless rambles to gather their thoughts or make their points that understanding their message is impossible.

Some operators for whom English is a second language may need special attention. Accents severe enough to distort comprehension must be avoided, despite how willing the volunteer may be to serve. Allowing that person to serve in a different capacity is an obvious solution.

Remember, the accuracy of the text of the message being sent and received must survive the operating skills of the operators on both ends of the circuit. Our training sessions definitely need to emphasize the importance of clear speech and careful practiced listening skills.

It may be in that role that our local DXers and contesters may be most useful. Of course, Charlie believes that the DXer's skills are superior since talking rapidly as in a contest serves no particular value in working DX. A Contester's speech must remain clear and understandable however, regardless of talking speed. Charlie made a phone call immediately to a friend in the local EMA center and explained his idea. He's in charge of developing training programs for the operators throughout the county. As you might predict, he quickly enlisted Charlie to help him develop some lesson elements to sensitize operators to be aware of correct voice operating procedures. Charlie, as usual, agreed to help. Being retired, he has all the spare time in the world, doesn't he?

Your own local Em Comm could use your service. Are you registered as an ARES member? You're not? Please go to <http://www.arrl.org/FandES/field/forms/#fsd-98> , fill it out and send it electronically or in hard copy to your Section Emergency Coordinator. Look at your section webpage under [www.arrl.org](http://www.arrl.org) to find out who your SEC is if you need some help. Contacting your club President will be effective as well. Yes, DXers and Contesters are welcome. Tell your SEC that Charlie sent you. Thanks.