

CHARLIE'S WHISTLE

By

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When 2007 comes around, Charlie will be able to say that he has been a ham through five complete sunspot cycles. He was first licensed in the early 1950s, during the down slope of Cycle 18. His first couple of years in ham radio were spent in the same way as most of the rest of us, learning procedures and propagation on the HF bands. Today, most hams don't gravitate toward the HF bands, however. The VHF bands behave entirely differently and may have a different effect upon our new hams. But, that's not the point of this Charlie's Whistle story.

Being the experienced mentor, teacher, DXer and engineer that Charlie is, he can't help but notice some patterns that normally develop over this much time. His Amateur career essentially began just prior to a sunspot cycle minimum and during those years, he had quiet time to study and absorb the technical components that would serve him well as his professional and Amateur radio careers developed. During his critical first few years, he experienced quiet 10 and 20 meter bands during darkness (we had no 15 meter band yet) and only occasional opening on 20 during the day. Charlie grew very fond of 40 meters because it was the best all around band for DXing and was open to many DX stations during hours of darkness. It is still Charlie's favorite band today, so apparently, its imprint was permanent.

Over the years, Charlie completed his college education and military obligation. Yes, we were obliged to military service in the 50s. Through all of this period, Charlie always was the hands on engineer. He loved working on complex issues that required hours of effort to solve. In college and the military, Charlie was the person people turned to for the answer. Maybe that was his special calling to Amateur radio.

Lately, while chatting with some new members at the club, he listened to their complaints on various issues of the day; dead bands, no activity, no DX, etc. Charlie recollected that most of them were licensed during the last cycle peak, from 1999 to 2002. They were bummed out because the bands were dead, certainly not like the high level of activity that attracted them initially. Charlie began to think about this and after a while came to the conclusion that the hams that come into our hobby at sunspot minimums might be different from these who were drawn into getting their tickets when sunspots were at their maximum. Charlie could demonstrate that different motivations exist for the two groups and that usually a greater number sign up when the higher HF bands are most active. VE teams have noticed that they are serving fewer candidates lately, during the months approaching the cycle minimum. These facts cannot be coincidental, can they? But, is that the only reason? It sounds too simple.

After the meeting, Charlie drove home contemplating his newest theory. Mary was waiting for him, doing some needlepoint and listening to music. Rufus kept her company, resting his big hound chin on her foot and snoring mightily. Opening the door woke Rufus and he stood up, stretched, wagged his tail and waited for Charlie to come over and scratch his head. As Charlie kissed Mary's cheek, he asked if there was anything good to eat in the frig. Mary jumped up saying, "Well of course dear. You know there are always good things here. What are you in the mood to snack on?"

As Charlie hooked up Rufus's leash for his walk he asked, "Any sliced turkey left with rye bread?" Mary said there was and she'd make his sandwich while he and Rufus took their walk.

Charlie headed out into the quiet of the DX Hill evening with Rufus. As they slowly checked all the official designated spots, Charlie continued to ponder his theory. Could there be two kinds of

hams that are recruited every 11 years? Are the hams that come from the high sun-spot years really different from those who become licensed at the low end? The more he thought about the question and matched the new hams that he could think of with how they would be classified with respect to their personalities, expectations or interests. By the time Rufus's work was done and he and Charlie had returned to the house, Charlie had all but convinced himself that there really is a connection between the "high sun" hams and the "low sun" hams.

Rufus ambled over to his bed in normal hound dog fashion to take his big nap as Charlie sat to enjoy what Mary had prepared for him. She had made two cups of tea as well and sat with Charlie. "I thought you might like some of the raspberry flan I made this morning. There's just a little left and I want to wash the dish. I need it to make a peach torte tomorrow." Charlie didn't need to be asked twice to help her with that small problem.

They sat and Charlie talked with Mary about the question he was wrestling with. She didn't know if his premise was correct so she asked him for some names of people that she would know in each group. Charlie thought for a little while and named a few people. Mary knew a couple of them but not well enough to be able to appreciate any major differences in their natural attitudes. They chatted for a while until the flan and tea was gone, and then went to bed without figuring out the puzzle

Next morning, as Charlie was tuning 40 meters before dawn in the way he starts every day, he continued thinking about the questions he had raised. Multi-tasking is simple for Charlie since he's so familiar with careful listening for weak signals with only minimal attention required. Are there really two versions of ham radio operators produced during a sunspot cycle? Maybe it's just a coincidence. But, it's undeniable that some hams are active, action driven and aggressive while others are just as smart but lots more reserved in their action and outward drive. The second group seems more comfortable analyzing and performing methodical work when compared to the first group that wants high volume results and production cranking out the door.

Charlie stopped for a moment while he was waiting for a warbly fading signal to sign its call on 7003.7 MHz. "We have that new group of testers in the club that thrive on high level activity such as in a contest," Charlie thought out loud. "They were complaining at the meeting about the dead bands. I'll bet they came into ham radio at the peak of the last sunspot cycle." The warbly signal was a JA that was testing. Charlie called him but got no reply.

Charlie did some research later in the morning by doing a Google search and finding all sorts of strange information. He learned that some believe that a more significant factor than the attraction into different aspects of our hobby is how they may have followed an even greater global influence of the sunspot maximums. The data he found on a strange website <http://www.carolmoore.net/articles/sunspot-cycle.html> written by an anti war activist but it had plenty of world events tied to sunspot maximums. It was interesting reading. Among other material, it chronicled the works of a Russian professor of Astronomy and Biological Physics, A.L. Tchijevsky during World War I who hypothesized that particularly severe battles regularly followed each solar flare during the sunspot peak period of 1916-17. Of course, some other fairly major events took place approach or moving away from cycle minimums. For instance, the data fails to point out that most of World War II occurred on the down slope of Cycle 17. The Korean War took place on the down slope of Cycle 18 and Vietnam covered most of Cycle 20. All were pretty significant events to be sure.

So, does any of this demonstrate that the high energy and activity of sunspot cycle maximums draw the interests of people and nations inclined to that way of life? Similarly, does it show that

the more sedate and calm people and nations feel comfortable with the lower solar energy of the cycle minimums? Social science and peacenik folk singers seem to want us to think that way but in the end, isn't it just one of those things in which we're able to see what we wish to see? That's the beauty of data. A smart person is always able to produce data to support his or her position. It isn't like working new DX. No one can debate either you worked it or didn't once you have a QSL card and it takes 100 confirmed entities to earn DXCC membership. Let's keep things simple.