

CHARLIE'S WHISTLE

By

Bob Beudet, W1YRC

For a very long while now, all of us have heard how times have changed. Since the Sept 11, 2001 attacks to the World Trade Center and Pentagon, anyone who regularly travels by air knows how dramatically and suddenly air travel has changed. Life as we knew it will never be the same again. In fact, 9/11 changed a great many things from what they were before. Charlie and Mary had rented some classic movies recently and one of them had some scenes taken in an airport, showing the ticketing concourse, boarding gate area and in the aircraft during flight. It surely didn't resemble anything you would see today. Charlie mentioned to Mary about how different things are now with so much security and nothing taken for granted. We all know that because of fear of terrorism and danger to ourselves and our country, none of us can ever behave in the casual manner with which we were accustomed in the days prior to 9/11.

Other things have changed as well, probably none as dramatically as the processes connected with the air travel industry, but changed none the less. Getting into a court house or a federal building requires passage through metal detectors and/or x ray machines. Even schools now have locked doors and video cameras surveilling all visitors.

Most large crowds at sporting and concert events are carefully monitored by video cameras and armed security personnel. Driving across the Canadian or Mexican border on business or vacation isn't merely a flash of your driver's license and stating your reason for crossing the border as it used to be. Ultimately, the added cost of new security measures introduced in the last five years has been passed along to all of us, the consumers. We must pay for everything eventually.

At his last club meeting, Charlie was sitting calmly when one of the new members, who was also a new ham, asked a question under "good of the order". He had recently become interested in chasing DX, mainly due to the regular influence of Charlie and his friends talking with the newcomers before and after meetings. He participated in a couple of the winter and springtime DX contests; the ARRL DX Contest and the CQ WPX and worked well over a hundred entities. His question concerned something he had just learned about, that the extremely simple to use eQSL method of confirming his 150 or so new DX credits weren't going to be accepted by the ARRL toward the DXCC award. He had become quite pleased with the paperless and inexpensive QSLing method was upset with and couldn't understand the ARRL's firm position in refusing to accept any eQSL credit toward DXCC. The League stated that they will accept electronic credit from their own electronic logging system called Logbook of the World, however, which this new DXer sees as very similar if not even a direct copy of the eQSL system. Of course, this isn't really the case.

Charlie is always happy to take the lead in trying to answer questions concerning DX from club members. In fact, he sees it as his duty. He answered a similar question to this one about a year ago, before this fellow had moved to the area or joined the club. The valley between DX Hill and the far hills in the next county has been built up steadily over the last couple of decades which has resulted in hundreds of new small businesses and created thousands of new hi tech positions for engineers and technicians. This, of course, brings in a steady flow of new members to the valley along with a predictable loss of some being recruited away. Luckily for the club, more new members have joined than left in the last few years.

Charlie raised his hand and asked the president if he wanted a full explanation now or if he should meet with the new member after the meeting. The president scanned the members present and decided that many members would benefit from Charlie's tutorial, so he asked him to

proceed. It would be time well invested for many of those at the club meeting. Charlie explained how the eQSL program worked. Basically, like ARRL's much newer Logbook of the World process, it is an electronic method of confirming QSOs for the purpose of providing credit toward earning various achievement awards such as DXCC or WAS. eQSL was developed in the late 90s by N5UP and attracted lots of users worldwide.

Charlie explained that the eQSL system has substantial elements of trust built into the credentials and security measures that protect the means by which a QSL card is issued.

Anyone who did not have first hand experience of the nightmare created by the many Don Miller DX operations in the 1960s would be inclined to trust a fellow DXer's claim of operating from some rare spot on earth and be inclined to accept his proof of doing so. Charlie reached into his wallet for a note and read a website for those interested in the Miller background. He could never remember it so he keeps it for times like this. He carefully read it

<http://www.geocities.com/k2cddx/dmlead6.html?20065> to the members many of whom wrote it on scraps of paper, coffee cups, gum wrappers, etc. Charlie then went on to explain that some Don Miller operations unfortunately were outright frauds. He wasn't within hundreds of miles of the claimed location.

DXers want to believe. Hugh Cassidy of the legendary West Coast DX Bulletin wrote in the website above that DXers want to accept another DXer's word. In time, Miller was proven to have lied to us, misrepresented his work and claimed credit for operations that he knew were undeserving of credit. On many levels, Miller changed the world of DX forever by what he did. We could never "trust" another DXer's word again without absolute proof. Anyone who didn't live through this period simply cannot understand the pain it caused for us all or how pure DXers feel about it. But, the Miller era created the need for new security measures to guarantee that no future expeditioner with similar plans to those of Miller could never hope to get away with them.

Charlie explained that the eQSL system claims foolproof and reliable security for the confirmations but actually someone like Don Miller could drive an 18 wheeler through the system's credentials. ARRL saw that as well and stayed with their task of designing their own electronic confirmation system until they were satisfied. Finally, after a great deal of work, it was completed. They called it Logbook of the World and it has been a great success. Details of the system are on the web at <http://www.arrl.org/lotw/>. Starting in September, 2003, the LoTW system now holds the record of millions of QSOs and is adding new logs to its files regularly. Reading through the information page on the web, it is obvious how much focus the designers placed on credentials and protection of the integrity of logbook information and that of users and DX stations. Nothing can ever be assumed or taken for granted as it was in an earlier time.

Charlie finished his impromptu talk by pointing out that both eQSL and LoTW were created with good intentions, mainly to provide electronic QSL service to DXers at minimum cost. Today, the cost of collecting QSL cards for DXCC is very expensive. Charlie told the club, "Your cost of acquiring 316 current entity confirmations necessary for reaching the first rung on the DXCC Honor Roll ladder can easily be as much or more than what you spent on the station you used to work the DX." Charlie looked around and saw a few chuckling. He seriously added, "I'm not kidding. Do the math for yourself.

Collecting 316 cards can cost you several thousand dollars. Just one needed card can run up quite a tab with printing, postage, "green stamps", trips to the post office and of course, repeat requests and multiple QSLing attempts. Of course, the process will take place over several years but the cost is quite real."

The club president thanked Charlie and the members surprised him by applauding for being able to provide them with so much information. Charlie was most happy to help. All that know him will testify that he loves doing this. He hopes that he'll be able to continue this sort of help from his experience for many more years. Bring your questions to your club meetings and ask the veterans. They've probably had the experience that will save you time and trouble and will usually be delighted that you ask your question.