

CHARLIE'S WHISTLE

By

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Just before last Field Day, Charlie was gathering himself together before leaving home for his club meeting. While looking for his keys, glasses, pen, wallet, notebook and his watch, he was half watching the TV news report and one item caught his attention. He sat and listened. It was something that he already knew from other reading he had done but not remembered. The report said that a great majority of young people from 18 to 24 were woefully ill informed concerning their geographical knowledge. Two thirds of a sample group of over 500 young people couldn't find Iraq on a map, one third couldn't point out Louisiana, half couldn't identify New York and nearly everyone, 88% had no idea at all where Afghanistan was. Charlie remembered that a couple years ago, a large group of New England high school students was questioned by a Boston newspaper poll and about three quarters of them couldn't name the six states that make up New England nor could most even say how many states made up New England, even though they all lived in New England. Many seniors couldn't even name all the states that border the state in which they were living and preparing to graduate from high school. Most of us feel that is totally outrageous.

Charlie called to Mary and asked her if she had heard this news about our young people. She leaned in from the kitchen and responded, "Yes dear. I heard this report at noon on my little portable radio while I was working in the garden. That really is terrible isn't it?" Charlie nodded and asked her, "Mary, how much better do you think hams would do if they took a similar test?" Mary could read him like a book. She just smiled, nodded and said, "I see where you're going with this, you sly fox." She looked at her watch and said, "You better get going, dear. The club meeting starts in a half hour. Oh, don't forget the tray of cookies I made for them."

While driving the short distance to the meeting, Charlie quietly thought more about his latest challenge and how a savvy DXer not only knows where most countries are, he or she knows the entity's beam heading and about when its sunrise and sunset occurs. All hams who seriously chase things like WAS, county or lighthouse awards know generally where their needed states or counties are located. It goes with the job.

Charlie reached the church hall where his club meets and pulled into a nice spot at the end of one row of cars. As he climbed out of his truck, Dennis, a fellow club member, drove in and waved so Charlie waited for him to park. Dennis is a young fellow in his mid thirties (ah-hem, young) and has been a club member for a few years now but only recently was able to get a tower up and start enjoying the wonderful world of DXing. As he got out of his SUV, he said, "Hi Charlie. I worked two new ones, a DU and a 9M4 last night just about 7 o'clock. It was just as you said. I pointed about due north and watched the time of sunrise over there and worked each of them just as they started up, before any pile-up had started. I only called once and bang! Golly, that was fun! Thanks for the tip." Charlie just smiled and said that he was very pleased and encouraged him to keep up his good work.

They walked into the church hall, talking about what DX was due to show up in the next week. Charlie watched Dennis's face and could sense from his excited hand movements that as he was talking, the new DXer was mentally calculating where each entity was located and where to point his beam. Charlie, on the other hand, was thinking about the geography that this fellow had to be learning by manipulating the great circle map of the globe in his head. Charlie asked him, "Say Dennis, did you know much about geography before you put up your tower?" He replied with a chuckle, "Heck no. In fact, before I got my ticket a few years ago, I didn't know very much about where any states were at all, except a little about Chicago where I came from and

Milwaukee where my wife Betsy came from. It was never an interesting subject in high school.” Charlie asked, “So you’d say that ham radio has taught you some finer details of geography?” Dennis replied without any delay, “Golly yes indeed. I don’t have any choice but to learn where all these places are. Everything requires that I know where they are so I’ll know stuff like when skip will favor them or even where to point my beam. It’s really a pretty basic survival skill for a DXer.”

They made a straight path to the coffee pot and Charlie placed the covered tray of Mary’s cookies nearby for everyone to find. Dennis poured out two cups and fixed them for Charlie and himself. Soon, the meeting was called to order and the usual business items were dealt with. Of course, everyone was polite while sipping their coffee and munching their cookies. The missionary’s trick still works after all these years, feed the people and they will listen.

This particular meeting was a relatively short one because much regular business had been handled earlier in the week the meeting by the Field Day committee and the standing Technical Affairs committee. Both committee chairmen made brief reports and in thirty minutes, the meeting reached “new business”. Charlie raised his hand and asked the president if he had heard the news that our young folks don’t seem to have even basic knowledge of geography. The president hadn’t heard that but about half of the members present raised their hand to show that they had. The meeting was wrapping up early so the president asked Charlie to give the members a summary and he did so, at least as much as he could recall. He asked if anyone looking to recruit new school age hams had ever thought about using the natural learning linked with DXing to teach geography. It seemed that the three teachers in the room had not. Charlie noted that they weren’t DXers. He didn’t hold that against them. They did offer some good ideas though. One suggested showing a video about DXing in a contest, with different countries being logged every 20 seconds. Another suggested a field trip to Charlie’s shack. The discussion went on for several more minutes until the president could see that this would go on much longer. He called for order and stated loudly, “Let’s plan something for the fall. Charlie, would you be willing to chair a committee to plan a club activity around this issue?”

Naturally, Charlie agreed and asked the club’s teachers if they’d help. All three quickly nodded in agreement. They knew that attending a meeting at Charlie’s would surely include a fabulous meal or at least some great snacks. They could hardly wait for the first meeting. Then before sitting down, Charlie spotted Andy, the thirteen year old son of Mike, a fellow DXer and Collins collector in the valley. Charlie has known young Andy since he was born. Charlie asked the president to allow him one more thing. He knew that Andy was interested in getting a license some day. Mike has never pushed him however, other than coming to the club meetings with him, maybe. Charlie wanted to illustrate his point and leave an impression with the membership until he returns with his committee report after Labor Day. Charlie asked Andy if he has ever felt that he had any advantage about world geography from listening to his dad talking about DX. Andy laughed and said, “Yeah, I guess.” Charlie smiled and nodded. Andy said that he certainly recognized the names of countries and where they are.

Andy paused for a moment and said, “when news came out that Montenegro split away from Serbia, I heard my dad talking on the phone about it. I went into school the next day and asked my home room teacher about Montenegro and how far it was from Macedonia. She didn’t know but said that I probably meant Montego Bay and that’s in Jamaica. Andy said, “I didn’t want to tell her she was wrong but I knew she was.” Charlie smiled and agreed.

Charlie said for the benefit of the non DXers, “Montenegro is on the Balkan peninsula, a couple hundred kilometers from Macedonia. Beam heading is the same as for central Europe.” The

president broke in and said, "OK Charlie, you've made your point." Charlie laughed and made a motion to adjourn which was seconded.

While driving home, a couple of members called Charlie on the club repeater to thank him for the good idea. One member said that his xyl who is a high school teacher won't believe it when he tells her about the new club project. Charlie chuckled at the thought of what she would actually say. Amateur Radio can be a strong learning tool and train its followers to learn things about the world far more easily and sooner than others. Charlie knew one thing for certain, that none of the sample group of 500+ young people tested were Amateurs, they simply couldn't have been. How about having a rematch, this time with DXers?