

CHARLIE'S WHISTLE

By

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The HF bands are flat at the bottom of the sunspot cycle. No one can work any good DX. We might as well take down the HF antennas and go find some repeater to monopolize.

What am I saying? No, I haven't lost what little gray matter I have remaining. This is the kind of thing I overhear from some hams on repeaters and recently, while walking around at our Boxboro Convention. Of course, this isn't true at all, not by any stretch of imagination. This morning, I worked a YB and received a 5-9 report. If I had looked at the WWV report before doing anything, I might not have even put power to my radio.

You can't conclude what DX conditions might be merely based on poor expectations.

Charlie faithfully cruises the low end of forty meters every morning just before dawn and hardly ever is disappointed. Some mornings, he doesn't work anyone but nearly always hears some stations. Don't ever expect Charlie to agree with your conclusion that the bands are dead. One relatively new club member and new ham called Charlie just after dinner one evening last week and told him that he got up early and heard him working some DX one morning but couldn't hear any of the stations that Charlie was working. In fact, except for Charlie, he couldn't hear any stations at all below 7.1 MHz.

Charlie had quit for his dusk DXing and was reading some magazines when this call came in. However, he returned to the shack with the cordless phone and asked him to listen on 7013.6 kHz for a very strong German station. The caller couldn't hear the station. Then, Charlie directed him to 7007.8 where an EA station was over S9 on his meter. Surely, he could hear this one. But, even this station was inaudible. The new ham said, "here, listen to this" as he tuned across the bottom of the band. There were a couple of weak heterodynes but nothing until he got well above 7.100 MHz where he heard some broadcast. Charlie asked him to set his radio to receive AM. He did and heard the broadcast speaking in a Slavic language but the signal was only S7. Charlie tuned in the same station and found the broadcast signal to read S9 +35 db. Obviously, something was wrong at the new fellow's home. Charlie asked him if he had an antenna connected and if the antenna was in the air? Then, he asked if he checked the connections to the radio. Of course, he asked what sort of radio he was using. It was an old but very fine Kenwood TS-830 that he bought from a club member. It worked OK when he got it but it doesn't seem to work now. He called the person who sold him the radio and he offered to help him but was going to be out of town for a week. Charlie was assured that everything else checked out fine. This young ham was very discouraged and was in need of a helping hand before he quit the hobby as being above his understanding.

Charlie asked him if he had tried other bands and if he had the same problem. The answer was yes. Charlie asked if he had any other antennas and if they were going through a switch or filter. The response was yes, he had both. Charlie asked him to disconnect the forty meter antenna from whatever it was going into and connect it directly into the radio. Charlie would wait. He unscrewed the coax fittings involved and connected the antenna.

The radio immediately blasted the broadcast signal into the room. "Wow!" the fellow exclaimed. Plainly, he found his problem and turned down the audio. Charlie asked him to turn the radio back to CW and go back to the bottom of the band. He did so and found dozens of signals all over those bottom fifty kHz. Some were actually quite loud. He felt silly, having done something that he should have caught for himself. He told Charlie how he felt and as you can expect, Charlie just chuckled and told him how he has done the same thing himself. He assumed the switch and filter were doing their job properly and they obviously weren't. Now, he

can reconnect them one by one and determine which the bad one is and repair or replace it. Sometimes it's just a connector problem or a bad solder joint. These can be found by visual inspection or gently wiggling the connection while it is connected to the radio.

All of us make these sorts of errors. That's why we benefit from checking everything without assuming too much. It's sort of like checking to see if the TV is plugged in before tearing it apart. If problems get the best of you, don't let them make you angry.

Do the best you can in checking connections and accessories in the loop. One by one eliminate them from the circuit until you find the guilty party. Everything and anything should be suspected; often the most basic thing is the cause. Don't assume anything. I said don't assume anything! Check everything and eventually, you should isolate to culprit. If necessary, ask one of your club's helpful and friendly Elmers. I guarantee that they have had the same problem or answered the same question before you asked.

After they've chalked up a few decades on their ticket, finding new problems is rare indeed. They're usually the same ones over and over again.

Charlie decided that he would put together a winter program for the club on common problems around the shack and simple troubleshooting for non-technical hams without using test equipment. That will be a popular program. Many members will benefit and it will stimulate plenty of audience participation, the best kind of program, indeed. Try it at your club. You don't need many props; maybe a few pieces of old split coax, corroded connectors, a loose switch. You know, all that stuff in a corner of your garage or basement. Good luck.