

## CHARLIE'S WHISTLE

By

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With the bands quiet every evening shortly after sunset these days, Charlie has a lot of time to catch up on his reading. In fact, with the generally quiet band conditions we experience in general, we all have less of an excuse to not straighten out our messy shacks and catch up on projects and the reading that we have promised ourselves that we wanted to get back to doing. The scientists and radio propagation experts around the world agree that we're at or near the junction of the end of Sunspot Cycle 23 and the start of Cycle 24. The way this exact point on our calendar is determined is through empirical analysis, a fancy way of saying "after the fact". So, by the Fourth of July cook-outs in 2008, we should be able to munch our hot dogs and discuss the cycle sunspot minimums that took place about January of 2007 and how the bands have improved since then. In fact, of course, when the cycle minimum takes place actually makes very little difference to us hams. We only want to know when it was in order to know that the bands will be improving after it.

On one cold and dark night recently after enjoying a typically delicious meal created in Mary's kitchen, Charlie was relaxing in the den, reading one of the many books written about the life and legacy of Winston Churchill. His faithful four legged pal, Rufus was stretched out across Mary's beautiful woolen braided rug in the middle of their cozy living room. He loved this soft and warm rug while he pursued his regular dream of chasing his friend Tabby, the cat from the foot of DX Hill. The animation of all four of his paws was certain proof that he was enjoying a good run in his dream but of course, never catching Tabby.

Charlie had always been fascinated with Churchill's visionary career and especially how he led his British people through the dark days of the blitz, eventually to victory over the Nazi forces in World War II. He had read several accounts about Churchill but his war related service was the most remarkable. Not everyone will become famous or have books written about his or her lives, but some giants in history like Mr. Churchill have left a significant imprint on world history and deserve special attention.

The paths we all take through our own lives will give us all different opportunities to contribute our skills and thoughts to mankind as well. Leaving our mark behind is something of which we should all be mindful as we raise and support our families, perform our work every day and pursue our interests in Amateur radio. We actually can make quite a difference by what we do, usually far greater than the depth we realize. What we do in our lives will become our legacy and what our successors will remember about us.

An ancient Arabic parable, related by elders in the community tells of two men who after completing a long journey across the desert, each turn to view the tracks he has made in the sand. As the story goes, one sees a long line of tracks all the way past the seventh dune on the horizon. But his companion saw that he had left no tracks at all despite the fact that they had walked the same distance and in the same time. The message the story portrays for modern readers is that the life works of one man will impact and benefit the world long after he has passed on, in great contrast to those of another whose presence and passing is totally unremarkable.

In this respect, Charlie admired great men and women who have left their impact so vividly on civilization, even centuries after they have passed on. Charlie would be the first to point out that it wasn't necessarily the individual person who made the mark on society but rather, the person's work or intellectual contribution. In our own lives and professions, we all must strive to leave our community, company, radio club, fraternity, school, family and any other social or

professional group, in which we participate or associate, in a better state than it was before we traveled through it. In that way, our presence and passing will be meaningful.

Charlie had been reading for an hour or so when Mary came into the den and sat in her favorite chair. She had finished her day's work and was ready to relax. She asked Charlie if his book was interesting. She said that she hadn't heard a word from him since he finished his blueberry pie. Charlie looked up suddenly and smiled and said, "Oh I'm sorry, dear. Yes, I've been reading this book on Churchill that (their son) Jack gave me for my birthday. He said it was a terrific book and he was right." Charlie had read the first hundred pages, put a bookmark into the page and closed the book. He continued on with Mary, "You know, Winston Churchill was a remarkable man, so far ahead of his time. What do you think he would do if he were a great world leader today?"

"Hmmm", Mary said. "What an interesting thought. I wonder how he would deal with world problems. We'll never know the answer but the idea is fascinating isn't it?" Just then, the phone rang. It was Andy from the club and he wanted to quiz Charlie on how to work DX during the minimum portion of the sunspot cycle. Mary could hear Andy's voice from the phone across the room and knew that Charlie was good for at least an hour. She had plenty of experience with this sort of thing so she just smiled at Charlie and went back to the kitchen to start her pie crusts for the morning's project of making a dozen pies for the church.

Andy had the common frustration that most relatively new hams seem to have who expect bands to be open at convenient times, like when they return home from work or very early mornings before they head for the office. Of course, during these cycle doldrums, convenient times such as these present totally quiet bands. In fact, many entire days see totally quiet HF bands. Andy expressed his frustration over having recently obtained a new tower, big beam antenna, KW amplifier, expensive new transceiver and not being able to use any of it. Charlie recognized that as a very common complaint and fortunately, he knew the solution to keep Andy from putting a "For Sale" sign on his tower and station, most of which still has brand new price tags and stickers on them.

Charlie asked, "Andy, have you ever worked 80 or 40 meters? How about top band?" Andy replied, "Naw, I listened to 80 once and the static crashes drove me crazy. Wait a minute; you're on 40 CW every morning aren't you? Do you hear anything there?" Charlie said, "Andy, there's hardly a morning when I don't enjoy my cruise through the low end of 40.

Oh sure, very often signals are weak but there's no lack of terrific fun on 40 all the time.

Pound for pound, it's my favorite band, even ahead of the "money band", 20 meters. 40 meters brings out the best in an operator. It's challenging and rewarding, always interesting."

Andy astutely pointed out, "Yeah, but you have a beam on 40. That must make a difference."

Charlie admitted that a beam surely makes life more comfortable but he added, "You can have a beam too. You don't need to have all this aluminum on a tower. Just hang parallel half wave wires with the center one driven like a dipole and cut to your operating frequency, the director 5% shorter and the reflector 5% longer. Place them about 20 feet apart and up as high as your trees will permit with the director broadside facing Europe and start having fun." Andy was slow to respond, obviously thinking about it. Then, he said, "That's a pretty big array. What if I don't have room for three wires?" Charlie said, "That's easy Andy, just eliminate the director or reflector. On 40 meters, it's smarter to reject signals off the back so drop the director. Either way, the beam will produce gain and won't cost much more than the wire, some rope and insulators, less than 50 dollars. The best part is the European stations won't be able to tell your signal from that of a fellow with a thousand dollar setup." Andy was all excited to start building his wire beam and said hurriedly, "Thanks Charlie. I'll see you on 40."

Charlie wished Andy good luck along with his offer of help if needed. He quietly placed the phone down as Mary returned. She said, "Did it again, huh?" Charlie just smiled and shrugged. "Guess so", he replied. He went on, "Andy was on the verge of giving up on all that he had worked to build and enjoy because every day at the bottom of the sunspot cycle didn't fill his log pages with exciting DX all day. It's like fishing, you know. How many times have I gone fishing and come back with no fish? It isn't always because I usually return the fish to the water, either. I've enjoyed many great days fishing when nothing was biting." Charlie went to the kitchen to refill his coffee cup and as he came back to join Mary, he said, "You know? These young folks coming up the line don't have any patience. They want quick rewards and returns on their investment. What did we say earlier? Instant gratification? Yep, that's it. They need to achieve DXCC in their first year or they think that they've failed. Gee Whiz!! All Andy needed was to be shown that at the bottom of the cycle, he must chase DX through some noise, copy weak signals and learn to be more patient." Charlie thought and sipped his coffee. Then he observed, "Maybe it will make a better ham out of him and make him ready to help someone as impatient during the next cycle minimum."

Patience is indeed a virtue and never more true than as it applies to chasing DX. Reaching the top of the DXCC Honor Roll can take a lifetime but it is the basis of a lifetime of gratification. Very best wishes for a very Merry Christmas, Happy Chanukah and a most happy, healthy and safe DX filled New Year from all the elves and gremlins doing the work in Charlie's Workshop.