

CHARLIE'S WHISTLE

By

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Are you a DXer? If you're a regular reader of Charlie's Whistle, odds are positive that you consider yourself to be a DXer. Chances are that you would also answer yes to that question if it were asked on a repeater or at a flea market? You may not be the kind that stays up all night, waiting for some faint signal to appear or the kind of person who makes vacation plans or schedules surgery around a published DXpedition schedule. But of course, there are different kinds of DXers. Some are extremely serious, keeping incredibly detailed records of their logs and QSL status by band and mode. Others simply enjoy working stations in foreign countries and don't care very much about QSLs. Of course, Charlie is a very serious DXer but he would be quick to tell you that there are many DXers in the world who make him appear quite ordinary if he were to be compared.

The recent holiday party at Charlie's club was a great success and everyone, including first time guests, had a terrific time. The club probably recruited some new members and just about everyone made some new friends. Believe it or not, they actually sang Christmas songs and surprisingly, many members and guests can sing quite well. The essence of fellowship and brotherhood was healthy and alive in the valley. New hams and crusty old DXers were singing and joking side by side. It was wonderful.

Long time DXer friends like Mike and Charlie can usually be found together at social events; enjoying Mary's baking and of course talking about DX. Some of the visitors to the club party who didn't know either Charlie or Mike were attracted to the DX talk and came by to say hello. "Hi, I guess you guys are DXers too. So am I. I'm Larry." Charlie and Mike smiled, gave their calls and asked what the visitor's call was. It wasn't familiar to either of them. But by the call, they realized that he was a very new ham. Mike is much more sardonic than diplomatic. Mike asked Larry what his DXCC total was. As expected, Larry looked puzzled. "My what?" the visitor asked. Mike said it differently, "Are you a member of DXCC?" Of course, Larry wasn't, didn't know what DXCC meant but considered himself a DXer none the less. As noted previously, Mike is much more direct than Charlie in his reactions and responded with silent indifference by taking another bite of his apple pie. Charlie enjoys helping new DXers like this fellow. He also doesn't appreciate Mike's insensitivity at times but they're very old and solid friends, so he could easily overlook it. He asked Larry how long he had been a DXer and learned that Larry had just started but said proudly that he had talked to 48 countries. Mike asked how many he had confirmed and Larry again looked puzzled. Mike reworded it, "How many QSLs do you have?" Larry replied, "Oh, uhh, I guess I have eight or ten; Italy, Canada, Germany, Scotland....."

Mike interrupted him by saying, "Well, I'm glad to see you working DX and collecting cards. Charlie forgot more about DX than most of us will ever know, so ask him any DX questions that you have." Charlie grinned and said, "Oh don't mind this guy, Larry. I can understand why you enjoy working far away stations. DX is great fun, isn't it? Do you have any antenna up on 40 meters?" Larry replied that he had a G5RV in a tree but had only 100 watts of output power. He had never worked anything on 40 except a station in Pennsylvania. He asked, "Is there really any DX on that band?" Mike choked on his coffee and apologized. Charlie answered for him, "Oh yes, indeed, Larry. In fact, 40 meters is my favorite DX band. I'm on 40 CW every morning before dawn. You ought to try it. I'll bet that even with a G5RV antenna, you'll work some good stuff."

Mike explained to Larry that his friend Charlie here was probably the biggest DXer for miles around. He has everything in the world confirmed and sits on top of the DXCC Honor Roll. Charlie stopped his friend by interrupting, "Larry, there are many different sorts of DXers but we're all DXers. There are some who spend virtually every waking hour of the day tuning some DX band and watching for something new. There are others who don't bother to ever turn on their HF radio until their DX Cluster program alarm goes off to tell him that a new one is on the air, gives him the call and frequency. A single key stroke even tunes the radio and turns the antenna to the correct beam heading for him. All he has to do is press a few keys on his computer keyboard. The software nearly works the station for him. Then there are some who merely run a KW and have a big antenna that they aim toward Europe or Asia and call CQ. They work DX by saturating the bands with their signal and working everything. There are dozens of different levels of interest and dedication in between. Invariably if asked, every single one of these folks will tell you they are a DXer." Mike jumped in and added, "Lots of them aren't qualified to carry the shoes of a real DXer like our friend here", as he put his hand on Charlie's shoulder.

Charlie quickly said, "Oh, don't listen to this character, Larry. We're all DXers. We just enjoy it in different ways and that's OK." One of Larry's friends who until now had been sitting quietly had something to say about that. "Charlie, I'm Tom and I don't completely agree. Don't you DXers watch where you stand on the DXCC lists and aren't you pretty happy when they work a new one and move higher on the list?" Mike laughed and looked at Charlie, "Yes Charlie, isn't that true?"

That even brought a smile to Charlie. "Well," he said, "I can't deny what you said. DXers are mighty sensitive to where they sit on the DXCC lists. Many work very hard to gather confirmations to support their DXCC totals on different bands, modes and a combination of all of these, called the DX Challenge. Some have over three thousand in the Challenge. There are more than a dozen flavors, so to speak, of DXCC memberships tracking special modes or bands. Then there's the most common and popular DXCC, called the Mixed DXCC. That's a total of new DX confirmed on any Amateur band or normal mode. There are more Mixed DXCC memberships in the world than any other. It is considered by just about everyone as the Gold Standard of DX achievement awards. You may mix and match as you wish and build your score up to a maximum of 338 entities, not counting any deleted ones. That score determines your qualification for the Honor Roll. Then there are 58 more entities that are now deleted, so if any DXer had them all, he or she would have a DXCC score of 396." Charlie could see that Larry and Tom had that glassy eyed look on their faces. He asked, "Are you following me OK?" There was a pause and Larry was brave enough to say, "No, I'm lost." Tom just grinned and asked, "Charlie, what is your DXCC score?" Charlie replied, "Well, that isn't important. I've been at it for many years and old guys like me have lots of old DX in the log." Mike popped in, "Don't let Charlie fool you. He has the highest total of anyone for a few hundred miles around here." Looking at Charlie, Mike said, "Let's see, counting St Barts that just came on at Christmas time, you're at what.....about 372 or so?" Charlie nodded and said softly, "Well, it's 375 but these fellows don't care about that."

Tom popped up and said, "That's exactly my point. Serious DXers like you know exactly where you sit on the list." Little guys like us know about where we are but its plus or minus 25 or so. Larry added, "I guess it's like baseball players who know exactly what their batting average is going into a game or even before each time at bat, after they get a couple of hits for three times at bat or how far they are from some record they're chasing. They keep records down to the third decimal. Talk about precision!"

Charlie couldn't say that Tom was wrong. In fact, he didn't say anything. Mike had just poured himself a fresh cup of coffee and observed, "DXing is a lot like sports. Can you imagine anyone playing most any sport and not keeping score? Even solitary sports like fishing demand an entire series of metrics to compare one's performance to another or even to his own previous performance."

Mike explained, "There are thousands of DXers in the world who methodically monitor their DXCC position, compared to that of friends and well known top guns like our friend Charlie." Larry and Tom realized that they had learned something this evening in the presence of a DX master. But despite their relative position in the DXCC pecking order, they can be proud to accurately call themselves DXers every bit as truthfully as Charlie or Mike because they all pursue DX and love the thrill of the chase and that's what it's all about.