

CHARLIE'S WHISTLE

By

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One of the club's newest members asked a question during a recent meeting. The same question was asked before by others but as is true with so many topics, they need to be revisited from time to time in order to satisfy the new hams who weren't around to learn the answer to these frequently asked questions previously. Some invariable truths and mysteries of the ages never get handed down to the next generation. Some things simply must be rediscovered by new operators for themselves.

Thinking he was revealing a profound observation, the club's newest QRPer* stated, "We have some big DXers around the club like Charlie and Mike and we have some big contesters around like Steve, Joe and Mert over there at the coffee pot. They all have big towers, big antennas, can run lots of power, have well stocked stations, are all very skilled operators who can easily contact DX stations when most of us think the band is dead but aren't on the air at the same time. On the surface, I can't tell these folks apart. It seems to me that they could all work together, DXers and contest folks. But, it seems that these folks aren't interested in the same things even though they seem to be the same sort of guys. Does that make any sense?"

Some members looked at one another, probably to see who would try to answer this newly DX immersed ham. They've heard it before and of course, some aren't DXers and don't care what the answer might be. But our old friend Mike, the flea market Collins owner, isn't the least bit shy and knew that we'd been here before even though this new fellow hadn't. So, he didn't want to spend a lot of time answering something that was obvious to many members. He stood and said, "I know that you aren't either one; DXer or contest, are you?" The QRPer shook his head but said that he'd like to be both a DXer and a contest. Mike replied, "That's very good. Many good operators are both but invariably one or the other comes up to the top and becomes dominant over the other. Some guys like our friend Charlie over here will make a hundred contacts in a DX contest even though he surely is not a contest, just to help the club's team entry. He'll verify that."

Then, Charlie raised his hand to say something. "I'm sorry but I forgot your name, what is it please?" The QRPer said that his name was Mitch. "OK Mitch, simple plain DXers like me and contesters like Mert and Joe over there who participate in DX contests have a great deal in common. In fact, those two guys are both on the DXCC Honor Roll; even though they'll tell you that they're just contesters. I guess it's just a difference in the way that a ham views himself. Now, the same cannot be said of a pure contest. That ham loves the competition of the contest. It might be all on VHF bands or stateside contacts such as Sweepstakes. As a DXer, the idea of sitting in a chair for many hours logging a few thousand W and K contacts is more than I could stand. Conversely, a contest would wrinkle his nose over a DXer some times spending hours, calling just one single DX station until he eventually logs him. Spending that much time just to log one call sign is totally disastrous and insane to a contest, who wins or loses a contest by whether or not

he can make 6, 8, 12 or more different contacts per minute and sustain that pace for hours and hours on end. He calls that the Q rate and the higher it is, the better. Am I getting through, Mitch?"

Mitch nodded and said he was starting to understand. Another club member wanted to add something. "Hi Mitch. I'm Louie. I'm a DXer like Charlie even though I'm not in his league. I still need about 50 entities." Charlie quickly broke in, "Mitch, don't let him kid you. That means that his DXCC score is around 285, a very respectable total, indeed." Louie continued, "Well OK. That's right but I wanted to tell you that HF DXers will often take part in the many DX contests during the year even though they have absolutely no desire to turn in a score or even keep score. But, they'll keep a good log because contests provide an opportunity to DXers for working DX on a new band or mode because it brings out DX stations that aren't ever active except in a contest. DXers looking to fill-in the blank spaces on their need list can make big progress by taking part in the CQ World Wide, WPX or any of the other big contests. So, to answer your question, a DX operator like Charlie could go over to the contest station owned by Joe, sit in the operator's chair and work all the DX he wanted. Joe could go over to Charlie's place on DX Hill and win a contest from there. Except for some special logging and control programs that each uses at home, there would be no difference to them operating from the other guy's station. They're all top stations with very effective antenna systems. The biggest difference is in the heads of the operators. What their motive was to build the powerful stations that they own and operate is what dictates what it will be used to do."

Another hand went up. "I was the new member who asked this same question about two years ago. Since then, I've made DXCC and placed in the top 10% of the section in a few contests. I really like DXing and contesting equally. I don't really think that I'll pick either one over the other but I can easily see what these top operators are saying. They're probably right and from a practical sense, they're probably suggesting that we go one way or the other just for our own well being. Between chasing the latest DXpedition and preparing for the next contest, I'm in the shack every morning before work and every night after work. My wife calls me the stranger she married. But she's studying to get her ticket now so we have a contest right in the shack just to see who gets to operate." This last fellow invited the one who asked the original question to get together with him after the meeting and he'd explain a few things he has found out that might help.

The president had simply been sitting back, sipping his coffee, finishing some pie and watching this exchange take place across the meeting floor. Finally when it calmed down, he said "Well, if any guest or new member needed to see why we come to club meetings, he just witnessed a live unrehearsed demonstration of the value of our club working together to help a new ham. This couldn't have taken place without the participation of many different members from different seniority levels. Everyone profits, including spectators, many of whom may have wondered about the same things that this brave new member stood up and asked."

Mike looked at Charlie and nodded. The club's DX and contest trust was in agreement.

Club membership brings many different views together and by discussing them together, consensus and synergy, often a better method or conclusion can be reached than anyone ever could by simply discussing with a friend or stranger on the air or by e mail. Support your club and raise your hand during meetings. Don't sit there as though the meeting is a performance put on by the local drama club. You must take part and participate. It's your club and your meeting. It's why you pay dues and support it. Take part in it. Ask questions and offer suggestions. Start at the next meeting.

*QRPer is a commonly used reference, created by Hugh Cassidy WA6AUD (SK), editor of the West Coast DX Bulletin in the 70s. QRP means low power, usually less than 5 watts. QRPer, when used by Cass referred to any newbie DXer who was still in his beginning and learning phase.