

CHARLIE'S WHISTLE

By

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Regular readers of Charlie's Whistle know that Charlie is a dyed in the wool DXer and has been one for many years. Many old timers are not as stereotyped as Charlie, but that may be because they haven't been as active in their ham radio career or aren't as well known by fellow hams. Charlie, on the other hand, has been very active since earning his license more than 50 years ago. Unlike other hams, young and old who aren't avid about their hobby, Charlie was bitten by one particular interest particularly well out of the many other interests in ham radio.

Some new licensees are content to simply buy one or more FM radios and "sit" on one or more repeaters for the rest of their days, exchanging small talk with mostly the same other people every day. Others enjoy building and repairing radios and antennas but rarely ever get on the air. Still others spend their available ham time sitting and waiting for their turn to say a few words on some type of on-air net or through a passing satellite or the space station. There are dozens of other different niche interests that hams can discover and pursue. But, Charlie and tens of thousands of other hams around the world cannot imagine living a day without spending some of it chasing DX, filling out DX QSL cards, reading DX Bulletins, tuning the bands for a surprise opening or at least thinking about DX.

Critics of DXing will often say that they don't want to spend good operating time speaking with people around the world who they don't know and likely will never meet again. They often point out that the extent of a DXer's vocabulary is "5-9 QRZ". DXers will defend their preference by stating that their interest is in determining if a propagation path with other countries is open and not necessarily in the conversation itself. Being able to sit and chat every day with the person on the other side of the earth isn't high on their list but of course, that can and does happen many times, especially when the parties have actually gotten to know one another over time. But, the important distinction is that the DXer is focused on making the contact and determining that a communications path can be established. The non DXer is more content chatting with someone of similar interests in the next town or state and not in learning much about the propagation needed to allow it to happen. The DXer will kid with his friends that stateside stations are QRM and not stations to be worked or logged. Of course, this is harsh and an overstatement but with some DXers, it actually bears some truth. Their log books haven't seen a stateside call in years.

Charlie is known in the area around DX Hill as Mr. DX. In recognition of other top gun DXers like Charlie in the world, the hams who live nearby usually refer to all these remarkable hams as "Mr. DX". Folks like Charlie represent the pinnacle of DX operating achievement, the best DXer that they know. Therefore, within the radius of fifty or so of DX Hill, everyone has Charlie's phone number recorded on his or her frequently called list as their resource for any information related to DX. His number is the DX hotline in the area. That's fine with Charlie and he invariably handles the honor with grace and respect.

The major issues that routinely are asked at flea markets, club meetings or even chance encounters on one of the local repeaters invariably involve a new ham who is still learning the meaning of DX and what it means to him or her. Last week, immediately following the local ARES 2 meter simplex

net, Charlie's telephone rang. The caller introduced himself as one of the locals and that his work schedule had prevented him from attending even one club meeting in the two years that he has lived in the valley. He had many questions about DX and asked if Charlie could help him. Charlie noticed that it was still quite early in the evening, not quite 7:30 and asked if the new fellow could come over right then and help him enjoy some blueberry muffins that just came out of the oven so that they could chat about this matter in person. There's not a person alive within one skip propagation distance to DX Hill who would turn down that offer. Even this newbie had heard of Mary's fame over her baked delicacies.

Charlie had returned to his shack and was cruising the lower end of 40 meters, looking for interesting DX. Europeans were quite strong and he worked a few, just using his 100 watt exciter. There's no need of high power to work these stations. Like any good operator, Charlie runs the minimum power needed to conduct effective communications. That does not mean running 1 KW at all times. It seemed a very short time had passed until the door bell rang and old Rufus bellowed with a couple of deep "woofs" from his reclined position. There was no need of Rufus wasting any energy either. He didn't even lift his head to transmit his woofs.

Mary warmly greeted the visitor who came into the house's small den. He extended his hand to Charlie, "I'm Arnie. I've heard lots about both you and Mary." He could smell an absolutely show stopping aroma and couldn't restrain himself from asking, "Are those your famous blueberry muffins that I can smell?" Mary smiled broadly and nodded, "I just made some fresh ones for dinner tonight and for breakfast tomorrow morning. Would you care to try them?" Of course, no answer was needed or expected. Charlie simply led Arnie into the kitchen.

Mary sat the "boys" down and indicated that there was a carafe of decaf coffee, regular coffee and tea on the table and could serve iced tea or coffee as well. Arnie was quite surprised and said, "Gosh, I'm not used to such choices. Anything would be fine." Charlie poured out three cups of regular coffee and Mary took hers into the den to watch some TV with Rufus while the boys talked radio.

Arnie came right to the point. He said that he asked someone on the repeater last week, "When are the JA stations most likely to be heard on the different bands?" He said that three different guys immediately transmitted simultaneously, telling him to call Charlie for that information. Arnie said, "It was like Pavlov's dog experiments. You mention DX and the immediate knee-jerk reaction is to call Charlie." He explained that it was somewhat similar to what a college professor said about familiar recognition. The professor said that 'when you're a hammer, everything looks like a nail'. So, when the any ham in the area thinks about DX, the thought of Charlie automatically comes up.

In his entire life, Charlie doesn't remember ever evoked comparisons to Pavlov's dogs and chuckled over that. Arnie was quick to add, "Of course, no one meant any disrespect, I'm sure." Charlie said that he hoped he was correct. Then, he asked "So Arnie, what brings you here this evening, other than Mary's baking? How may I help you?"

He started by asking how to become a DXer like Charlie, which of course isn't something that can be easily answered. It would be like asking a major league baseball player how to win a batting title or consistently pitch winning games. Charlie spent some time becoming familiar with Arnie's station equipment, operating schedule and his goals. He responded with some information designed to help

him make good choices. Then Arnie asked about how to find DX when tuning across the bands. Charlie looked at the clock on the kitchen wall and said, "It's just about time for some Far East stations to be coming in on 20 meters. Then after that, maybe we can find some interesting stuff to work on 40 or 80 meters. Let's go to the shack and spend some time on the air." Arnie and Charlie refilled their coffee cups and each picked up one more warm muffin. They made their way through the den and to the shack with Charlie in the lead. On their way, Arnie pointed out, "How do you just know stuff like what you just said? You know what is coming in and where to look." Charlie merely said, "It comes with time."

As Arnie entered Charlie's seriously equipped ham shack, his jaw dropped and he said, "Oh...My...God! This is way more than I expected." His eyes jumped from one piece of equipment to another and to the certificates and pictures on the wall. Charlie had him put his coffee and muffin down on the desk before he spilled them all over the floor. Then, he had him sit in the #2 operating position. Arnie's reaction was like that of a 10 year old baseball fan on his first visit to Fenway Park and hardly that of a 30 something engineer.

There was CW coming out of the headset resting on the desk but Charlie could see that Arnie wasn't a CW person because he didn't identify with any of it. It's easily understood since there has been no code requirement beyond 5 words per minute for years and no requirement at all for the last two years. Charlie spun the dial up to the phone portion of the 40 meter band and found a DL station calling CQ. He was strong, easily 15 to 20 db over S9. Charlie set the transmit frequency and swung the mike boom over to Arnie and said very casually, "Call him, Arnie". Arnie looked shocked and Charlie said, "Go ahead...call him." Of course, the DL heard the call and a nice chat developed. After a couple more QSOs with other stations, Arnie asked about CW and said that some day he'd like to learn the code.

Charlie was delighted to hear that of course and slid back down to the low end of the band and heard a VU station on CW. He glanced at the clock and calculated that "It's just a half hour after sunrise in India and the band is peaking toward the west for him. I'll give him a call." Charlie batted out a quick call and the fellow came right back. Charlie copied his reply for Arnie's benefit and held his pad of paper up to let him read it. The VU station sent, "GE Charlie. HW R U DNG? RST 5NN as usual OB BK TO U" ...

Charlie replied to the VU station and told him that he had a guest visiting. He wished his friend in India 73 and signed with him. He then explained the CW shorthand to his guest and Arnie just smiled and said, "That's cool". Without much effort, another DXer was earning his stripes in Charlie's ham shack. But Arnie had lots of questions; what is DX? Why do some call it the king of ham activities? Isn't that just a bit of an overstatement? Charlie spent the next several minutes explaining the basis of DXing and probably why he is so strongly affiliated with it.

DX is the activity within Amateur radio that attracts thousands of participants around the world. Just the idea of contacting someone far away, possibly around the earth and in a completely different culture and environment, simply through radio transmissions without using Internet or telephone connections is, by its nature, very appealing to many hams. But becoming a top DXer requires more than being appealing or way cool! A DXer has a highly developed skill in operating ability and a competitive station that is available around the clock. It takes years of on air experience, learning

propagation and a very good understanding of how receiving and transmitting equipment functions. No one who becomes a “plug and play” DXer by purchasing a good radio, using a high end set of CW paddles or microphone and waiting for the DX packet Cluster to tell him where to find DX stations will ever develop the skill of a DXer. Those skills are necessary to reach the 200 mark and certainly to reach the 300+ level of confirmed entities in the DXCC chase.

The gold standard of operating awards is the DX Century Club award, better known as DXCC. The basic award is given to a station and operator who has provided proof of 2 way contacts on the Amateur bands with 100 or more different countries, known as entities because some rock piles and reefs on earth can hardly be called a country, even using a wild imagination. Yet these can be counted as distinct “new entities” if contacted on the ham bands. Very specific rules must be met to recognize entities as distinct from all others. There are 338 different entities presently existing in the world. Clearly, the person who achieves DXCC with 100 confirmed contacts has a very long way to go before having all 338 worked and confirmed. It could take a lifetime and often does.

Hundreds of other operating awards in the world are directly patterned after, even copied from DXCC and its detailed rules to achieve it. As said earlier, DXCC is the gold standard. It is the operating award to which other personal operating awards are compared. Therefore, DXCC may confidently be regarded as the most important or king of all operating awards. Lots more information about DXCC including listings of all members may be found at <http://www.arrl.org/awards/dxcc/> There are several types of DXCC; all the way from the common “mixed” to specific DXCC awards when all contacts are made using one mode or band.

Arnie had been listening carefully as Charlie went through all this familiar material. He observed, “Golly, I don’t think that I’m the first person to hear this run down, DX, am I?” Charlie laughed and said, “No Arnie, you surely are not. A few hundred hopeful DXers have been through here.”

It was nearly 10 PM by the time Arnie got up to leave. He thanked Mary and Charlie for their hospitality and a wonderful evening and headed out to his car. Charlie and Rufus went along and Charlie continued answering questions all the way while Rufus tended to his nightly business. Arnie asked if he could come and visit again and of course, Charlie said he was always welcome.

Charlie watched him drive down the hill and followed Rufus, walking his nightly route along the front picket fence and thought about his visitor’s question, how many DXers have come through his shack, likely for their introduction to DX. It surely has been many hams over a great many years. Then, Charlie tried to think of how many actually continued in DXing and reached the Honor Roll. Sadly, he could only think of a few who had done that. In fact, most that he could recall had not even become DXCC members. They work DX when it’s there but not with Charlie’s deep interest. What’s the reason, he wondered? Possibly, the “way cool” aspect when seeing Charlie’s shack didn’t translate into the sacrifice and long all night operating hours needed to achieve top honors in DXCC?

The Honor Roll of DXCC is a relatively elite club, not by choice but by its severe requirements. Fewer than two tenths of one percent of all licensed hams in the world are Honor Roll members. The door is always open but the price of admission is plenty of hard work and desire to achieve it. There are DXers like Charlie in your community. Do what Arnie did; go ask him or her for more information. The world of DX is waiting for you.