

## CHARLIE'S WHISTLE

By

Bob Beudet, W1YRC

Our old friend Charlie sits at his rig air every day without fail. His friends would say that he gets every bit of his dollar's worth from his license and equipment. Being so active, he always hears what's happening on the bands, often before the DX Bulletins report it or clubs and reflectors include it in their chat rooms or editorials and tell the others. That's why Charlie seems to always work rare DX long before others even know it's on the air.

After many years of daily listening, Charlie has developed some views concerning the fairly apparent change in operating styles. It first struck him a few months ago and since then, he has been especially noticing it as becoming far more pervasive. What caught the old mentor's notice was that operators will sometimes start talking before the station he is speaking to or calling has stopped transmitting. When station #1 pauses or takes a breath, station #2 will jump in and start talking. Calling CQ is no different. On any day that you choose to listen, stations will start calling a DX station while the DX is still transmitting. The news flash to all these folks is that when a station is transmitting, the operator cannot receive. It's impossible! In Amateur radio, we normally operate in a simplex mode, meaning that one person speaks at a time while the other person listens. When both speak at the same time, neither one will hear a word from the other nor will any communications take place.

Why does this happen? The most obvious answer for this impetuous style of operating may be that stations have become accustomed to the use of VOX on HF or possibly chatting on repeaters where someone can easily break into a conversation between sentences or sometimes when the other person pauses but only if he releases the push to talk button. Even on repeaters, it is common to hear, on heavily used ones, two or three stations trying to speak at once. They may simply be too accustomed to sitting around a table where everyone talks over one another. Well, it doesn't work that way in radio.

Charlie sees this take place on CW as well as on phone, however not nearly to the same extent. Due to changes by the FCC to the examination requirements, dropping any code testing in February 2007, newer CW operators taking exams since then didn't have to take a CW test to earn any class of license. But to the credit of hundreds of them, they pursued learning CW and improving their skills voluntarily after obtaining their license. Charlie and other CW operators are very gratified to see that happen. It gave Charlie new hope for the future of ham radio as he knew and loved it.

But just as previous operators had to learn, new "no-code" Amateurs need to improve their operating skills. Proficiency will come in time with study and practice. The problem mentioned earlier in this story that caught Charlie's attention might easily be avoided by operators simply using some common sense.

1. Listen and be sure that the other person has finished transmitting before you jump in and transmit.

2. Don't start talking when the other operator merely pauses to take a breath or to think of what he will say next. You don't have to fill every piece of dead air. Wait until you are sure that you won't be transmitting on top of the other station.
3. Charlie's personal favorite....avoid the use of VOX. It is far too tempting to forget that you are on radio and simply start talking as though you were on the telephone, using duplex transmissions.

Proper operating procedure encourages phone operators to use the procedural word, "over" to signal the other operator to transmit. On CW, most operators still use "K" or "KN" to turn it over to the other station. Using good operating procedures saves time and promotes the accurate exchange of information without the need to repeat or the danger of copying any material incorrectly. Speaking or sending CW clearly and smoothly without any attempt to set a new speed record will serve this goal well. The worldwide CW organization called FISTS emphasizes on its membership certificate that its members remember that "Accuracy Transcends Speed" and that they practice "Courtesy At All Times", very good advice for all of us.

On phone, one should always try to speak slowly, articulate clearly and not use strange or "cute" phonetics for a call sign. Most non professional speakers often speak far too rapidly and do not enunciate all words in a sentence or maintain consistent volume in their voice as they reach the end of a sentence. Mumbles transmitted through QRM only waste time and cause more QRM. The DX station may misunderstand your call sign wrong which is a terrible thing, especially if it is a new one for you! So listen to yourself. Hear what you sound like. You may be surprised. Practice into a tape recorder if necessary before operating on the air.

DX stations are not immune from these issues. Charlie heard a few exchanges last week that actually made him smile. In a split frequency DX pile-up, the caller gave his standard 59 report and took a breath before giving his name, location and best regards. The DX operator was subconsciously programmed to move on after hearing his report and he started transmitting as soon as the caller took a breath. He gave his call a couple of times and stated "QRZ, listening up 2 to 3". By the time he stood by, the first caller had just finished talking, only to hear the DX calling another station and not acknowledging what he said. Therefore, the calling station had no idea if he was logged or whether he had a contact. So, he called again and eventually, the DX station answered him again and told him that he was already in the log. This wasted time and took time away from someone else's chance to log the DX. Surely it made him feel foolish. The entire sequence could have been avoided if both stations had simply paid attention to what the other operator was doing and had read and followed any of the good books on DX operating, such as Bob Locher's book, "Complete DXer" <http://www.idiompress.com/books-complete-dxer.html> or ARRL's Operating Manual, available from [www.arrl.org](http://www.arrl.org) .

Learning good operating technique is something that Charlie emphasizes constantly to his students and by his example to thousands of others who observe him every day. There is no substitute for it and an Amateur who lacks good operating technique quickly finds that he or she is not as successful as expected. As in riding a bike, playing a sport, training a

dog, flying an aircraft, scuba diving, playing poker, playing a musical instrument, crocheting or becoming a good cook, there's a correct way to do it and an incorrect way. No one chooses failure willingly so we all owe it to ourselves and fellow operators with whom we share our precious frequencies, to become excellent operators and examples for all others to follow.

Charlie was inducted in the A-1 Operator's Club <http://www.arrl.org/awards/a1-op/> many years ago and is very proud of being a member. His certificate is one of the few he has hanging in his shack, along with DXCC, WAZ and a few other DX operating awards. Membership in the A-1 club is granted to qualified Amateurs only after two existing members independently nominate the same Amateur for membership. The criterion is demanding in that one must always serve as an example of top operating skill in phone, CW or any other mode. It is a fairly elite club, difficult to get into and rightfully should be. No one is permitted to apply for A-1 membership for themselves. Everyone being considered for the A-1 Operator Club must be nominated by other A-1 members, without any action taken on your part. So, Charlie's advice to all readers of this column is to become an excellent operator in the mold of our mentor, Charlie, and one day, hopefully very soon, you also will be welcomed into the club and be recognized along with other top operators in the world.

Actually, recently Charlie was reviewing on-line, the list of Amateurs who had been initially nominated by a member of the A-1 Operators Club. One of the obligations of membership is to be mindful of deserving new members and to extend second nominations for them when personal knowledge warrants doing it. He has initially nominated several over the years and reviews the list of single nominations every few months, looking for a name or call that he recognizes as worthy of being named to the organization and is simply in need of a second nomination.

As luck would have it, he saw the name of one of his students from many years ago on the list. He had lost track of him when the fellow went off to graduate school in California and settled out there to build a career and raise a family. Ham radio would have to wait until later. Before leaving Charlie's area, this fellow had become an incredible operator on CW and in contests. Although Charlie had "Elmered" him from Novice to top op status, he recalls telling everyone how much better an operator this fellow was than he was. Hard to imagine as that is, Charlie will assure you that this young man has it all. Well, without a moment's hesitation, Charlie sat at his computer and typed an e mail to the A-1 Op desk at ARRL, nominating this fine operator. In a couple of days, his nomination was confirmed and that made him smile. He could see in his imagination, the surprised look on the face of this unsuspecting fine Amateur across the country when he learned that he had been inducted into the A-1 Operator Club. That's what it's all about. One day, possibly you will receive a large envelope and rip it open to find that you are an A-1 Operator member. Let me be first to congratulate you!