

CHARLIE'S WHISTLE

By

Bob Beaudet, W1YRC

For several decades, most hams and hams-to-be around DX Hill learned the skills that they needed to be proficient in their operating techniques from Charlie. Of course, hundreds of other "Elmers" around the world carried out similar mentoring but hams near DX Hill consider themselves quite fortunate that Charlie, an undisputable original, lived his last forty plus years in their neighborhood.

Learning from a master and then trying to emulate him or her is plainly the best way to succeed in sports, the performing arts, crafts, skilled trades, cooking and hundreds of other things we all must do. Following the example presented by a role model is clearly the most effective way for students to learn just about anything, whether in their hobbies or in their work. Learning the right way from a master saves time and prevents wasted activity. Tuning most ham bands on any given day or evening will graphically illustrate that a great many Amateurs have not learned proper operating practices nor do they seem to appreciate the value of good judgment and tolerance for their fellow Amateurs. There is clearly need for others to take on Charlie's role in every club and community.

Charlie retired nearly twenty years ago and has slowed down just a bit. His wonderful wife Mary will defend him however, saying that speed isn't the necessary skill that defines a master unless one is talking about NASCAR racing. Mary knows that his mind and ability to process complex thoughts quickly are just as sharp as ever. She sees him in action on the phone just about every day, answering someone's question, correcting someone's facts or reminding someone of something that should have been learned years before.

His quick recall of specific DX information is phenomenal. He can quote expedition call signs and members of the DXpedition teams from many years before and usually the best QSL routes for them. Charlie admittedly cannot climb to the top of his tower as easily as he could years ago but he still can do it, which is more than many his age can say. He has accepted aging fairly gracefully and doesn't complain very often about the early morning ache in his back as he makes the trip from bed to the shack for mandatory tuning of 40 meters. Charlie is the first to admit that aging is no fun but is also quick to agree with that old comedian; George Burns who became a Silent Key at 100 years old and often said that getting older certainly beats the alternative.

As he has gotten older and has had much more time in retirement to reflect on people and events around him, Charlie has noticed how different some hams are from others. He also has realized how some successful people are quick to admit that they owed much of their success to the help and support that they received from others. Personally gaining from the work of others is a winning way to learn how to become a top player in DX, sports, the arts or as we allowed earlier, just about anything.

Charlie has noticed a disturbing trend among some younger folks, aged 20 to 45. A noticeable lack of respect, especially toward older people and impatience in dealing with others of most any age is frowned upon by people of Charlie's generation who were brought up to respect others, especially elders. Charlie would never think of openly berating older people or referring to them by disparaging names. Yet, that is something he observes regularly, especially among some younger folks who have learned just enough to feel superior but not nearly enough to actually be competent in anything. Some day, they may realize their problem and become better people but it's not a safe bet at all.

Many of these same people have accepted the fact that they must be self reliant as they grow in their various careers. But, despite that, they haven't realized that they cannot get to their goals without plenty of help from others along the way.

Charlie's manner of teaching is to make new Amateurs realize that they control their success as a DXer, contester, and as a designer of antennas or whatever. But they do not live in a vacuum nor can they possibly succeed without plenty of support from those who have the knowledge and much experience to offer useful guidance.

Charlie recently read about another person named "Charlie". This real life person is a lecturer who tours the country, telling about his experiences as a prisoner of war in Vietnam. His name is Charlie Plumb and he is neither a DXer nor even an Amateur. He was a US Navy fighter pilot. Yet, his message is profound and germane to this month's topic in this story. So with full acknowledgement to the author, please read on:

Charles Plumb was a US Navy jet pilot in Vietnam. After 75 combat missions, his plane was destroyed by a surface-to-air missile. Plumb ejected and parachuted into enemy hands. He was captured and spent six years in a communist Vietnamese prison. He survived the ordeal and now lectures on lessons learned from that experience!

One day, when Plumb and his wife were sitting in a restaurant, a man at another table came up and said, "You're Plumb! You flew jet fighters in Vietnam from the aircraft carrier Kitty Hawk. You were shot down!"

"How in the world did you know that?" asked Plumb.

"I packed your parachute," the man replied. Plumb gasped in surprise and gratitude. The man pumped his hand and said, "I guess it worked!" Plumb assured him, "It sure did. If your chute hadn't worked, I wouldn't be here today."

Plumb couldn't sleep that night, thinking about that man. Plumb says, "I kept wondering what he had looked like in a Navy uniform: a white hat; a bib in the back; and bell-bottom trousers. I wonder how many times I might have seen him and not even said 'Good morning, how are you?' or anything because, you see, I was a fighter pilot and he was just a sailor." Plumb thought of the many hours the sailor had spent at a long wooden table in the bowels of the ship, carefully weaving the shrouds and folding the silks of each chute, holding in his hands each time the fate of someone he didn't know.

Now, Plumb asks his audience, "Who's packing your parachute?" Everyone has someone who provides what they need to make it through the day. He also points out that he needed many kinds of parachutes when his plane was shot down over enemy territory -- he needed his physical parachute, his mental parachute, his emotional parachute, and his spiritual parachute. He called on all these supports before reaching safety.

Sometimes in the daily challenges that life gives us, we miss what is really important. We may fail to say hello, please, or thank you, congratulate someone on something wonderful that has happened to them, give a compliment, or just do something nice for no reason. As you go through this day, this week, this month, this year, recognize people who pack your parachutes.

This true story teaches us quite a lot and could help to bring some of the new hams that Charlie has noted down a few pegs from their high horses. Unfortunately, referring to the Vietnam conflict or to anyone who served in the military at that time may not be respected by these 30 something know-it-all people because Vietnam veterans served before these folks were born and today are members of the "old" and "over the hill" people. Some of the 30 something crew lack sufficient respect to recognize the message set forth here. Actually, one might ask if we can actually trust our lives to one of these younger folks to pack our parachute today as Charles Plumb did forty years ago. Times have changed and so have the general attitudes of the 30 somethings. Yet, in some ways, we all at least help to pack one another's parachute.

Unfortunately, disrespect seems to be more widely prevalent amongst our new hams than most of us would care to admit or that it was when Charlie was a new ham. If that had not been the case, the development of Elmers couldn't have taken place and the parachutes of many of us would never have been packed.

We all wish you Happy Holidays, peace and good health from Charlie and his team.
See you next year.