

## CHARLIE'S WHISTLE

By

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Recently, Charlie's club newsletter included a contribution from another club in an effort to fill its own pages. As any newsletter editor will tell you, gathering enough suitable material on a regular basis is very challenging. It was the first time that he published material from a member of a different club from his own. The material looked innocent enough, so he used it and filled some space with the 2,000 word article.

Charlie read the very well written article and immediately enjoyed the idea that his club was gathering material from other clubs. It can only enrich our knowledge to participate in a wide scope of material and thoughts. It was immediately apparent that the article was written by a new ham who knew a great deal more about his previous work in CB than he did of Amateur radio.

He spent a good deal of time describing the specific brand name antennas, tuners, accessories that every new ham must purchase in order to be successful. He listed everything with their part numbers at HRO and even provided the local branch's phone number. He made no reference to the type of antenna, only the make and model number. The story read more like a testimonial that HRO could use in its advertisement. There wasn't a bit of information provided that concerned technical knowledge or even why certain antennas might be more effective in making desired contacts, as he suggested. Charlie concluded that this very talented writer had little radio knowledge beyond the appliance operational skills necessary to connect and use certain commercial equipment.

Charlie printed out a copy of the newsletter from the electronic copy that he was sent and brought it with him to the next meeting which was conveniently scheduled for the following week. Of course, Charlie is a mild mannered fellow and he had no intentions of berating the article or the author but he felt that it was necessary to use it as an object from which to demonstrate a serious need which exists and taken hold of our hobby.

The formal meeting was fairly routine and short in order to leave time for the evening's program which was a "show and tell" demonstration by the club's most prolific QRPer who had just completed packaging a five watt forty meter transceiver into a standard construction hard hat. But, when the president asked for anything in the "good of the order", Charlie rose and asked for a few minutes. Of course, he was granted as much time as he wanted.

He began by giving some background of how any licensed Amateur should be able to understand the basics of what is going on in his or her antenna, what features in a radio are worth spending extra money to have and what is always oversold and not important to most of us. He went on to say how he has seen the average ham change over the last 25 years or so. In his estimation, most new hams and possibly some older ones have absolutely no idea what ham radio basics are all about. He stated that he has reached that conclusion after many months of observation and speaking with newly licensed Generals

and even Advanced and Extra licensees. He admits that he was quite surprised to learn that many of them didn't understand the first thing about a basic half wave dipole or why it was fed in the center with low impedance line. He continued to say that most didn't understand how the ionosphere refracts our signals back to earth at times and absorbs them completely at other times or what sun spots actually do to our ability to make contacts.

Charlie asked, "With the club's permission, I would like to hold regular classes for any interested club member or guest to concentrate on only the basics of our technology. I will do some instructing and am confident that some other members who either work in or have retired from a technical career will also want to help out." At that comment, several members called out that he could count on them to help. Charlie thanked them and continued, holding up the copy of the club's newsletter, "It is not right to read this article written by someone from another club and see him demonstrate how he doesn't understand any of the technology behind what he recommends in his primer for new hams. His statements about using antenna tuners to make a random wire load up and effectively work as well as a larger resonant antenna is totally wrong and misguided. I feel that we definitely need to nip this sort of thing in the bud before our new generation of hams believes this stuff."

A member raised his hand with a question, "So Charlie, are you saying that everything in this article is wrong and we shouldn't have published it?" Charlie shook his head and replied, "Oh no, certainly not. He is a very skilled writer and I'll bet that he works in a field that requires that he have outstanding writing skills. Clearly, he has talent. There is actually a good deal of his article that is good and sound advice. I recall him saying how to set up the radio on the operating desk, relative to a window or other source of light. Doing that properly will provide operator comfort and efficiency. He also recommends reviewing the grounding of all equipment on the operating desk before applying any AC power. This is all good advice. My concern is with other things he said that show me that he doesn't understand basic technology surrounding his ham station and antennas."

Charlie's old friend Mike raised his hand and said, "I move to establish a basic theory class in the club and appoint Charlie as the lead instructor. He will pick the meeting place and time and decide how long the class should run." A half dozen members raised their hand to second the motion. The president immediately said, "Those in favor?" That was followed by a thunderous "AYE!!!" He stated the obvious, "the motion is passed."

Charlie chuckled and stated another obvious point, "I guess I opened my mouth and got myself a job, huh?" Of course, that's what Charlie wanted to see happen. Before sitting down, he said that he will be calling on some members to help with this program and he will send an e mail notice to all members when and where the first class will meet. He emphasized that non members are welcome to attend. Charlie explained, "Use your judgment in deciding who among the hams you know might benefit from this sort of course. Just because someone has an Extra license, you mustn't conclude that he or she understands all the basic theory necessary concerning antennas, propagation, operating techniques, grounding, correct CW sending and operating procedures, understanding

QSL bureaus, how to work DX, and a host of other things that form the foundation of the knowledge necessary to become a competent operator. Thank you.” With that, Charlie sat and the president thanked him before entertaining a motion to adjourn.

The QRPer started to set up his demonstration which immediately followed the formal meeting. While he did that, everyone else moved to the back tables to pick up their traditional refreshment after the meeting. Coffee, tea, soft drinks, blueberry pie, several types of cookies and donuts were offered. Several members came up to Charlie and quietly said that they would like to be included in his class when it gets going. They were quiet about it possibly because some members were just a bit shy about admitting that after so many years in ham radio, they didn't feel comfortable with their knowledge of the basics. The fact that they recognize it and wish to do something to correct it is terrific! Simply studying for and passing the Extra exam doesn't teach basic theory. Much of the study material assumes that you know the basics, a serious flaw in the material. Further, most exam material is simply memorized without being learned. Also, holding a license for 10, 20 or more years doesn't automatically inject solid basic knowledge. More likely, it has established some well entrenched bad habits or misinformation which must be corrected.

Despite the fact that several hams, including some surprisingly seasoned ones, approached Charlie expressing their interest in what he wanted to do, Charlie could see many other new hams in the room that he positively knew would benefit from the special study but they remained silent. Possibly, they will decide to join in after they see how well and diversely attended the program develops into. Charlie was certain that a basic theory class was needed and would do a great deal of good. He started immediately to sketch out the program for the first class and how he could provide actual representations of antennas. It was exciting and several of Charlie's old friends nodded their interest to him and indicated that they would help.

The QRP demo was very interesting. The presenter had prepared his material very well and was enthusiastic. That combination rarely fails and everyone who stayed after the regular meeting was rewarded with an exciting program. Several members expressed strong interest in trying QRP themselves.

Driving home after the meeting, Charlie's head was spinning with ideas of what he would present to help folks understand basic antenna theory and the most effective way to feed RF to different styles of antennas. It will be fun for him as well. Seeing so many hams dramatically improve their technical knowledge at each class will be very rewarding for an old retired engineer like Charlie. He was only sorry that the idea hadn't occurred to him long ago. It's a perfect club education program also. It won't cost very much and may be offered day or night and in almost any venue. Programs like this are among the best reasons for supporting your club and attending meetings. What do you think? Would your club benefit from offering a series of basic electronics classes to its members? I'll wager that they would. Good luck.

