

THE RHYTHM BOMBSHELLS

1944 - 1945

Metfield and North Pickenham, England

Chris (Drake) Dracopoulos



Once upon a time, in 1944, there was a terrific "Swinging" big band based at North Pickenham, England. The GI musicians came from all parts of the USA with ranks from PFC to Captain. While in England, at that time, every musician in the Army Air Corp usually headed for the Red Cross Club as soon as he had unpacked his barracks bag. One of those musicians was a piano man, Lt Elwood Morris Jones, Jr, "Jonesy" to his friends, stationed with the 491st Bomb Group at Metfield.

- During one of his trips to London at the Officers' Mess Hall in the Mt. Grovesnor Hotel, he met an old college chum. He turned out to be the director of the Military Bands in London and was friendly with the SHEAF Special Services officer. Soon thereafter, Jonesy had enough instruments and stock arrangements at Metfield to start rehearsals. They named the band THE RHYTHM BOMBSHELLS. The band members were evenly divided between operational crews and the ground support, and rarely did a mission interfere with their band jobs.
- This was also true when the 491st was transferred to North Pickenham after their bomb dump blew up at Metfield in August of 1944, and they replaced the 492nd, which lost more planes in combat than any other bombardment group in US history (three months of combat missions).
- Chris (Drake) Dracopoulos was assigned to Station Defense in February of 1944 and worked with Special Services at North Pick. He was the drummer who led a small band that played for base dances and was the Master of Ceremonies at the weekly "Record Hops" in the Enlisted Men's Aero Club.
- The local pub in the nearby town of Necton was one of the "in" hangouts where on many nights, while on a 6 hour pass, Chris played the badly out of tune piano. GI's from North Pick and Watton, "chicks" from the (ATS) Army Transport Service (England's WACS), stationed nearby, and old timer locals gathered for "Mild & Bitters" (we Yanks paid for many of them), and a lot of hours of "Sing Along" !! Does anyone remember those nights???
- When the 491st arrived at North Pickenham, around the second week of August, 1944, Chris and Tommy Young, the guitarist, were put in charge of the band since they were always available. The band continued as THE RHYTHM BOMBSHELLS and went from 11 pieces to at least 14 pieces before disbanding in July, 1945 when many of us left for the states on the famous troop ship, the Queen Mary.
- The band was privileged to have a terrific assortment of stock arrangements (charts), many Glenn Miller originals, which helped make THE RHYTHM BOMBSHELLS a great-sounding band. The more we played, the "tighter" we became. At North Pick the band played for weekly dances at the Enlisted Men's Aero Club and the Officers' Club.
- One of the highlights was playing for the 491st "100 Mission" party which was a resounding success. Between VE Day, when the missions ceased, and July 1945, we also booked the band to play for dances at neighboring bases which were not fortunate enough to have a base band of their own. Needless to say, we were greatly appreciated.
- At times the motor pool would give us a hard time when we requested transportation. Chris would call on Lt (later Captain) Kenneth "Red" Plummer, our tenor sax and trumpet player, native of Ottumwa, Iowa, who would "pull rank"; then we would get our 6-wheelers!
- Jonesy, our piano man, recalls sitting on his bunk early one morning, taking off his shoes after a band job, when the orderly came in to call for a mission. Fortunately he was able to take a good nap in between "briefing" and "start engines." He also recalls a couple of humorous events:
- At one job the piano was so flat he had to transpose "up a step" so the band could tune to it. Then, after we played in a band contest, Lt Bill McClelland, our trombonist, fell backwards off the stage and

wound his trombone around his neck. No, he wasn't hurt, but had to go to London to get his trombone straightened out.

Jonesy and Bill McClelland met at the 1985 reunion of the 2nd Air Division Association and both agreed that the band kept all of us sane through those stressful days and nights. Chris, now of Malden, Massachusetts, has been in touch with the following former band members:

Elwood Morris Jones, Jr (piano)	San Diego, CA
Donald W. Whited (Bass)	Tulsa, OK
Laverne Sevilla (Tenor sax)	Cheektowago, NY
William McClelland (Trombone)	New Concord, OH
Carl Lepon (Alto sax)	Longwood, FL
Russell Hellwig (Drums)	St Charles, MO

- Here is a list of all THE RHYTHM BOMBSHELLS whom Chris can remember with their 1944 home addresses and some current addresses:

Chris (Drake) Dracopoulos (Drums)	39 Harris St. Malden, MA 02148 (Current)
Russell F. Hellwig (Drums)	1234 Shirley Ridge Dr. St Charles, MO 63304 (Current)
Elwood Morris Jones, Jr (Piano)	4225 Mt Voss Dr. San Diego, CA 92117 (Current)
Donald M. Whited (Bass)	4117 E 64 th St. Tulsa, OK 74136 (Current)
Laverne F. Sevilla (Tenor Sax)	40 Denham Blvd. Cheektowago, NY (Current)
Carl J. Lepon (Alto Sax)	169 Gold Club Dr. Longwood, FL 32779 (Current)
William L. McClelland (Trombone)	151 Montgomery Blvd. New Concord, OH 43762 (Current)

Addresses in 1944

William K. Carithers (Piano)	Unknown
Tommy Young (Guitar)	C/O Mrs. English 68 Bigelow Ave. Watertown, MA
Anthony Puca (Bass)	15996 Bergen St Brooklyn, NY
Thomas W. Parker, Jr (Tenor Sax)	82-67 Austin St 514 Mowbray Apts Kew Gardens 15, NY
Sgt John D. Hassler, Jr (Tenor Sax)	C/O John Sr 4035 Zenith Ave N. Minneapolis, MN
Eddie Zisko (Alto Sax, Clarinet)	Steubenville, OH
A.K. "Pete" Chauvin (Alto)Sax	2535 Baldwin Ave Detroit 14, MI
Emanuel Knoblock	Unknown
Kenneth "Red" Plummer (Tenor Sax/ Trumpet)	719 N. Fellows Ave Ottumwa, IA (Folded wings)
William "Bud" Babcock (Trumpet)	17 Crocker Ave New London, CT
Art Case (Trumpet)	30 Wilmar Terrace (1 Streit Ave) Poughkeepsie, NY
Glen L. Pool (Trumpet)	PO Box 84 Moran, TX
Ray Eaton (Instrument ?)	18 Truman St New Haven, CT
Don Braem (Instrument ?)	505 So Vine St Marshfield, NY

There were 30 GI musicians at one time or another who played in the North Pick band. We have identified 18 and know the current addresses of only 7. IF YOU KNOW THE WHEREABOUTS OF ANY OF THE MEMBERS OF "THE RHYTHM BOMBSHELLS" of North Pickenham or can identify any of the unidentified from the "100 Mission" party photo, please write to:

Chris (Drake) Dracopoulos

39 Harris Street Malden, MA 02148

WE WOULD BE MOST GRATEFUL!!

