

Airman Ray Smith

7002nd USAF Hospital

Chambley Air Base, France

This is a quote from Ray Smith before he passed away in 1979 telling in his own words his life in the US Air Force during an interview. You can find more on that interview later on in this document.

THE WORDS OF RAY SMITH

I joined the Air Force in 1952, July 22nd, serial #AF15475566. I was born in 1934, Halloween night - October. I was the seventh son of the seventh son. My family and I moved from Melber to County Line Road (in the same county of Graves). There we lived with at another sharecropper's farm. Mr. Dowell was his name. From there we moved out in the country close to Mayfield KY. From there we moved to St. John's KY, on Highway 45 west of Paducah KY. From there we moved to another farm on Highway 45 half way between Paducah and Mayfield, KY. At that time I was nine years old.



From there we moved to Lone Oak, KY, which is three miles west of Paducah where I attended school for the 4th through 8th grade. My father then bought a farm (called Pepper's Farm) seven miles north of Lone Oak. I never resided there as I left

home at that time at the age of twelve. After that, my father sold the farm and moved to Paducah. I visited there frequently while working as a helper on a Coca-Cola truck. I also rode my bicycle to work at Kirchoff's Bread plant in Paducah, where I operated an oven.

From there I went to the International Shoe Company working as a sole back tacker and tack machine operator. One day a friend of mine came to me at lunch time and said "Let's go swimming." We did, and this brought about my resignation (or otherwise be fired.) This lead to my enlistment in the U. S. Air Force in 1952. I took my basic training at Sampson Air Force Base and then transferred to Fort Knox, KY.



I was later transferred to George Air Force Base, Victorville, California. While there, I had my first paying job as an entertainer at Nora's Desert Inn, Barstow, California at the rate of \$12.50 a night, Friday and Saturday only. From there I was transferred to Metz, France at Chambley Air Force Base, 21st Fighter Bomber Wing, my position - Medic. After nineteen months in Metz, France I was returned to the USA - New York City - where I was discharged with honors and medals for

service beyond the call of duty, accepting my original discharge June 22nd, 1960 which is eight years of service to my country...which I am proud of.



Behind Ray are "The Rock 'n' Roll Boys" -

James Webb, Dean Perkins, Raymond Jones, and Henry Stevens on drums.



RAY SMITH



[Narvel Felts Reflects on Ray Smith](#)

Carl Perkins on Ray Smith:

"Well, to say something about Ray Smith, you're talking about a man who had as much to do with the foundation of rock-a-billy music as anybody I knew. I knew Ray many, many years ago, back in the fifties. I knew him to be a trooper, and when we called each other a trooper back then, that's what you was. You were not a copy cat. Ray Smith should have been, and was, in the hearts of people like me, and his fans, one of the truly great rockin' talents who came out of the fifties years. He will never be forgotten. When men go on and leave what Ray Smith left us to love and cherish, it's a treasure that man cannot take away. It's something you bury in your soul and you live on with it, and through our livin', Ray Smith will never die."

Ray Smith on Sun Records and Sam Phillips

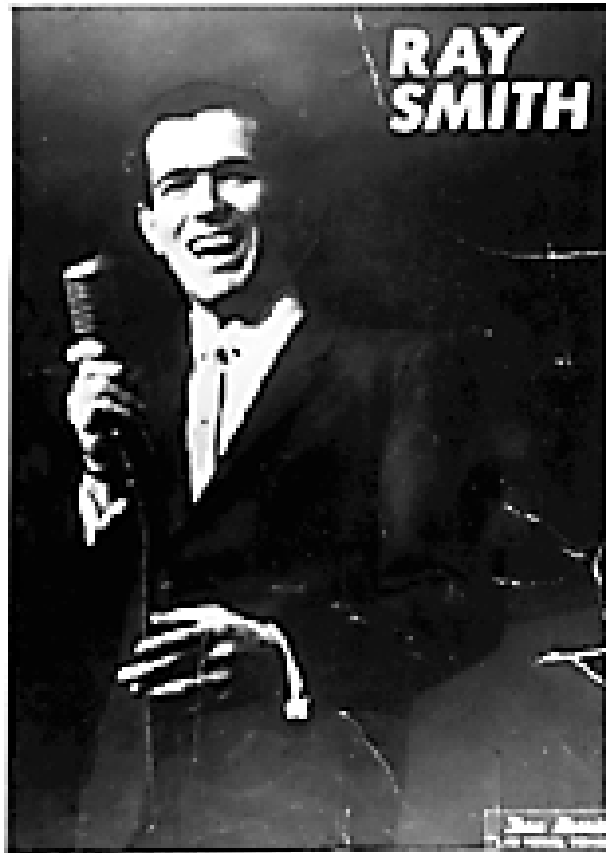
"It really was a little hole in the wall but it had the best damned sound! It had the sound for that day and time. I remember I sung one song with a bucket over my head so that they could get the sound they wanted. Another time we did Sail Away with Stanley Walker singing tenor. We took five stacks of records, in fact it was Bill Justis's record of Raunchy, and stood Stanley up there on those so he could get even with me to sing in the mike. Hell, they'd do anything to get a sound! Another time on So Young I remember Charlie Rich was on piano. The intro and the ending was the same and I remember faded out on that damned thing. After we'd faded, Charlie was still sitting there playing his lick. Everybody had done stopped and Sam yelled, "Charlie, we're done. We're finished!" Charlie was feeling good. He'd reach up, get a drink, never miss a lick.



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I won \$100 off Sam Phillips one time. This was 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning. We were betting on the first song Hank Williams ever sung on the Opry. I told him it was Lovesick Blues and Sam said, "Hell no, It was Mansion on the Hill." I said, "Bullshit!" Sam said "I'll bet you \$100 and I said, "You're on." So Sam goes and phones Audrey Williams in Nashville. I said, "I'm gonna get on the other extension", because I knew Audrey and had backed her up. Sam said "Audrey, I'm sitting here with Ray Smith and we got \$100 bet on the first song Hank ever sung on the Opry." She said "It was Lovesick Blues" and Sam said "Godamn it, Audrey, you just cost me \$100 and he told Sally to go write out a cheque for \$100. I shoulda taken that son-of-a-bitch and framed it. But I didn't - I spent it! But Sam is a hell of a guy. Crazy! He'd go a week without shaving. Ha! Damned nice guy, though. Started us all" --- Ray Smith talking to Dave "Daddy Cool" Booth, 10/26/75.

Publicity photo from Ray's Las Vegas days.



An interview with Ray Smith - 1979

Q) Where is Melber, Kentucky - your birthplace?

A: Melber is not a town but is a 'burg where I was born a sharecropper's son. It is three miles out in the country. Melber is thirteen miles west of Paducah, KY and Graves County KY.

Q) What did your dad do for a living?

A: My dad was a sharecropper and a sheet metal worker. He also worked for the atomic bomb plant in Paducah KY, which is one of the biggest in the USA. Alben W. Barkley was responsible for having it placed there. He was the Vice President of the United States under Roosevelt and Harry S. Truman. I used to carry Vice President Barkley's newspapers, the "Paducah Sun Democrat." I also served him when I was a curb hop at Price's Barbecue on 34th and Broadway in Paducah KY.

Q) What was the influence of music on your early life?

A: A direct order from a Sergeant while in basic training at Sampson Air Force Base in Syracuse, New York, to sing without a guitar or any kind of instrument or music. I was standing in my shorts and shower clogs and the song I sang was "Lovesick Blues." This led to me being entered in the base's talent show. I won 1st prize. That is what influenced me into music, and I have been doing it ever since.

Q) How do you recall your childhood days?

A: Happy, very sad, poor, and a will to rise above it.



Ray Smith Hits Via 'Rocking Little Angel'

Born October 31, 1938, in Paducah, Ky., and educated there, Ray Smith first became interested in a musical career while in the Army. After his discharge he formed his own band and soon had weekly TV shows in Paducah and Evansville, Ind.

Q) Did you have any favorite music at that time?

A: Eddy Arnold, Ernest Tubb and Gene Autry.

Q) Did your parents have any musical influence on you?

A: No.

Q) Do you have any musical education?

A: No.

Q) What instruments do you play?

A: Guitar, piano and harmonica.



In this picture Stanley Walker takes center stage.

Stanley provided the unique guitar stylings on Ray's Sun recordings (and vocal harmonies on "Sail Away" - SUN 319) and played with Ray extensively during the late fifties and early sixties. Before joining Ray, he played with the gospel act

the "Singing Ramboes". After his tenure with Ray Smith, Stanley became Jeanie Sheppard's guitarist. With Jeanie, Stanley played the opry numerous times and also "Hee Haw." Stanley recorded some outstanding country tunes of his own in the early eighties. Stanley plays to this very day doing weekend gigs around his beloved Western KY, and remains the nicest guy you will ever meet and one of the finest guitarists you will ever hear.

Q) Where and when did the "Rock and Roll Boys" come about, and who were they?

A: In 1956 I started "Ray Smith and the Rock and Roll Boys";

bass and rhythm guitar - James Webb from Bardwell, KY, guitar - Raymond Jones, Bardwell, KY, steel guitar - Dean Perkins, Mayfield, KY, drums - Henry Stevens, Metropolis, IL.

Q) What kinds of gigs did you play?

A: We did mostly one-nighters, concerts and night clubs in Kentucky, Illinois, Missouri, Tennessee, Arkansas, Mississippi, Louisiana, Oklahoma, California, as many states as there are in the USA ... we worked them all. I also had my own TV show for two and one half years on WPSD, channel six, in Paducah, KY. It was called "The Ray Smith Show." My announcer was Bill Green. My sponsor was Beardsley Chevrolet, Bardwell, KY. After six months Beardsley canceled my show to sponsor another country show. Two days later I was called by the producer at WPSD, who asked if I would like to keep my show with no sponsor, they would produce it themselves. I accepted and we aired every Monday night from 7:00-7:30 pm and later on Wednesday from 8:00-8:30; "A" time. After that I made my first record in 1958 on Sun Records owned by Sam Phillips. It was called "So Young" and it put me on the Dick Clark Show at the Little Theatre in New York City, which lead to other TV shows such as American Bandstand and other shows all over the nation. I was contracted to do my own show on Channel seven in Evansville, Indiana on Saturday afternoons for one month.

Q) Did you do any radio or tv with The Rock and Roll Boys?

A: Yes, my first radio show was on WMOK, Metropolis, IL. Ed Hills was the announcer and it was the original "Ray Smith and the Rock and Roll Boys." Then I had a radio show in Benton, KY and guest appearances on radio stations all over the country including Mayfield, Paducah, Newport Arkansas, and Louisville KY; and TV shows all over the USA and Canada (Channel 9, Toronto, Channel 11 Hamilton, Ottawa, Peterborough, CHEX Channel 12 - all in Ontario.)

Ray at the drum kit.

Q) Who is Charlie Terrell and how did you meet him? What influence did he have on your career?



A: Charlie Terrell is the owner of a lime and fertilizer company in Sikeston, Missouri. He was formerly the manager of Onie Wheeler, who had a hit record which he wrote himself, and whom I very highly respect and admire as he is now a member of the Roy Acuff Band. Charlie Terrell saw my TV show and gave me a call at the TV station after my show was over, asking me if I had a manager. He also asked me if I was a recording artist. I replied "No" to both questions and he asked me if I would like to have one. I replied "I don't know... I am working seven nights a week and doing a TV show as it is." His reply: "When can I meet you for discussion regarding management and a recording contract." At the time I said "Yes, but I don't know when." He came to my home three times, and on the third time I drove into my driveway and there was a car sitting in front of my home. The man got out of the car with an attache case in his hand, walked up to me and said "Are you Ray Smith?" I said "Yes" and he said "I am Charlie Terrell from Sikeston, Missouri." He said "this is the third time I have been here." We proceeded into my home to talk business. After a conversation and everything was settled, the final words were "If I can get you a contract on a leading label, will you sign me as your manager?" I

replied "Yes." Three days later, he returned from Memphis, Tennessee with a contract from Sun Records signed by SAM PHILLIPS. In 1958 I did my first recording "So Young." Charlie Terrell was my manager for fifteen years.

Q) While with Sun, you didn't record with your own band but used the famous Sun Studio gang for backup. Why did you not use your own band?

A: You are wrong! I did use my own band. The only one that was not a member of the Rock and Roll Boys was Charlie Rich who wrote and played piano on four records I recorded for Sun. The only other one that was used at Sun Records that was not my band was the fellow who wrote "I Forgot to Remember to Forget" recorded by Elvis Presley. His name is Stan Kessler. Oh, and Lee Van Cleef as drummer for one session, otherwise the rest of the musicians were all the Rock and Roll Boys. The engineer and A&R men were Jack Clements and Bill Justis, who had a hit with "Raunchy."

Q) I know a lot of things happened at 706 Union in Memphis and there are plenty of stories around about those wild days. Please tell me what you remember most of all about the time you spent with Sun Records.

A: Happiness, parties, etc.

Q) Then came JUDD... obviously this was pretty logical as it was owned by Sam's brother. How exactly did the Judd recordings happen?

A: Very carefully. They produced my biggest seller: "Rockin' Little Angel."

Q) Your first Judd single was a smash hit... released nationwide

and even getting a lot of recognition overseas. The follow-ups didn't do so good and no wonder, they lacked that catchy rock and roll beat. Why didn't Judd try to follow that hit with another rocker instead of the ballads?

A: Because he is stupid. (ha ha)



Q) Tell me how you came to record for the following labels and if possible give me approximate years you recorded those records. Infinity, Vee Jay, Warner

Brothers, Smash, Tollie, Celebrity Circle, Diamond

A: Because I was asked. Infinity - 1962, Vee Jay - 1963, Warner Brothers - 1963, Smash - 1963, Tollie - 1964, Celebrity Circle - 1965, Diamond - 1966



Q) The Diamond single was followed by 3 singles for BC, a label owned by Charlie Terrell. Did this label exist before you recorded on it?

A) No.

Q) How did you get on the Nashville based Cinnamon records? This is quite interesting, as Narvel Felts (another underrated fiftier) recorded some stuff for them.

A) Charlie Terrell.

Q) What is the connection between Corona and Boot?

A: None.

Q) How do you feel about the two singles you made for WIX records?

A: Beautiful... "Room Full of Roses" is #1 in London England now.

Q) What do you think about today's country music with all the violins and big production songs?

A: Mel Tillis, Faron Young, Marty Robbins... they are beautiful!

Q) Have you always been in the music business full time since you left the Air Force? Did you have any jobs on the side - What kind and where?

A: Yes, music full-time.

Q) How did a Kentucky boy end up all the way in cold cold Canada?

A: You go to Detroit and turn left.

Q) What do you specifically like about being in the music business?

A: Company, people, and friends.

Q) What are your goals in the music business?

A: Same as anyone else in the business.

Q) Do you feel the business has given you a fair shake so far?

A: Not as far as royalties, but as far as people - I love it and I will do it until I die.

DON'T STICK NO FORK IN ME ... I AIN'T DONE YET!!!



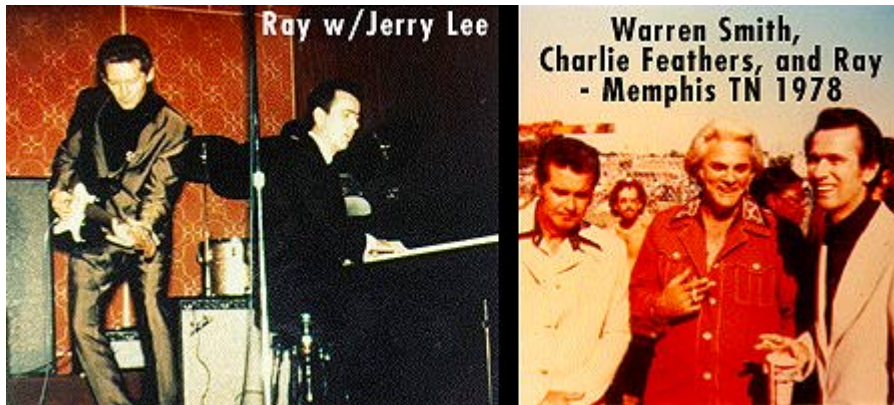
This is Ray at home in Ontario working on what would eventually become his rockin' version of "Roomfull Of Roses." The piano at which he sits was obtained from the legendary Ronnie Hawkins. Ray was looking for a piano for his home and inquired with Ronnie if he could buy this one.

Ronnie came up with the price of \$300. Ray then offered him double or nothing on the flip of a coin - and won - taking the piano for nothing. (notice cool beverage at arm's length)



"Much of the material you see here comes courtesy of the one and only Tommie Wix, without whom this page would

not be possible. Tommie was a close friend of Ray's. She presided over his fan club, produced his last recordings, and was largely responsible for his resurgence in popularity (particularly in Europe) in the late 1970's. Thank you Tommie, and rock on!"



Yes, that's Sleepy with Ray, along with Peter Zdenko, Eindhoven Holland.



LEFT: One of Ray's early line-ups featuring a very young Stanley Walker on lead guitar. **RIGHT:** Ray performing in 1956 (2 years before his first recording at Sun). Note the stand-up bass and banjo accompaniment in the background.



Ray Smith passed away in 1979