

It's all Part of my Rock 'n' Roll Fantasy

By Dick Cole, Chief,
DCMA Public Affairs

The mobilization began just after dawn. The fog and mist were still hanging in the air as the bus pulled into the parking area and began discharging its passengers. Quickly, a small crowd began to gather, greeting the passengers with clipboards, handshakes and the flash of cameras. The individuals leaving the bus were royalty, but not in the conventional sense of rulers and potentates. They were some of the biggest names in rock music.

They had arrived to be counselors at Rock 'n' Roll Fantasy Camp, and I was a "camper."

We were outside on an uncharacteristically steamy September day in Columbus, Ohio, checking in for the first-ever one-day RRFC. Prior to this experiment, RRFC had always lasted five days and was held only at one of four locations: Los Angeles, New York City, Las



Dick Cole, DCMA Public Affairs, at Rock 'n' Roll Fantasy Camp in Columbus, Ohio. (Photo courtesy of Dick Cole, DCMA Public Affairs)

Vegas or London. The goal was to attempt to cram as much of the weeklong experience as possible into a single day. I was there as part of a group of 80 campers to try my hand at being a rock star.

RRFC takes people of all ages, from all over the world and, after an audition and a few hours of rehearsal in a camp-assembled rock band, puts them on stage

to perform before a crowd at a venue like LA's House of Blues. For this one-day camp, the bands were going to perform in a "battle of the bands" with the winner announced during a Journey and Def Leppard concert at Columbus' Germain Amphitheater.

My instrument is the drums. I began playing at 13 after six disastrous years of squeaking away on clarinet, and I played in band and orchestra throughout junior high and high school and then sporadically until 2004 when I resumed taking lessons and started playing regularly with a praise and worship band at my church. That experience was certainly satisfying

During one rehearsal break, I got some private drum instruction from both Simon Kirke, drummer for Bad Company and Free, and Artemus Pyle, former drummer for Lynyrd Skynyrd.

and enjoyable, but I still yearned for a taste of the rock star life. At about \$10,000, not including travel costs or hotel, the standard five-day camp is no frivolous indulgence and is out of my price range. I thought I could afford the one-day camp in Columbus at a cost of \$2,000 plus travel and hotel.

All campers were to come prepared to play two songs for their auditions, which began immediately at 8 a.m. The 10-song audition song list included: “Gimme Some Lovin’” by the Spencer Davis Group; “Sweet Home Alabama” by Lynyrd Skynyrd; “China Grove” by the Doobie Brothers; “Sister Christian” by Night Ranger; “Rock ‘n’ Roll Fantasy” by Bad Company; “Alright Now” by Free; “Sweet Child of Mine” by Guns ‘n’ Roses; “Once Bitten, Twice Shy” by Great White; “Pretty Woman” by Ray Orbison; “Brown Sugar” by the Rolling Stones; “Rock ‘n’ Roll” by Led Zeppelin; “Smoke on the Water” by Deep Purple; and “Can’t Buy Me Love” by The Beatles. These songs

were on the audition list because a member of most of these bands was a counselor at the camp. I came prepared to play “Sweet Home” and “China Grove.”

After playing “China Grove” for my audition, I was assigned to a band. Our counselor was Michael Lardie, keyboard player for ’80s super group Great White. We received a tent assignment for rehearsals. With barely time for a “hello,” we began the process of selecting a song from another list to learn, rehearse and perform in the battle of the bands later that evening. After a brief discussion, because we had a female lead singer, the band decided to rehearse “Hit Me With Your Best Shot,” an ’80s rock standard by Pat Benatar.

The rehearsals were intense. Lardie would make suggestions about ways to improve our performance and to perform with flash and panache to impress the judges

in the battle of the bands. As we practiced under Lardie’s tutelage, big stars would drop by to pose for photos, listen to a song or even join in and play. During one rehearsal break, I got some private drum instruction from both Simon Kirke, drummer for Bad Company and Free, and Artemus Pyle, former drummer for Lynyrd Skynyrd. On another break, VH1Classic VeeJay Lynn Hoffman came by and interviewed me for a program they were making about the camp.

Besides Lardie, Kirke, Pyle and Hoffman, other stars present for the camp included: Teddy “Zig Zag” Andreadis, keyboard player for Guns ‘n’ Roses; Jeff “Skunk” Baxter, guitarist with the Doobie Brothers and Steely Dan; Fred Coury, drummer with ’80s “hair band” Cinderella; Spencer Davis, guitarist and founder of the Spencer Davis Group; Mark Farner, lead singer of Grand



Members of Cole’s Rock ‘n’ Roll Fantasy Camp band take a bow following their performance. From left: Parke Fisler, John Rose, Cole, Ro Sweat and D.J. Mathis. (Photo by Jaye Cole)



Funk Railroad; Sandy Gennaro, drummer for Cyndi Lauper; Kelly Keagy, drummer for Night Ranger; and Gunnar Nelson, one of Rick Nelson's twin sons and member of the band Nelson.

Finally, after hours of practice in the heat and humidity of our rehearsal tent, it was time for the day's special treat. We all got an opportunity to meet and greet the members of Journey and Def Leppard, who were performing that evening in concert at the amphitheater. We met our heroes, got our pictures taken with them, shook their hands and got their autographs. Following the meetings with the two bands, we quickly changed clothes and got ready for the battle of the bands.

Each band took the stage outside the amphitheater in random order based on drawing a number from a hat. Ours was the fourth band to perform before the judges. Local radio station personalities, a newspaper entertainment reporter and a VH1 executive served as members of the judging panel. More and more people arrived for the evening's concert and stopped to watch and listen to the RRFC bands perform.



Cole's band greets members of British group "Def Leppard." From left: John Rose, Cole, D.J. Mathis, Ro Sweat, Def Leppard guitarist Phil Collen, Def Leppard guitarist Vivian Campbell, Mike Nelson, Kelly Stroud and Parke Fisler.

By the time our band took the stage, there was a substantial crowd. I frequently am a spokesman to media as part of my duties as a public affairs specialist, but playing in front of that crowd of people was far more unnerving! Once we completed our turn on stage, the members of the band listened to the remaining bands perform and then made our way to our seats for the evening's Journey and Def Leppard performance.

Following Journey's set, as the stage was undergoing reconfiguration for Def Leppard's performance, RRFC founder David Fishof and two local radio personalities took the amphitheater stage to announce the

winners of the battle of the bands. No, it was not our band, but we all had a fantastic time during our camp experience.

Attending the camp motivated me to join a local band — Point Blank — that plays in clubs and lounges and performs for private parties, corporate events and weddings. Two of my RRFC band mates, lead singer Kellie Stroud and lead guitarist D.J. Mathis, both joined a Sacramento, Calif., band, Highway 20.

Therefore, attending RRFC was my motivation to return to performing in a band and made music one of my other lives. I am still a pilot, photographer, book author and college professor besides performing my "day job" with the Defense Contract Management Agency, but, as they say, that's another story. **C**



Dick Cole, DCMA Public Affairs, at Rock 'n' Roll Fantasy Camp in Columbus, Ohio. (Photo courtesy of Dick Cole, DCMA Public Affairs)