

USARC NCO Shined

Story & photos by TIMOTHY L. HALE
U.S. Army Reserve Command

FAYETTEVILLE, N.C. – Bright lights illuminated the stage, synchronized to the pulsing, rhythmic beat.

In the middle of it all, Staff Sgt. Lynnette Collier, and 17 other performers, lit up the stage with energetic songs and dance routines for a near-capacity audience during the 2014 U.S. Army Solider Show at the Crown Theater, here, July 19.

Four months into the road show, Collier, 46, has become the elder stateswoman of the show – a shining star in this year's cast.

See **STAR**, Pg. 6

es in Soldier Show



STAR

from Pg. 5

"I am older than all of them," Collier said, with a laugh. "They are all so young! Some of them are right out of basic or AIT (Advanced Individualized Training). But I'm still in the game!"

Her journey to the Soldier Show started in November at Fort Bragg, where she works in the U.S. Army Reserve Command as administrative specialist in the G-1 Mobilization section.

Collier tried out, encouraged by friends and co-workers who knew she had a long history of singing in churches in her hometown of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

After performing the gospel hit "Open My Heart," by Yolanda Adams, Collier didn't hear anything back immediately. Days and weeks passed before she was notified, via email, to send in a video of her performing.

"The only video I had was me performing "Open My Heart," while I was in Afghanistan in 2009," she said.

Again, days and weeks passed.

Then in February, she was contacted again to travel to Fort Sam Houston for another try-out – this time in front of Army Entertainment staff. The one catch was if she made the show, she would not be returning to Fort Bragg.

POIGNANT PERFORMANCE. Collier gives a heart-wrenching performance during the 2014 U.S. Army Soldier Show. "I feel very blessed to be given the gift that I have and to have this opportunity," Collier said. "I just do what the Lord wants me to do. It may be me on the stage but the talent comes from Him."





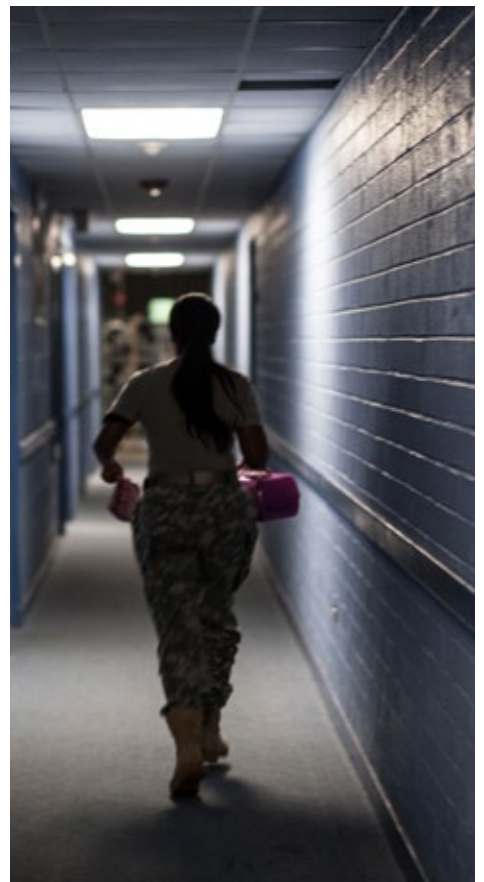
TEAM LINEN. With no roadies, it's not just about being a performer. As the noncommissioned officer in charge of the wardrobe team, Collier, irons cast member costumes before the start of the show. "We have 18 cast members and we do all of their ironing. I have never ironed so many clothes in my life. Not even my own children's clothes!" she said.



STEP, BALL, CHANGE. Collier, left, blocks a dance routine before the show. "I'm older than all of them. They are so young! ... But I'm still in the game!" she said.



MAKE-UP. Collier has her stage make-up applied by Shakera McFadden from the Paul Mitchell School in Fayetteville (*above*). After make-up, Collier runs down a backstage hallway to get ready for the opening number (*right*) and with just minutes to spare before the opening number, Collier (*below*) collects her thoughts.



“I just do what the Lord wants me to do. It may be me on the stage but the talent comes from Him.”

— Staff Sgt. Lynnette Collier
U.S. Army Soldier Show performer

“It was a big risk to take,” she said, adding her then 20 year-old son was living with her in an apartment in Spring Lake. “But I went and sang ‘I Will Always Love You,’ by Whitney Houston,” she said. “That is my ‘go-to’ song.”

She also had to rehearse a dance routine with other potential cast members. Although, she was worried that her lack of dance experience would hurt her chances, it didn’t and she made the show.

As the saying goes, “the rest is history.”

While it may seem to the casual observer that being a part of such a production is full of glitz and glamour, there is a lot more behind the scenes that people do not see.

The entire cast and crew serve as their own roadies at each location – unloading equipment, setting up the stage, managing personnel, rehearsals, and in Colliers case, managing cast wardrobe.

“We call her team ‘Hashtag Team Linen,’” said Sgt. 1st Class Frederick McDuffy, the show’s non-commissioned officer in charge.

“She is the NCOIC of the wardrobe,” he said. “She really brings so much maturity, experience, and leadership to the show. She is very dependable – vocally, professionally, and personally.”

While show cast members can only be a performer for one year, others, like McDuffy, can serve up to three years behind-the-scenes.

“It really is a pleasure to have her as part of the show. I’d like to see her continue on as part of the behind-the scenes crew next year,” he said.

Before each show, Collier and her first squad of Soldiers do all the ironing for each of the 18 cast members. This includes steaming out wrinkles and removing stains.

“I have never ironed so many clothes in my life,” she said. “Not even my own children’s clothes!”

Collier said one of the highlights of being part of the show is the travel.

“We do a 38 installation road show and coming to Fayetteville puts us about halfway through the tour,” she said.

She said that while many people join the military to travel, after 22 years in the Army, she never imagined there would be any travel like the Soldier Show offers.

“I’ve already traveled more in the Soldier Show than I have in my entire Army career,” she said.

Another highlight is the camaraderie that exists with the cast and crew.

“We are Soldiers first but we are also Family,” she said. “I tell the Soldiers, ‘that no matter what is going on in your life, take your attitude, put it in a paper bag and hang it up on the dressing room door before you go on stage.’”

She said that putting on the best performance possible is what each audience deserves.

“It’s just like being on a deployment but without a weapon,” said the Afghanistan veteran. “We have to ensure that our mission gets done at every venue.”

When her tour ends in January, Collier is looking forward to returning to USARC and to her friends and Family, who reside in McDonough, Georgia.

Collier, who describes herself as a very shy person, said her vocal abilities are a God-given talent. Her vocal range showed as she performed in eight of the 14 songs, including three solos to include a Broadway-worthy rendition of “Somewhere Over the Rainbow,” from “The Wizard of Oz,” and a stirring rendition of “The Star Spangled Banner” to end the show.

“I feel very blessed to be given the gift that I have and to have this opportunity,” Collier said. “I just do what the Lord wants me to do. It may be me on the stage but the talent comes from Him.”

As the house lights filled the theater after the show, one thing became crystal clear — Collier is a shining star among many. 🌟



STELLAR PERFORMANCE. Collier shines in a ruby red dress as she sings "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" from "The Wizard of Oz" (top), gives a stirring rendition of "The Star Spangled Banner" (above), and signs an autograph (left) for a fan after the Fayetteville show. "It was a big risk to take, but I'm 'living the dream,'" she said.



[CLICK HERE](#) for more images of Staff Sgt. Lynnette Collier at the 2014 U.S Army Soldier Show on our **FLICKR** page.