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From building bridges to singing ballads: Soldier gets chance to become Army vocalist

FORT LEONARD WOOD, Mo. – There were only a few job choices available for Spc. Jeffrey McCormick when he decided to serve his country in 2012.

Life as an Army engineer was not fulfilling for the Montana native who dreamed of belting out ballads instead of snapping together bridge bays.

One chance encounter changed his life and resulted in a stint as a temporary vocalist with the 399th Army Band at Fort Leonard Wood.

“Ever since I can remember, I have loved music,” McCormick said. “Music in general has been my escape. I didn’t necessarily have the best childhood, and so a lot of times I would escape through music.”

The Bigfork, Montana, native, said he didn’t think he would ever have the chance to pursue his childhood passion. He said he, as a bridge crew-member, dreamed of being a singer often while floating on a river in the cold Missouri weather.

His encounter began when he overheard a conversation between a noncommissioned officer in charge of the 399th Army Band and another Soldier. He said he overheard the NCO talk of his former infantry days and butted in to inquire how the NCO was now a member of the band.

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Several months later, he auditioned with the current band NCOIC.

“When Spc. McCormick first auditioned with the 399th Army Band, I knew right away that he had a special talent,” said Sgt. 1st Class Timothy Kresse, NCOIC, 399th Army Band. “When you do this as long as I have, you just know when you hear the right voice. I am excited for the opportunity ahead of him and proud that he will soon be an official Army vocalist.”

McCormick is in the early stages of this dream becoming a reality, as he is scheduled to attend advanced individual training to reclassify as an Army vocalist.

“It should be a pretty cool experience, because I have already experienced AIT, and now I get to go back with the knowledge of how the military actually works,” McCormick said.

While the band’s musicians were supportive, McCormick said talking to other engineers about wanting to sing got him many strange looks and even less enthusiasm — something with which he was familiar.

“I was the only guy in choir class. Everyone else was too cool to do it,” said the 24-year-old. “The town of Bigfork, Montana was . . . very into popularity, and I wasn’t popular.” Former 1st Sgt. Harold Cole, who also selected McCormick to be his assigned driver, said he knew McCormick would be an asset, wherever he served in the Army.

“Spc. McCormick is a definite team player,” Cole said. “He is well disciplined, respectful, tactful and loves working. I think he has a bright future in the Army and any organization is better off with him in the formation.”

McCormick is humble but said without some talent, he would not have had the chance to work at a job he has longed to do.

“Music is a true passion for me. I don’t know what I would be without music,” he said.

Currently McCormick is attached to the 399th Army Band as part of an on-the-job-training program, while waiting to attend AIT to be classified as 42R.

“What keeps me going is that feeling of using this God-given gift that I have to bring others happiness and joy,” McCormick said. “Music is a huge thing. If I can use this gift to help people in any way, and since I love doing it anyway, then why not.”

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Enclosed: (1) Photo

Photo Cutline: *Then Pvt. 1st Class Jeffrey McCormick, assigned to the 50th Multi Role Bridge Company, 5th Engineer Battalion, strums his guitar during an organizational event. Courtesy photo*

About Fort Leonard Wood

Fort Leonard Wood is a thriving and prosperous installation that has evolved from a small basic training post 70 years ago to a premier Army Center of Excellence that trains about 80,000 military and civilians each year.

Home to the Maneuver Support Center of Excellence, Fort Leonard Wood now trains and educates service members and develops doctrine and capabilities for the Training and Doctrine Command's U.S. Army Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear School, U.S. Army Engineer School, and U.S. Army Military Police School, three gender integrated Initial Military Training brigades, and the Army's largest Noncommissioned Officers Academy.

Over the past several years, Fort Leonard Wood has received numerous additional responsibilities to include supporting a colonel-commanded Marine Corps Detachment and an Air Force Detachment, which are both the largest on any Army installation, are located on Fort Leonard Wood; a large Navy Seabee Detachment and elements of the Coast Guard train here as well.
