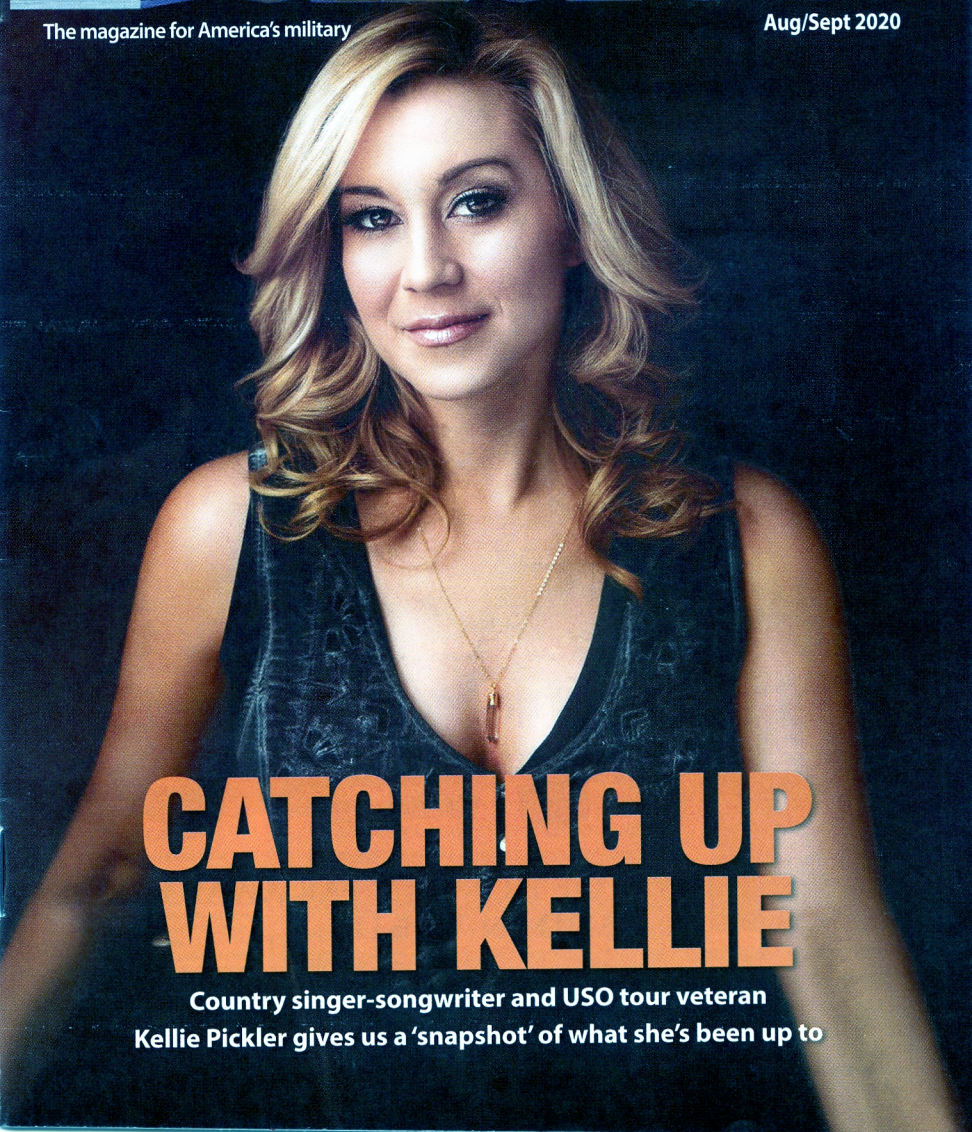


Salute

The magazine for America's military

Aug/Sept 2020

A portrait of Kellie Pickler, a country singer-songwriter and USO tour veteran. She has long, wavy blonde hair and is wearing a dark, sleeveless top with a necklace. The background is dark.

CATCHING UP WITH KELLIE

Country singer-songwriter and USO tour veteran
Kellie Pickler gives us a 'snapshot' of what she's been up to



Country singer-songwriter and USO tour veteran **Kellie Pickler** gives us a ‘snapshot’ of what she’s been up to

You could call Kellie Pickler a “modern minstrel”: this country crooner has spent the better part of the past 14 years like a wandering troubadour, collecting poignant true tales of human triumphs and tribulations from all around the world and translating these stories into relatable, unforgettable and cherished country songs.

“I’ve always been a person who is very aware of my surroundings, very observant,” Pickler explains. “I pay attention to what’s going on around me, especially to what’s going on with other people. One of my greatest joys in life is listening to people’s stories...If you just ask, you can learn a lot about people, sometimes their whole life story!”

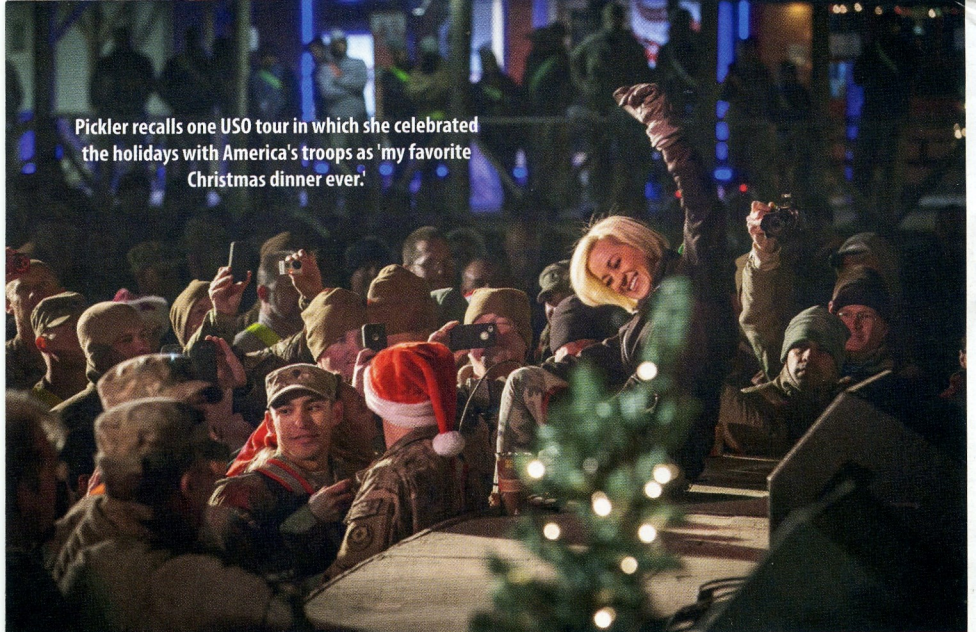
“This has translated itself into my songwriting,” Pickler continues. “People identify with the songs and the stories, because these are *their* stories—I’m telling the truth about them and, maybe, a universal truth as well. People have more in com-

mon than they realize. I feel very connected to all of their stories and so blessed to hear them.”

Pickler is known to most Americans as the bright blonde teenager who wowed both audiences and judges—even the notoriously acerbic Simon Cowell—with her 2006 appearance on television’s *American Idol*. That appearance led to a recording contract with 19 Recordings/BNA Records and her debut album, *Small Town Girl*, which contained three hit singles—“Red High Heels,” “I Wonder” and “Things That Never Cross a Man’s Mind”—and has sold more than 900,000 copies worldwide. Her third studio album, *100 Proof*, was named the number one Country Album of The Year by *Rolling Stone* and was listed on Best of 2012 lists by the *Washington Post*, *Rhapsody*, AOL’s *The Boot* and others.

Television has remained a key component to Pickler’s high profile: she partnered with dance coach Derek Hough and won the Mirror Ball Trophy

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Pickler recalls one USO tour in which she celebrated the holidays with America's troops as 'my favorite Christmas dinner ever.'

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on *Dancing with the Stars* in 2013; a CMT documentary series *I Love Kellie Pickler*, co-starring her husband, songwriter/producer Kyle Jacobs, ran in 2015 and 2016; and her most recent effort, the syndicated talk show *Pickler & Ben* which features reporter Ben Aaron, received three Emmy nominations in 2017, and two nominations in its second and final season in 2018.

America's military troops have a special place in her heart, and to date, Pickler has done 12 USO tours, beginning with her first tour in 2007, and says she gets something new out of the experience each and every time.

"I've been so blessed to be able to work with the USO," she notes. "Going on these USO tours has allowed me to build my perspective on the world, and I'm grateful and appreciative of the opportunities to be a part of this organization."

Pickler likens her USO experiences to "snapshots" that have enhanced her life. "I sat at a lunch table with a soldier, face-timing with his wife as she was waiting for their baby to be delivered," she recalls. "I was blessed to be able to share that experience with him....And there are

so, so many moments like that during the USO tours. I feel that being part of those moments has made me a better person."

Some of her favorite USO adventures have involved heavy equipment and machinery, she recalls. "I've flown with the Blue Angels and jumped with the Golden Knights. I've shot a howitzer—and all sorts of guns—and ridden on the back of a Chinook, and all of these experiences are just amazing."

Even more amazing are the stories that she has heard, and been a part of, on USO tours. "My favorite Christmas dinner ever was sitting in the dirt, eating beans out of can at the FOB with a bunch of soldiers," she reminisces. "There was just something so real, so right, about that experience. There was nothing commercial about it. It was just sharing the true meaning of Christmas."

As for her future, Pickler comments, "I have been writing so much. I hope to get back into the studio soon." And there are definitely more USO shows on the horizon. "I'm so passionate about the USO," she says. "I hope to be part of the USO family for as long as they will have me!" 