



Ralph Cecil Collier

2023 ACACHOF Inductee



Deceased 1983

40 Years in Rodeo

Ralph Cecil Collier was a Texas Rodeo competitor, stock contractor, judge, announcer, promoter and producer. He was born January 29, 1910 in the Glen Cove Community of Coleman County, Texas to Abner and Abbie Ralph Collier. His father, a farmer, died when Ralph was young. Fascinated early on with the life of a cowboy, he climbed aboard his first

bronc at age 12. Hiring on with the local Rafter 3 Ranch, he gained proficiency as a ranch hand, and competed in his first rodeo event in 1927 at age 17. Initially, he competed in all five regulation rodeo events, but eventually transitioned into a bronc riding specialist, claiming that participation in all of those events consumed his entire schedule.

By the late 1930's, he was consistently ranking in the top three contestants, winning titles over Casey Tibbs, Louis Brown, Billy Weeks, Bud Humphrey, Paul Bond & Bobby Estes. Among many others, he competed at the Cheyenne, Ogden, El Paso, Houston, Rochester, Calgary, and Madison Square Garden Rodeos. In 1941 & 1942, he competed at Everett Colburn's World Championship Rodeo in Dublin, TX. Before a crowd of 11,000 at the Cheyenne Frontier Days, he became one of the few cowboys to successfully



ride the famed bronc “Five Minutes to Midnight” on July 28, 1943. Among his other successful rides were “Windmill”, “Hell’s Angels”, “Ace of Spades”, “Gone With the Wind”, & “Midnight”. He once made \$2,332 for an eight second ride (which factors out to \$40,000 in contemporary currency). Being a runner-up in the 1944 Madison Square Garden Rodeo, and riding the famed “Home Brew” there the following year. He was ranked in the top ten bronc riders nationwide during the 1940’s. All this success did come at a price, however. Over the course of his rodeo career, he broke a total of 37 bones, including both arms and legs on various occasions. “But shoot, he’d say, they always get well!” The game-changer, however, came on August 7, 1947, again at the Cheyenne Frontier Days. Only one of six bronc riders chosen, he drew the infamous Squawman, who had never been successfully ridden. Fortunately for posterity, the event was photographed by Devere Helfrich. The ride was nearing completion when Squawman took a sudden turn to the right while coming down from a mighty leap. Ralph’s leg snapped just below the hip, and he landed in the dust of the arena floor. After receiving treatment at a Cheyenne hospital, he was transported to the home of his sister, Era Watson, in Coleman by fellow contestant and world champion calf roper, Royce Sewalt. Era was so grateful for Sewalt’s consideration that she named her youngest child Collier Royce in his honor.

Though initially told he might never walk again, Ralph slowly regained his mobility over the course of a year’s time. While confined to bed, he started planning for the possibility of producing rodeos. Returning to the saddle for a time as a roping contestant, he became increasingly involved in both a judging and producing capacity. As a judge, he was paired with Jack Favor, Buddy Mefford & Eddie Hovenkamp, and Colonel Jim Eskew hired him to serve as announcer for the JE Ranch Rodeo. Making a habit of bringing his own stock to rodeo events, and known for his keen eye, he found himself in increasing demand as a stock contractor. Starting with two highly trained geldings, Moe & Joe, he would lease one out and ride hazer for the contestant on the other. The late James White, owner of the Broken Spoke in Austin, TX, recalled how Collier’s perspicacity once saved him from buying a bad horse. At the height of his production career, he was bringing 150 horses to rodeo events.

Competing at the JE Rodeo Ranch in Washington DC one year, he nearly succeeded in stealing the kids show entirely by accident.

Much to his chagrin, his lariat got tangled around his leg after successfully roping a calf, at which time he was pulled from his horse and drug around the arena. It took six other cowboys to successfully chase him down and untangle him, while the calf seemed to seize every opportunity to trample him in the process. He was none the worse for wear from the spill, however, and it made the children's night.

By the late 1950s he had become a full-time producer, as well as the Superintendent of Animals for the Tommy Steiner Rodeo. For Steiner, he coordinated and produced the 1958 Steiner World Rodeo in Havana, Cuba. Moving to Austin to be near family, he produced the Travis County Sheriff's Posse Rodeo, Callahan County Sheriff's Posse Rodeo, Gene Autry's World Championship Rodeo, and the World Championship RCA Rodeo. Over the course of his career, he rubbed shoulders with Roy Rogers, Gene Autry, Dale Robertson, Jock Mahoney and many other Silver Screen Cowboys who traveled the rodeo circuit.

Ralph Collier and Ruby Rae Graham were married in 1942, and she traveled the rodeo with him for years, making all his western shirts by hand. After their separation, he married Bebe Wire, an Austin real estate agent. As poor health set in and his many injuries caught up to him, he left the rodeo syndicate after 40 years and worked part-time for his brother and sister-in-law, Dee & Thelma Collier, at their custom saddle shop "The Lariat Ranchwear" in Austin. Ralph Collier passed away on January 19, 1983, just 10 days shy of his 73rd birthday. His services were conducted by the Reverend Charles Long, and he is interred in the Forest Oaks/Cook Walden Cemetery. In 2022, he was posthumously honored for his many contributions to the world of rodeo by the Dublin Rodeo Heritage Museum in Dublin, TX.

1st Place, SQ Ranch Rodeo, Philadelphia PA, Saddle Bronc Riding, 1943

1st Place, Ogden Pioneer Days, Saddle Bronc Riding, 1943

3rd Place, Madison Square Garden, Saddle Bronc Riding, 1944

2nd Place, Boston Garden Rodeo, Bareback Bronc Riding, 1944

pt Place, JE Ranch Rodeo, Danville PA, Saddle Bronc Riding, 1944

3rd Place, JE Ranch Rodeo, Danville PA, Calf Roping, 1944

2nd Place, National Western Stock Show Rodeo, Denver, Bareback Bronc Riding, 1945

1st Place, Hill Country Championship Rodeo, Kerrville TX,

Saddle Bronc & Bareback Riding, 1947
First Runner-up, All-Around Cowboy, Hill Country Championship Rodeo, Kerrville TX, 1947
2nd Place, JE Ranch Rodeo, Waverly PA, Calf Roping, 1951