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## **San Diego Sailor performs on ACM All-Star Salute to the Troops on CBS**

SAN DIEGO – It had always been the dream of Sonar Technician 3rd Class Destiny Coates to one day sing before a large audience – and thanks to the Academy of Country Music and their All-Star Salute to the Troops, that dream comes true the evening of May 20.

In early January of this year, while she was a student at the sonar technician A-school at the Fleet Anti-Submarine Warfare Training Center, San Diego, Coates was told by friends about a Department of Defense-wide contest for service members to submit video auditions to the ACM for their televised salute to the troops. The special was to feature country music stars performing in concert with members from each branch of the military at the MGM Grand resort in Las Vegas – exactly the sort of thing Coates had always wanted to do. There was one problem, however.

“I was incredibly sick, and there were only a couple days left to enter,” Coates said. “My voice was off, and I thought there was no way I’d ever get chosen.”

In spite of not feeling her best, she sat down in her room and recorded herself singing the country hit “Fancy” by Reba McEntire, and sent the video along to the Department of Defense office handling the contest. She heard back within a week that she was chosen as a top-three finalist for the Navy, and then ultimately was chosen in March as the number-one pick to represent the Navy on the televised special.

The road to singing on TV was long and winding, but one to which she knew she had long been suited.

"I grew up singing in every choir under the sun," she said. "I did jazz, blues and classical choirs, and I sang in a lot of country music singing contests. I even got to skip the physical education requirement in high school so that I could sign up for extra choir classes."

Once she became an adult, though, Coates made the decision to leave behind a life of music in Everett, Wash., and join the Navy.

She was initially unsure of entering the contest, as she's only been on active duty for only a couple of years and hasn't yet deployed due to the long training pipeline for sonar technicians. But she relied upon the compelling story of a lifetime spent having tended to her long-ailing late mother and already knowing the hardships of having an active duty, forward-deployed spouse to make her case for the contest.

"Once they deemed me eligible, I still almost missed my chance for consideration because my email entry was lost in the shuffle," she said. "Luckily they found it and decided they liked my singing, so I ended up being chosen and getting the chance of a lifetime."

CBS television sent a camera crew to San Diego to follow Coates and her husband, Mineman Seaman Kenny Coates, for several days to highlight for the audience the work active-duty Sailors perform. The producers also chose to surprise Coates with the revelation that she would be singing onstage with a country music powerhouse.

"They told me on-camera that I'd be performing with Keith Urban," she said. "I couldn't believe it!"

Coates had just one week to learn Urban's song "For you," which was featured in the movie "Act of Valor" before she would be flown to Las Vegas to perform before a live audience of 14,000 at the MGM Grand.

Coates said she was nervous leading up to the show, and also excited to meet a star like Urban.

"There was all sorts of heavy security because of all the celebrities who were there for the ACM Awards the night before," she said. "But then Keith swept in, and he immediately put me at ease because he treated me like a fellow musician and asked my opinions about how to put on the best performance together. To have someone of that caliber take my opinions seriously was a big relief."

In addition to doing her best with just one day of rehearsal time in Las Vegas, Coates said she also had to represent the Navy in the best way possible, in spite of the instincts of the makeup artists to go overboard.

"They wanted to put more makeup on me and to do something more interesting with my hair, but I made sure to keep everything within regulations since I knew there'd potentially be millions of people watching at home," she said.

Coates also didn't let her nerves get the best of her when she found out "NCIS Los Angeles" star and rapper LL Cool J was present.

"I'm a child of the '80s and '90s, and when I heard he was around, I said I'd love to take a picture with him and my escort went and got him," she said. "Then I started getting pictures with every famous person I could find!"

When it came time to take the stage, Coates just wanted to make sure to hit her notes.

"Keith told me, 'You've got this,'" she said. "I sang with everything I had, and I was just glad I didn't miss my notes or fall off stage."

Coates rounded out her time on stage with a triple standing ovation, and, because she was the first service member to go on, got to relax and take in the rest of the show from the front row with her husband.

"This was a dream come true," she added. "I grew up imagining myself on stage, but had written it off. But I got to live my dream."

"The All-Star Salute to the Troops" will air on CBS on May 20 at 9 p.m.

Training Support Center San Diego provides centralized student management and support to 17 Naval Education and Training Command Learning Sites in the Southwest region, including the Fleet Anti-Submarine warfare Training Center

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Story by Ensign Michael Patronik, Training Support Center, San Diego