



Congratulations

David W. Riley

of Semmes, AL

Disabled Veteran of the Year

A billboard congratulating Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year David Riley was donated by the Outdoor Advertising Association of America.

Amputee Inspires Convention

How does a high-tempo Coast Guard rescue swimmer lose all four limbs and become a better man in the process? Only the 2010 DAV Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year can truly answer this strange question.

David Riley of Semmes, Ala., received the DAV's most prestigious annual award at the 89th National Convention in Atlanta, where his incredible story and uplifting personality provided a highlight for an already amazing week.

Riley served in the Coast Guard for nearly two decades as an Aviation Survivalman (more commonly known as a rescue swimmer). In fact, he was a pioneering leader in the field and helped save countless lives while shaping Coast Guard rescue doctrine.

This high-tempo career came to a crashing halt in 1997, when Riley and his wife Yvonne took their first vacation in several years. While visiting the Alabama coast, Riley had what he called an "impending feeling of doom" and told his wife he was going to die.

The feeling was caused by a mysterious bacterial infection, which savagely attacked Riley's immune system and forced him into a month-long coma. As he fought for his life, doctors were forced to amputate all four of his limbs to prevent gangrenous infection.

Years of recovery and rehabilitation followed, but Riley's strength and sense of purpose pulled him through. He went on to become an entrepreneur, VA hospital volunteer and leader in his local DAV Chapter.

"The sickness was just an event in my life," Riley said. "It took some things from me, but it gave me a lot of things too. I'm a better person for it."

This positive spirit in the face of adversity helped Riley not only capture the DAV's Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year Award, it has inspired and amazed DAV leaders at all levels.

"He always has a smile on his face. He's got a great sense of humor," said Department of Alabama Adjutant Chad Richmond. "He's truly one of a kind."

"At this convention, we were visited by the President of the United States, celebrities and the Commandant of the Coast Guard, but I cannot think of one person who had more of an impact on every delegate and guest than Dave Riley," said National Adjutant Arthur H. Wilson. "After speaking with him, I understand that he is planning trips to places like the VA polytrauma center in Tampa Bay to speak to recently disabled veterans. He is excited about using this prestigious award to further his work on behalf of disabled veterans.

"I think we will be seeing a lot more of Dave Riley," Wilson said. ☉

