

VA Secretary Shinseki,
Dep. Sec. of Veterans Affairs, W. Scott Gould (unknown if present)
DAV CEO Roberto “Bobby” Barrera,
DAV Supporters,
Auxiliary Commodore Kay Egan,
Distinguished Guests,
Riley Family Yvonne, Logan, Krista & Caitly and Dave’s father General
William Riley, U.S. Army ret.,
Coast Guard Rescue Swimmers,
Shipmates,

Good Morning,

It’s an honor to be here in Atlanta at your 89th National Convention and take part in the presentation of the Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year award to a remarkable Coast Guardsman (the first Coast Guardsman ever to receive this award), and a **shipmate** ASM1 David Riley (USCG ret.).

Dave hails from Kingstown, R.I. He first served in the Army, following in the footsteps of his father – General William Riley, U.S. Army (ret.) – before he found his home in the Coast Guard. Dave, we love our sister

services, but we are thankful you made the decision to serve in the Coast Guard!

Dave enlisted in the Coast Guard in 1984, and completed Aviation Survivalman, or ASM school and Navy Helicopter Rescue School in 1986.

Now, what you might not know is that in 1986 the Coast Guard's rescue swimmer program was in its infancy, having just been officially stood up in 1984 – we checked the records, and to our knowledge Dave was the first rescue swimmer to become qualified in the HH-52 helicopter. He went on to become qualified as a rescue swimmer in three other Coast Guard helicopters – the HH-3, HH65, and HH60 – which means Dave has jumped out of pretty much every helicopter in the Coast Guard inventory!

Now for me, as a shipdriver, I've never understood why anyone wants to go up in a helicopter...so I really can't figure out what someone would jump out of one?!

Now, as I've said, Dave's rating in the Coast Guard was Aviation Survivalman. The members of this proud rating are more commonly known by another name – *rescue swimmers*. Perhaps some of you have seen the the movie The Guardian?! Kevin Costner – or was it Ashton Kutcher – played the Dave Riley Part! There are few titles within the military profession that are as hard earned and respected as that of Coast Guard Helicopter Rescue Swimmer.

Being a rescue swimmer is one of the most challenging jobs in the Coast Guard. It requires extraordinary physical demands. Rescue swimmers deploy from helicopters into the water – that is they “jump out” of helicopters to rescue those in peril from the sea – often operating in the most

severe weather conditions imaginable. They are some of the many unsung heroes within our armed forces that perform a mission that requires not only selfless service, but great courage.

And that's just what Dave did. Dave risked his life, on countless search and rescue missions, so that others might live. So that others might live has become the unofficial creed of Coast Guard Rescue Swimmers.

What makes Dave's legacy even greater, however, is how he overcame adversity – adversity that few, outside of this audience and our armed forces will ever experience. Despite all odds, Dave continued with his most important duty – to be a husband to Yvonne, and a father to Logan, Krista and Caitlyn. He also continues to be active contributor in his community. And he's even joined our Coast Guard auxiliary!

Now earlier, you heard me refer to Dave as a shipmate. Let me explain.

Even though ASM1 Dave Riley's active duty Coast Guard career was as an Aviation Survivalman, we still refer to him as a shipmate.

For people who serve on or over the water, the term "Shipmate" represents the unique bond that is formed when the people you serve with, and their families, become part of your extended family. How else would you describe persons you spend 24 hours a day with, 7 days a week, flying sometimes in the most treacherous of circumstances, and other times observing the grandest spectacles of nature that few will ever see.

The term "Shipmate" also encompasses the adrenaline and emotion of our Service: the great joy and satisfaction of a rescue well performed; the deep sorrow when, despite your best efforts, you cannot save someone from the perils of the sea. It's weathering these storms and difficulties—giving it your utmost while cold, wet and tired that forges the bond that is Shipmates.

There is no greater complement than being known as a great shipmate, and no better goal than to become a good one.

By any measure, Aviation Survivalman First Class Dave Riley IS a great shipmate.

But it strikes me that there's something even more special about this great shipmate – he is now performing a much more important duty – with our many service members who are returning from the front lines disabled.

Through his tenacious spirit, Dave is showing them that, despite their injuries, they can adapt and lead a fulfilling life.

To me, I think what Dave is still doing is continuing to live out his life by the rescue swimmers creed – *so that others might live* – the only difference is that those others are no longer people in need of rescue from the sea, but

our injured veterans returning home, in need of an example of how to cope with their injuries – So, to this day, in spite of his disability, ASM1 Dave Riley, U.S. Coast Guard ret. continues to dedicate his life, so that others – now our disabled veterans, might live – Dave thanks for being a great shipmate.

Semper Paratus.