

Year Posted: 2009



Sergeant Riley Haythorn
1994 Reds Graduate

U.S. SPECIAL FORCES WAR HERO ONCE LED THE REDS ON THE FIELD

Few men are brave enough to sign up for the rigors and risks inherent with service in the U.S. Army. Of those that accept the challenge, hardly any of them display the ability to qualify for providing security to key personnel. Even fewer men qualify as a member of the Quick Reaction Force, and almost no one rises to become a member of the Special Forces. But for 1994 Reds' graduate Sergeant Riley Haythorn, those stunning accomplishments were all met within his first few years in the U.S. Military. Riley has risen as one of the very best and brightest in the Armed Forces to become a part of one of the most elite organizations in the world, the U.S. Army Psychological Operations Unit. Anyone knowledgeable of Riley's past wouldn't be surprised in the least by any of this success.

Riley was a multi-sport standout athlete, and in baseball, where he led the Reds to their first State Championship Trophy; he excelled when the pressure was on and his team needed him. A sampling of such feats are:

- Tied in extra innings of the District Semifinals as a sophomore in 1992, Riley drove in the game-winning run.
- Later the same day, Riley knocked in the winning run in the District Championship Game.
- The following year, Riley knocked in 2 RBIs to clinch the District Semifinal victory.
- In the 11th inning of the 1993 State Semifinals, Riley led off the inning with a double and scored the winning run.
- As a senior in 1994 against a pitcher that would go on to the Major Leagues, Riley led off the 7th inning with a single and scored to tie the game and take the game into extra innings, where he then singled to score the winning run.
- Later that day, Riley knocked in the winning run to win the Greeley Invitational Tournament.
- In the State Regional Semifinals, Riley pitched four stellar innings to advance the Reds to the Regional Championship.
- With the Reds tied 1-1 and trying to win their first State Championship Game in team history, Riley singled to set up the go-ahead run, and then reached third base and deked the pitcher into balking to score and put the Reds ahead 3-1 in the State Championship Game, which would be the final score.



Riley takes out the opposing shortstop attempting to turn a double play



Riley was an All-League and All-State selection at Eaton



Riley (middle) stands at attention during Star Spangled Banner prior to '94 State Semifinal Game



First ever pileup in Eaton history – 1994 State Champions



Riley, #27, congratulates teammates in 1994 State Semifinal Game



Championship hardware picked up in 1994, Riley on bottom row, far right

An All-League and All-State selection, Riley was a very good player during the regular season; Riley was an exceptional player during the post-season. Few, if any, Reds have ever shined as Riley did when the pressure was on, and Eaton's had its fair share of big game situations and players that rose to meet the challenge. Though difficult to appreciate today with the Reds playing at a first-class ballfield adorned by over a dozen state championship banners covering its walls, when Riley played, the infield was all-dirt, and there were no state championship banners—mainly because there were no state championships that had yet been won by the Reds. Riley led his teammates as a tough competitor that was going to find a way to win big ballgames; often the Reds secured victory early in games, but when it came down to the late innings, no one took a challenge and did more with it than Riley. He was simply going to win the State Championship.

Following graduation, Riley committed to the service of our country and joined the United States Army. He quickly rose through the ranks to be deployed first to Germany, and then to Bosnia and Croatia as security problems arose in those countries in 1998. Sergeant Haythorn served in the 1st Armored Division, providing base security and serving on an elite Quick Reaction Force team. Much of Sgt. Haythorn's work overseas is classified, but the medals he has received make it clear that his actions were both of great importance, and carried out greatly.

While most Americans were still in shock from the events of September 11, 2001, Sgt. Haythorn was quickly put on a plane to Saudi Arabia preparing for the oncoming War on Terror. Sgt. Haythorn was then deployed to Afghanistan as the battle against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda commenced. For his actions in the War on Terror, Sgt. Haythorn won many of the medals of his ever-growing war chest, which currently holds 11 distinguished medals. Also while in Jordan, an amazing reunion coincidentally occurred between Reds, as Riley provided security detail at one of the bases that 1988 Reds' graduate Jimmy Reeman landed.



Reeman and Haythorn serving in the Middle East

Not one to ever shy away from any fight, let alone an important battle, Riley was deployed to Jordan and then Iraq in 2003 as Operation Iraqi Freedom commenced. Sgt. Haythorn served as a member of the 10th Special Forces Group and was selected as one of the elite soldiers that would search for chemical weapons throughout Iraq. There probably wasn't a more important job on the planet at the time than to seek and destroy any such weapons that Saddam Hussein was believed to still have at his disposal.

Sgt. Haythorn then worked to train Iraqi security forces throughout 2005. This mission was amongst the most difficult the Army had to offer, and Riley took the challenge and helped train many Iraqis to be able to defend themselves. Sgt. Haythorn and his comrades had pretty well shown the world of the ineptitude that these Iraqi men had in defending themselves in 2003 when their capital was taken by American forces in the span of just a few weeks. Sgt. Haythorn now had to train these men to prove to be much more competent than what they and their countrymen had just shown themselves to be. This difficult exercise continues to this day, but many of the men that Sgt. Haythorn trained are providing top-level security for the new government of Iraq.

With the military battles fought and won, Riley returned home to Colorado to prepare for the next battle. The best and brightest men in the military fight this global psychological war, much as during the Cold War, every minute of every day. The best minds are used within the Psychological Operations (PSYOP) Group to win wars without even having to fire a shot, and when that is not possible, to set the stage in advance for American victory when the time comes to fire the next shot. Sgt. Haythorn's PSYOP work is of course highly classified. What isn't fully classified though is the amazing success that this group has had in winning wars.



The performance of PSYOP units in Panama and the Persian Gulf has provided the world evidence of the power of persuasion in achieving fantastic results. The surrender of 60,000 Iraqis in Operation Desert Storm was due in no small measure to the sophisticated and well-orchestrated PSYOP campaign, ably supported by loudspeaker teams from a wide variety of PSYOP units of the Reserve Component. Their efforts saved hundreds, perhaps thousands, of Allied and Iraqi lives. PSYOP units played a huge role in spreading disinformation throughout the Iraqi Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom and helped to shorten the war and save many American casualties.

If ever the phrase “Once a Warrior, Always a Warrior” were looking for a poster-child, Sgt. Riley Haythorn would be it. Adorned with a dozen pieces of hardware ranging from the 1994 State Championship Ring to serving America with such distinguishment as to receive 11 medals, Riley is the ultimate warrior and champion. We couldn’t be more proud to call him one of our own.

Oh...and did the hero ride off onto the sunset with the girl? Well, this hero isn’t riding off into any sunsets, but he did marry the most sought-after girl in town, Eaton’s 1993 homecoming queen Shasti Dyer.

From one of your many former teammates that are inspired by your heroic achievements:

Congratulations on All of Your Success, Riley, and Thank You for Defending America; Eaton Baseball Couldn’t Be More Proud of One of Its Own