



Sgt. Tommy Rieman signs his action figure as Patrick Johnson and his 18-month-old son eagerly await a new toy. Sgt. Rieman was handing out action figures in the Baltimore Inner Harbor the weekend of the 2007 Army-Navy game. (Photo by Edric Thompson, Army News Service)

This Month in NCO History — From Abu Ghraib to Baltimore, Dec. 1, 2007

Pablo Villa

Sgt. Maj. of the Army Raymond F. Chandler III contributed this week to the fervor surrounding this weekend's college football showdown between Army and Navy with a recent Facebook post.

"I'll be there to root our Army Black Knights to victory," Chandler wrote, offering some uncommon high-profile support from the noncommissioned officer ranks.

NCOs normally don't figure prominently into the annual Army-Navy football clash. But the 2007 edition of the game was different.

The contest, which took place Dec. 1, 2007, at M&T Bank Stadium in Baltimore, Md., provided one standout NCO with a showcase moment.

Sgt. Tommy Rieman, of D Company, 1st Battalion, 116th Infantry Regiment, Virginia Army National Guard, was one of nine Soldiers selected by the Army to take part in its "Real Heroes" program. Rieman was selected for his actions Dec. 3, 2003, near Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq.

That day, Rieman and his seven-man squad were conducting a reconnaissance mission when their three-vehicle convoy came under fire from about 35 insurgents using AK-47s and rocket-propelled grenades. Rieman returned fire while using his own body to shield his gunner. The vehicles they were traveling in did not have doors, so Rieman was exposed to enemy fire, suffering

two bullet wounds and 11 shrapnel wounds. Rieman refused medical help several times, instead taking charge of the convoy and directing it away from the main road and out of the line of fire. There, the convoy encountered a smaller group of insurgents. Rieman directed his squad to return fire, eventually suppressing the attack. He then set up a defensive perimeter to allow a medical evacuation team to extract the wounded.

For his efforts, Rieman was awarded the Silver Star Medal in August 2004. That's when the "Real Heroes" program came calling.

The program, which was initiated in 2005, sought to tell a wider audience about the heroic acts of exemplary Soldiers through different forms of media. According to a 2005 U.S. News & World Report article, the idea was to tout ordinary service members who, when thrust into danger, showed extraordinary courage.

To do that, the Army made Rieman and the other eight Soldiers into characters in its popular video game series, America's Army. The Army also licensed plastic action figures in their likenesses. The video game featuring Rieman, America's Army: True Soldiers, was released in November 2007. A month later at the Army-Navy game, Rieman manned a booth on Baltimore's Inner Harbor near M&T Bank Stadium and handed out the action figure that bore his likeness while sharing his story of heroism.

"I love being in the video game and being an action figure. It's one of the coolest things you could ever have," Rieman told the Army News Service in 2007. "But it's not actually deploying and saving lives. To me, the coolest thing is having those guys raise their right hands to serve their country."

Though the Black Knights fell to the Midshipmen 38-3, Rieman said the experience of his first Army-Navy game provided positive closure to his experiences in Iraq. It also put into perspective the notions of teamwork and ethics that are part of the Army and the other military branches.

"The Army and the Navy are gray brothers, and it's a fun rivalry," Rieman said. "We can give each other a hard time. But at the end we all come together, and that's the most important thing."

Chandler echoed those sentiments on Facebook.

"Every other week of the year, the Army and Navy are teammates in defending our nation," Chandler said.

Army and Navy will kick off for the 114th time Saturday at Lincoln Financial Field in Philadelphia. The Black Knights will look to end their 11-year losing streak to the Midshipmen on the strength of the nation's No. 2-ranked rushing offense. ■

— *Compiled by Pablo Villa*

Watch it

- **What:** Army Black Knights (3-8) vs. Navy Midshipmen (7-4)
- **When, where:** 3:10 p.m. EST Saturday, Lincoln Financial Field, Philadelphia.
- **On TV:** CBS.
- **Notes:** This is the 114th meeting between the service academies. Navy has defeated Army 11 consecutive times and leads the series, 57-49-7. A win by the Midshipmen would secure the Commander-In-Chief's Trophy for the ninth time in 11 seasons.



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