Richard “Rick” M. Romley ’81

Lawyers are occasionally called warriors. That’s because they fight for clients, justice, and the rule of law. But most aren’t warriors in the way Rick Romley was. He was the real deal—lawyer, Vietnam War hero, and a warrior in every sense of the word.

Education

Romley took his BS degree with honors in 1974 from ASU. He earned his JD degree from the ASU College of Law in 1981.

US Marine Corps

Romley graduated from high school in 1968. A few months later, instead of college, he and his best friend joined the US Marine Corps.¹ Both were young, untested warriors, stepping up for their country just three months after the Tet Offensive by the Viet Cong. It was a massive attack that ended in a truce declared by the Pope and agreed upon by all sides.² While his legal career was envied by many, derided by a few, and always contentious, no one ever questioned his loyalty or his word. His one-year military career ended with a land mine—it blew off both legs above the knee. Years later, he wrote about it.³

I grew up in the sixties. It was a decade defined by political turmoil and Woodstock. I didn’t go to Woodstock. Instead, my best friend and I enlisted in the United States Marine Corps soon after graduating from high school. That was in April of 1968. Just four months later, I was through boot camp and infantry training and was on a military transport to Da Nang, Vietnam. Shortly thereafter, I was made a squad leader. On the evening of April 6th of 1969, the squad leaders were called together and told that we would be doing a sweeping operation south of Marble Mountain. Da Nang had taken some artillery fire believed to be coming from that area and it needed to be stopped. We began our mission the next morning, under beautiful blue skies. After nearly completing the mission, several of my fellow Marines went down. We took no gunfire, but there were land mines and booby traps, seemingly everywhere.

¹ “The United States Marine Corps, also referred to as the United States Marines, is a branch of the United States Armed Forces responsible for conducting expeditionary and amphibious operations with the United States Navy as well as the Army and Air Force. The U.S. Marine Corps is one of the four armed service branches in the U.S. Department of Defense and one of the seven uniformed services of the United States.” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Marine_Corps

² “The offensive was launched prematurely in the late night hours of 30 January [1968] in the I and II Corps Tactical Zones of South Vietnam. This early attack allowed allied forces some time to prepare defensive measures. When the main operation began the next morning, the offensive was countrywide and well-coordinated; eventually more than 80,000 PAVN/VC troops struck more than 100 towns and cities, including 36 of 44 provincial capitals, five of the six autonomous cities, 72 of 245 district towns, and the southern capital. The offensive was the largest military operation conducted by either side up to that point in the war.” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tet_Offensive

After evacuating my fellow Marines, we continued our mission. We then hit another area of land mines. We lost a total of six Marines that day. While rushing to provide assistance and to reassign weaponry, a land mine exploded beneath me. Although my active military service ended that day, I will never forget the young soldiers of my youth, including my best friend who joined the Marine Corps with me and was killed on a forgotten hill in the demilitarized zone in August 1969.

Romley was true to the legendary claim about marines—“once a Marine, always a Marine.” Years later, his chief deputy at the Maricopa County Attorney’s office, Paul Ahler, said, “He’s focused and forceful and passionate, and he has a temper when things don’t go how he wants. But whether you agree with him or not, he’s a very tough guy, physically and mentally. What he went through in Vietnam steeled him for the rest of his life. He’s still a Marine, and he’s not afraid of much.”

Maricopa County Attorney

Romley was elected Maricopa County Attorney in 1989. His Wikipedia page mentions some of his noted cases, and his most contested one. “One of his highest publicized cases was his prosecution of the AzScam½ scandal of the early 1990s. In 2002, he initiated an investigation of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Phoenix7 and its part in the Catholic sex abuse cases,8 that led to an admission of wrongdoing...

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4 https://www.phoenixnewtimes.com/content/printView/6396982

5 “During his 16 years as Maricopa County Attorney, Rick Romley became nationally recognized as a leader in criminal justice issues. Mr. Romley took a leadership role in many prosecution, prevention and reform policies, including: adoption of a constitutional amendment guaranteeing rights to crime victims in Arizona; rewriting Arizona’s Criminal Code, which resulted in ‘Truth in Sentencing,’ requiring criminals to serve their full sentences; reforming Arizona’s juvenile justice system; and creation of two nationally-recognized drug demand reduction programs.” https://www.maricopacountyattorney.org/251/Past-Maricopa-County-Attorneys

6 “Seven prominent Arizona legislators and seven other political figures have been indicted on charges of bribery, money laundering and filing false election statements. The charges, handed down Tuesday [February 7, 1991] by a Maricopa County grand jury, grew out of a 13-month ‘sting’ operation by the police in which J. Anthony Vincent, a self-described gaming consultant, paid lawmakers tens of thousands of dollars in a campaign to make casino gambling legal. In a separate civil racketeering lawsuit that grew from the same investigation, property and bank accounts of 18 people were confiscated. The lawsuit, filed Tuesday evening by the Maricopa County Attorney’s office, confiscates property of the seven lawmakers named in the criminal indictment and state Senator Alan Stephens, a Phoenix Democrat. Mr. Stephens was not indicted.” https://www.nytimes.com/1991/02/07/us/7-arizona-lawmakers-charged-with-corruption.html?auth=login-email&login=email

7 “Roman Catholic Diocese of Phoenix in Arizona is a particular church of the Roman Catholic Church in the United States. It was established on December 2, 1969 when it was split off from the Diocese of Tucson. Its ecclesiastic territory includes Maricopa, Mohave, Yavapai, and Coconino counties, and also includes the Gila River Indian Reservation in Pinal County.” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Catholic_Diocese_of_Phoenix

8 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catholic_Church_sexual_abuse_cases
by the then-Bishop Thomas O'Brien. Romley also prosecuted Ray Krone for the murder of Kim Ancona. Krone, who had no prior criminal record, was convicted and sentenced to death. After spending ten years in prison, four on Death Row, Krone was freed after DNA conclusively proved that he was innocent. Romley defended his prosecution of Ray Krone by saying there was ‘strong circumstantial evidence’ of his guilt. In response to the conclusive proof that an innocent Ray Krone spent 10-1/2 years in prison, four of which was spent on Arizona’s death row, Prosecutor Romley said, ‘we will try to do better.”

Honors and Awards

In 2001, Romley received the Disabled American Veterans Outstanding Veteran of the Year Award. In 2007, the Arizona Veterans Association inducted him into its Hall of Fame Society. The induction statement confirmed that “during his tenure [Romley] was the recipient of over 100 Awards and Honors [as Maricopa County Attorney]. He testified before Congress on numerous issues, including terrorism, violent crime and victims’ rights. After his tenure as Maricopa County Attorney, Rick went to Washington D.C. as the personal advisor to Secretary James Nicholson [Department of Veterans Affairs].”

He won LIFE’s Presidential Unsung Hero Award and is a founding member of Veterans Medical Leadership Council. He has served on at least three boards: The American Red Cross, the 100 Club of Arizona, and Honoring Arizona’s Veterans.

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9 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_J._O%27Brien_(bishop)]

10 Ray Krone is an American who was wrongfully convicted of murder. He was the 100th inmate exonerated from death row since the death penalty was reinstated in 1976. Krone was born and raised in Dover Township, York County, Pennsylvania, and graduated from Dover Area High School in 1974. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ray_Krone]

11 [https://www.innocenceproject.org/cases/ray-krone/]

12 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rick_Romley]


14 [https://avhof.org/members/membership-directory/rromley/]

15 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jim_Nicholson_(Secretary_of_Veterans_Affairs)]

16 [https://avhof.org/members/membership-directory/rromley/]

17 Ibid.

18 [https://www.arizonavmlc.org/]

19 [https://www.redcross.org/]

20 [https://www.100club.org/]

21 [https://www.honoringamericasveterans.org/]

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