



*As a member of A Company, 1st Battalion, 1st Marine Division in December 1968, Richard M. Romley would soon find himself thrust into the role of a combat squad leader. At left, Mr. Romley today as Maricopa County, Ariz., Attorney.*

## Arizona's Rick Romley Named DAV Outstanding Disabled Veteran for 2001

**D**ressed comfortably in an open-collared, blue, oxford cloth shirt and denim jeans, the trim, middle-aged man flashes an easy smile, extends his right hand and introduces himself. To the people of Arizona, especially those of Maricopa County, which includes the city of Phoenix, he is among the most respected local leaders in recent history. He is Richard M. Romley, Maricopa County Attorney and the man the DAV is proud to name the Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year Award for 2001.

Mr. Romley will receive the DAV's highest individual award from DAV National Commander Armando C. Albarran during the opening session of the 80th National Convention of the DAV and Auxiliary held in Miami, Fla., July 28 through August 2.

For Rick Romley, the road to becoming the DAV Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year began when he and his best friend David Schaffer decided to join the U.S. Marine Corps following high school. The two young men enlisted together in April 1968, figuring they could serve together and later take advantage of the opportunities to attend college when they got out of the Marine Corps. The two young recruits went through boot camp at San Diego and Camp Pendleton, Calif. But like many before them, following boot camp, the two best friends were assigned to different Marine units.

"When I graduated from boot camp, it was a proud day just

knowing I had survived it," Mr. Romley said. "But I think it was an even bigger shock to my father, Henry. The transformation was something. My father came to my graduation and he was very proud."

On leave from boot camp, Mr. Romley married his first wife. When he reported back from leave, he had orders for Vietnam.

Mr. Romley arrived at Da Nang, Vietnam in August 1968. Without delay, he was issued a weapon, loaded into a truck and sent to Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 1st Marine Division. Almost immediately after arriving, A Company took casualties, and the young Tucson native realized his life might be in jeopardy. Even though he was brand new, he swore to himself he was going to make it through Vietnam. By Christmas of 1968 he found himself in Da Nang going through a Marine Corps Noncommissioned Officer School. When he returned to his company he learned two more members of the unit had been killed in an ambush. It was then he was made a squad leader and discovered the sobering meaning of true responsibility.

In the spring of 1969 while deployed south of Da Nang and the helicopter air station near Marble Mountain, the young squad leader received his last combat mission.

"On the evening of April 6th, they called the squad leaders  
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together and told us we would be doing a sweeping operation south of Marble Mountain," Mr. Romley said. "Da Nang had taken some artillery fire believed to be coming from that area, and they wanted it stopped."

The reinforced squad was trucked into the patrol area before dawn the next morning. The sweep began with a clear, blue-sky dawn and went well until around 10 a.m. when the squad walked into a heavily mined area. Within minutes six members of the squad were down.

"I thought, 'My God! Six of my people!'" Mr. Romley recalled. "We had taken no enemy fire, but the booby traps were everywhere it seemed."

The squad's machine gunner was hit. Mr. Romley picked up the M60 and ammo and moved toward another Marine to assign the weapon. As he ran, he evaluated the situation and knew he had to get everyone out, regroup and continue the mission. There was a whistling noise and an explosion, and suddenly, he was flying through the air.

When he hit the ground, there was severe pain, and he knew he had triggered a mine. Two Corpsmen were immediately

at his side giving aid. The blast had ripped away one of his legs and severely damaged the other.

"I didn't know how badly wounded I was, but I know now that I would have died if not for those Corpsmen."

A helicopter evacuation quickly got Mr. Romley back to the military hospital at Da Nang. His wounds included arms, his right hand and stomach; the loss of one leg and damage so severe to the other leg that, with all the doctor's best efforts, it could not be saved and was eventually amputated. He would spend the next year in military hospitals in the Philippines, Japan, San Diego, and Oak Knoll, outside San Francisco, where he was fitted with prosthetics.

"I came out of the hospital in March 1970 and returned home to Arizona and my family," Mr. Romley said. "I was 20 years old, scared, on crutches, learning how to walk, falling down regularly, and not knowing what I was going to do or what was going to happen to me."

"Then I met a guy named Chuck Mossman, and he introduced me to the DAV here in Phoenix. The DAV became my family. They helped me through difficult times. They were always there for me. If I was down, the DAV was there to pick up my spirits. The DAV had 'taken me in.' I have been a life member ever since."

In the years to come, Mr. Romley, a bilateral, above the knee amputee, learned

to walk all over again. He enrolled at Arizona State University, graduating with honors in 1974 with a degree in business management. During this time he divorced and gained custody of his two young sons, David and Aaron, and began a five-year career as the owner-operator of a retail business. He then, decided on a career change, sold the business, and enrolled in law school at Arizona State University. He received his Juris Doctorate in 1981. Since then, he has dedicated himself to a career in public service.

Mr. Romley is nationally recognized as a leader in criminal justice and community improvement-related issues. Serving his fourth term as the Maricopa County Attorney, he administers one of the largest prosecuting attorney's offices, serving the fourth most populated county in America. His advice and counsel on issues are often sought, and he has testified before the United States Congress and addressed national organizations on issues such as violent crime, terrorism, drug trafficking and public corruption. Mr. Romley is the recipient of numerous awards. He was honored with the National Leadership Award by the Community Anti-Drug Coalition of America in Washington, D.C., in November 1997, and is the 2000 recipient of the DAV Department of Arizona Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year Award.



*Richard M. Romley, left, with his best friend David T. Schaffer. The two young Arizonans joined the U.S. Marine Corps together in the spring of 1968.*

*Marine Corps Commandant Leonard Chapman, right, visits with Richard M. Romley at the U.S. Naval Medical Center, San Diego in June 1969, during the young Marine's rehabilitation from wounds suffered in Vietnam.*

A champion of prosecution and reform policies, he successfully prosecuted the largest public corruption case in Arizona's history, popularly known as AzScam in the early 1990s, and his Anti-Drug Diversion Program was adopted as a national model by the President's Drug Advisory Committee. Among other career hallmarks, he was a prominent figure in efforts to

reform juvenile justice in Arizona and has been a key sponsor of the Violence Prevention Initiative – an effort to develop a long-term and comprehensive strategy to prevent violent crime. While a tough prosecutor, he also works to develop community-based integrated public policies that enhance public safety and has been recognized for his efforts by Mothers Against Drunk Driving, the National Association of Counties, the American Jewish Committee, The Department of Housing and Urban Development, and other public, private, and fraternal organizations.

"I feel for victims of crime," Mr. Romley said. "There's a lot of horrible things that go on in our society, and through my work, I feel I'm giving something back."

"From the first day I came to work for Rick Romley, more than a decade ago, he has always said, 'We make decisions for the right reasons,'" said Special Assistant County Attorney Barnett S. Lotstein. "We may know there are political ramifications, but we don't let politics drive our decisions. His history over the years has proved him to be a man of great character who does not allow politics or pressures to divert him from the right course."

In 1985 he married his wife Carol, and gained a stepson, Darin. The Romleys celebrate their 16th wedding anniversary in July. Together they have raised their sons to adults. David and Aaron followed their father into the Marine Corps, and David has made the Marine Corps a career. He obtained his college degree and attended Officer Candidate School, and is now serving as an active duty Marine Corps captain.

Today, Mr. Romley takes great pride in his military heritage and his public service. When asked, he says he wants to be remembered as "an honest person who cares very deeply about our country and tried to do what is right."

One of those "right things to do" comes each Memorial Day.

Like most veterans, Rick Romley has a special time set aside as a personal day to reflect on his military comrades. Early on Memorial Day he gathers flowers from his and neighbor's yards and takes them to the Arizona Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Phoenix. He places the flowers at the base of one of the black granite slabs listing the names of Arizona veterans killed in the Vietnam War. He then spends some time talking quietly with an old friend.

Before he leaves, he bends forward, steady-ing himself with his cane and touches the ninth name from the bottom engraved into the marble. It reads: Schaffer, David Thomas, Lance Corporal, United States Marine Corps. **DAV**



*Richard M. Romley, the DAV Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year for 2001 enjoys an outing in the desert, near Phoenix, Ariz., in his specially adapted Jeep.*

## Former NSO Henry Veillette Dies

**H**enry A. Veillette, 78, a former DAV National Service Officer (NSO) passed away at City of Hope in Duarte, Calif. on June 23.

"Henry Veillette dedicated more than a decade of service as a DAV National Service Officer (NSO) and nearly all of his adult life as a dynamic leader in the DAV Department of California assisting disabled veterans and their families," DAV National Adjutant Arthur H. Wilson said. "Hank's assistance as a professional DAV NSO and his life-long advocacy on behalf of this nation's disabled veterans helped to build better lives for countless disabled veterans and their families. We deeply mourn his passing."

Mr. Veillette was born in Connecticut in 1922. He enlisted in the U.S. Army Force as an aircraft Mechanic Trainee in 1942, later becoming a pilot trainee and earning a commission as a Second Lieutenant. Following flight training he was assigned to the 9th Air Force where he flew fighter aircraft. He suffered battle wounds that result-

ed in the amputation of both legs and was medically retired in 1947 at the rank of First Lieutenant.

Mr. Veillette earned his bachelor's degree in business administration from Woodbury College in Los Angeles in 1952. He joined the DAV's professional staff as a National Service Officer (NSO) trainee in 1961 at DAV National Service Office in Los Angeles and continued serving there as an NSO until resigning due to failing health in 1971. He remained a highly respected and active DAV member the remainder of his life. His leadership included serving in virtually all DAV Chapter Officer

positions, as DAV Department of California State Commander and Adjutant, Chairman of the Department Claims and Service Commission, and as a member of the National Finance Committee.

Mr. Veillette was a life member of DAV Chapter 73, in Woodland Hills, Calif. He is survived by his wife of 54 years, Evelyn; his sons, Jim (Kate), David, and Ron (Cherrie); grandson Brock; and granddaughters, Kelsey, Bailey, Amy and Paige. **DAV**



*Henry A. Veillette*