Late last year Cal U was named one of the nation’s Top Military Friendly Colleges and Universities by the journal Military Advanced Education. The commitment to serving those who serve our country began decades ago at Cal U, which has long provided future military leaders with the educational foundation to succeed. Here we salute three accomplished officers who share a common heritage as proud Cal U alumni.

Lt. Gen. Paul Van Riper
Upholding Faith, Family, Country, and Service

As a young Marine, Lt. Gen. Paul Van Riper had only one aim in mind when he entered Cal U to study secondary education and history. “I had the simple goal of earning a degree so I would be eligible for a commission,” recalls Van Riper, who worked his way through college and became a second lieutenant upon graduation in 1963. “However, the atmosphere at California was so positive, and the teaching so meaningful, that I soon came to value education in its own right. ‘Learning is a lifelong activity. In a very real sense, books are the ammunition’ for the minds of military leaders. Education is one of the few things that cannot be taken away from a person. It becomes part of your very being.”

Born in Brownsville, Pa., Van Riper serves more than 41 years in the U.S. Marine Corps, including wartime service in Vietnam and Operation Desert Storm. Commanding general of the Marine Corps Combat Development Command at the time of his retirement, he is chairman of the board of directors for the Marine Corps Heritage Foundation. An expert on the future of warfare and military strategy, Van Riper continues to serve his country by teaching at the National Defense University, the Marine Corps University and other military education institutions. He also consults for the Defense Advanced Research Project Agency, or DARPA, and a variety of private companies and organizations. He frequently presents speeches on his favorite topics, such as the new realities of warfare and terrorism, retooling command and control for organizational effectiveness, and the history of strategy and conflict.

“In addition to instilling knowledge and skills, universities need to ensure that students understand their responsibilities as citizens,” says Van Riper, who adds that he applauds Cal U’s commitment to building character and advancing the core values of Integrity, Civility and Responsibility. His identical twin, James R. Van Riper, was a colonel in the Marine Corps, and their two sons also are Marine officers. All four men are Eagle Scouts. Family life has always come first for Van Riper, who with wife L.C. is a new grandparent. “If I had to put my (life priorities) in order,” he says, “at the top is faith, closely followed by family, then my career in the Marine Corps.”

Lt. Gen. R. Steven Whitcomb
Relying on Values to Achieve True Success

Raised in a military family, Lt. Gen. R. Steven Whitcomb recalls the earliest experiences as a young soldier in training, which included rappelling down the face of a tall and imposing structure. The edifice wasn’t in one of the many foreign nations where he served his country over the past several decades, however. It was a dormitory on the campus of California University, where Lynn earned an undergraduate degree in English while enrolled in the ROTC program.

“I have so many fond memories of Cal U,” says Lynn, who grew up in a military family and learned everything from survival skills to map-reading techniques during his time on campus. “ROTC taught us about basic leadership while physically challenging us. It was a great challenge filled with adventurous people.”

Lynn credits the University with developing his writing ability. “Both English and ROTC helped me to become a better senior leader and deliver effective speeches,” he adds. Lynn went on to serve in Saudi Arabia and Iraq during operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Among numerous command positions, he helped to direct firefighters in the Pentagon on Sept. 11, 2001.

“We saved all of the Pentagon’s communications,” he says. “Though attacked, we never stopped Pentagon operations.”

From 2002 to 2005, Lynn commanded the 3rd Signal Brigade, III Corps at Fort Hood, Texas, and in Iraq while deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, developing the largest tactical communications system in the Army’s history.

Last October, Lynn became commander of the U.S. Army’s 311th Signal Command. Based in Hawaii, he directs more than 1,900 active-duty and reserve soldiers and civilian employees stationed across 14 time zones.

“The University is the cornerstone to future learning. It exposes people to other people and other cultures,” he says. “The world is a complex place. Learning how to make a difference in this world begins in the university.”

“Education and learning is a lifelong process.”

Lt. Gen. Alan R. Lynn
Meeting Challenges at Home and Abroad

Brig. Gen. Alan R. Lynn vividly recalls his earliest experiences as a young soldier in training, which included rappelling down the face of a tall and imposing structure. The edifice wasn’t in one of the many foreign nations where he has served his country over the past several decades, however. It was a dormitory on the campus of California University, where Lynn earned an undergraduate degree in English while enrolled in the ROTC program.

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“I have lived and fought in places where education is lacking. The disparity between the quality of life in an educated nation and other nations is stark.”