

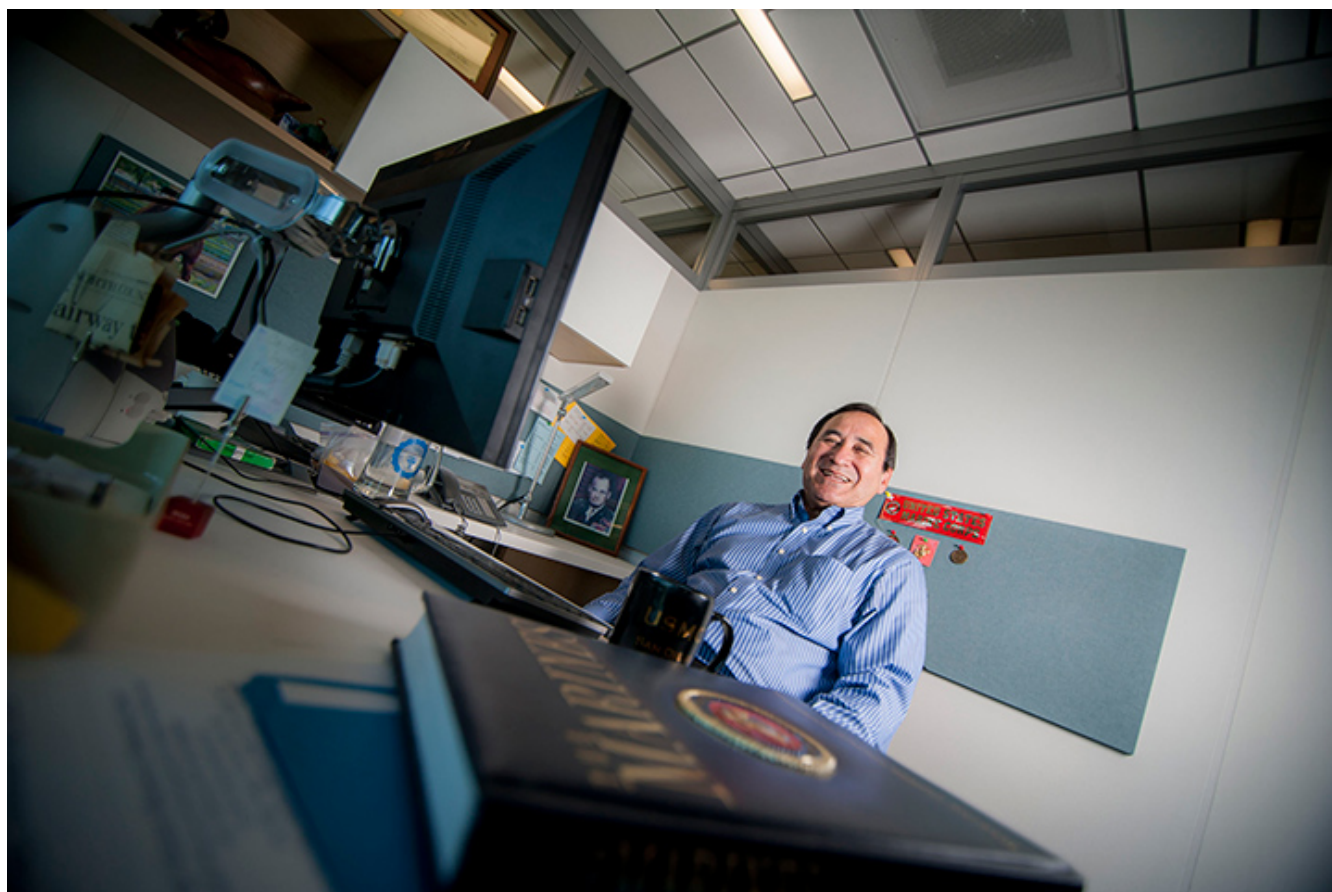
UC San Diego

UC San Diego News Center

By Christine Clark

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UC San Diego Veteran of Year Lives By Principles Learned As Marine in Vietnam



Carlos Molina. Photos by Erik Jepsen/UC San Diego Publications

When Carlos Molina was a freshman in college, he decided to postpone his education to volunteer in the U.S. Marine Corps, where he served two tours in Vietnam from 1967 to 1969.

“When I was 18, I didn’t think I was doing enough for my country, so I decided to join the military,” Molina said. “My family has a rich history of military service, but none had served in the Marine Corps, so I decided that was where I would go.”

Today, Molina, who works in UC San Diego's Office of Contracts and Grants Administration, has U.S. Marine Corps memorabilia in his office to remind him to live by the principles the Corps taught him: honor, courage and commitment. He's carried these values with him throughout his life and career—as a student, lawyer and, today, as a UC San Diego employee.

Molina's service will be recognized today when he accepts the UC San Diego Veteran of the Year award. He will be honored at a special reception, open to the campus community, from noon to 1 p.m. at the San Diego Super Computer Center Auditorium.

"It's an honor and truly humbling," Molina said. "It's also a huge surprise. I'm grateful my colleagues took it upon themselves to nominate me for something like this."

Molina was nominated for the award by several people for his demonstration of the core values of the university's Principles of Community and for his dedication to helping others, according to Billiekai Boughton, chair of the UC San Diego's Veteran Association.

Molina's military career began at boot camp at the Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego. He graduated from boot camp and was deployed to Da Nang South Vietnam in 1967. When he landed in Vietnam, Molina was assigned to the 9th Engineer Battalion, Headquarters Company, which was located in Chu Lai. During his first night in Chu Lai, his company was attacked. The attacks continued and after a week or so Molina was assigned to Delta Company, where he was sent out to the field in the southern end of the Que Son Valley south of Da Nang. His battalion's opposition was the infamous 2nd North Vietnamese Army Division (NVA), which they fought against for the rest of Molina's stay in Vietnam.

After he returned home, Molina volunteered to serve another tour from January to August of 1969.

"It was not common, but I didn't want to leave the guys behind," he said. To this day, Molina becomes emotional when he recollects the servicemen he fought alongside with, many of whom lost their lives to the war.

Veterans Events

The Student Veterans Organization (SVO) will join the other veteran communities on campus to celebrate military service with the following events:

- Veteran of the Year Ceremony, Noon, Nov. 8—A special ceremony will be held in the UC San Diego Super Computer Center Auditorium to honor a veteran staff member or student who has gone above and beyond his or her campus career duties to impact their surroundings or community.
- San Diego Veterans Day Parade, 11 a.m., Nov. 11—For the official holiday, members of the SVO will join veterans from San Diego State, University of San Diego and several local community colleges to march together downtown in honor of veterans and their service to our country.
- Flag Display, Nov. 13 to 15 —About 150 small American flags will be placed on the west lawn of UC San Diego adjacent to Library Walk to honor each American service member who lost his or her life in combat this year. A poster featuring the names of those who sacrificed their lives will also be displayed.

“At the time, there was no talk on the ground about whether we should have been in Vietnam or not,” he said. “We just cared about looking out for each other.”

When Molina returned home after his second tour, he said it took him a year to become fully integrated into society again.

“If people hadn’t been there [to Vietnam] or served, then I didn’t want to talk to them about it,” he said. “If you have been in harm’s way, it’s hard to forget. I will probably be 90 years old and when I think about the war, it will feel like it was just last week.”



He continued, “I found that it is like a car accident. If I kept focusing on it, I wouldn’t move on so I eventually had to put the war behind me.”

When Molina left for Vietnam, most of the news coverage focused on its escalation; however, when he returned home in 1969, the war had become largely unpopular.

“I didn’t feel welcomed,” he said. “They didn’t have parades for us like they did for my dad who served in World War II. We were criticized, but it was just something all of us veterans had to deal with.”

Following his service, Molina earned a bachelor’s degree at San Diego State University and a law degree from the University of San Diego. He practiced law in San Diego for 20 years before he was hired in the Office of Contracts and Grants Administration at UC San Diego in 2002.

Molina’s colleague, Susanna Pastell, said, “Carlos repeatedly tells us that if you make every decision in your life following the values of honor, courage and commitment, you can never go wrong.”

Molina, who is of Native American and Mexican American descent, is active in several staff associations. He is a member of the Native American Council, the American Indian Faculty and Staff Association, the Chicano Latino Staff Association, the Veteran Association and the Pan Asian Staff Association.

“I like to be involved,” he said. “It’s an opportunity for me to get to meet people in my community who have the same culture.”

He added, “I love UC San Diego. When it comes to service, I feel like people admire me for serving my country and for being a veteran.”

For more information on UC San Diego’s Veteran of the Year Award and the UC San Diego Veteran Association, go to: <http://blink.ucsd.edu/sponsor/veterans/>.

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