SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE AWARD OF VIETNAMESE MEDALS TO U.S. PERSONNEL
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The purpose of this article is to record, and to disseminate to my fellow collectors, my observations on the award of Vietnamese medals to US personnel made during a recent assignment in Vietnam. I feel my observations may be of some value to collectors of Vietnamese medals, to collectors of medals concerning the Vietnam War, and to collectors of US medals who are interested in foreign awards to US personnel.

This article is limited in several respects. First, it contains only my personal observations; it is by no means authoritative. I have consulted but one reference, a wall chart showing Vietnamese medals published by the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF). Second, it will not discuss awards for heroism but will concentrate on awards for meritorious service. I will say in passing that the primary Vietnamese award to US personnel for heroism appears to be the Gallantry Cross (Ahn Dung Boi Tinh), shown below.

Figure 1. Gallantry Cross. Grades not pictured are the one with Gold Star, With Silver Star. Ribbon- red, gold center, with narrow red stripes.

The Vietnamese Campaign Medal (Chien-Dich Boi Tinh) hardly needs mentioning. It is awarded to all US military personnel involved in the war. The point that should be made here is that, since it is not issued by the government of South Vietnam, the appearance of individual medals is likely to vary considerably depending on source of manufacture. Figure 2 shows the reverse of my own medal which I purchased in Vietnam.

The next most common Vietnamese medal awarded to US personnel would likely be the Armed Forces Honor Medal (Dahn Du Boi Tinh), sometimes termed the Medal of Honor. This medal has long been awarded to US advisory personnel serving with Vietnamese forces as well as other US personnel. Only within the past few years has the RVNAF begun to award this medal to their own personnel.

The Armed Forces Honor Medal is awarded in two classes. The first class is presented to commissioned officers, normally majors and captains; the Second Class is presented to enlisted men. Warrent officers are in question; since the Vietnamese consider warrent officers almost more the same
in status as senior non-commissioned officers, unlike our own services. They usually receive as Second Class award. A Chief Warrent Officer (CW02) in my own unit received the Second Class award.

Award certificates and issue boxes do exist for the Armed Forces Honor Medal, and exist doubtless for other medals as well. I however, was awarded this medal myself, but never did receive any certificate or box. The obverse of my medal is shown below in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Armed Forces Honor Medal Awarded the author.

This is the First Class in gilt. Ribbon—gold with two red stripes and three blue. The Second Class ribbon lacks the outer gold stripes.
There are three other Vietnamese medals awarded to US personnel with which I am personally familiar. These medals are awarded far less frequently than the two already discussed. The Army Distinguished Service Order (Luc Quan Huan Chuong) in Figure 4 appears to be awarded to colonels and lieutenant colonels occupying positions of senior advisors and other highly responsible positions. The Staff Service Honor Medal (Tham Muu Boi Tinh) in Figure 5 appears to be awarded to field grade officers occupying staff or administrative positions in the advisory effort. The Technical Service Honor Medal (Ky Thuat Boi Tinh) in Figure 6 appears to be awarded to junior officers and enlisted men in the advisory effort who do not qualify for the Armed Forces Honor Medal. Each of these medals are issued in two classes.

Fig. 4 Army Distinguished Service Order. Ribbon- brown and green. The Second Class ribbon is without rosette.

Fig. 5 Staff Service Honor Medal. Ribbon- red and white with green outer edges. The Second Class ribbon has blue outer edges.

To indicate the relative rarity of these medals, during the period of my service in Vietnam, I observed the award of more than twenty Armed Forces Honor Medals in my unit but only one Army Distinguished Service Order, one Staff Service Honor Medal, and two Technical Service Honor Medals. Incidentally, one of these two latter was awarded to a captain who would have qualified for the Armed Forces Honor Medal had he not asked for the other so as to have a more distinctive though lesser award!

It should be emphasised that the criteria for award of the medals mentioned in this article applying to US personnel have little similarity to the criteria for the award of the same medals to Vietnamese personnel. There is much room for further research and statistics in this area. A major achievement would be to secure for the ONSA library a translation of the RVNAF award regulations. Illustrations and descriptions of award certificates and issue boxes are needed. Variations in medals, as between those manufactured in the United States and those made in Vietnam, ought to be noted.