

Vietnam Service Medal

What does your ribbon look like?



The Vietnam Service Medal/Ribbon was awarded to all members of the United States Armed Forces serving in Vietnam and contiguous waters or airspace there over. Members of the Armed Forces of the United States in Thailand, Laos, or Cambodia, or the airspace there over, during eligible periods and serving in direct support of operations in Vietnam.

The Vietnam Service Medal is a military award which was created in 1965 by order of President Lyndon B. Johnson. The medal is issued to recognize military service during the Vietnam War and is authorized to service members in every branch of the U.S. Armed Forces, provided they meet the qualification criteria in United States Department of Defense regulation DoD 1348.

The Vietnam Service Medal is presented to any service member who served on temporary duty for more than thirty consecutive days, or 60 non-consecutive days, attached to or regularly serving for one, or more, days with an organization participating in or directly supporting ground (military) operations or attached to or regularly serving for one, or more, days aboard a naval vessel directly supporting military operations in the Republic of Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos within the defined combat zone (DoD 1348 C6.6.1.1.5. revised September 1996) between the dates of 1961-11-15 and 1973-03-28, and from 29 April, 1975 to 30 April, 1975.

For those service members who supported Vietnam Operations from another country within Southeast Asia, DoD maintains (proximity to threat) as the disqualifying factor for Vietnam Service Medal eligibility.

For the United States Navy, vessels operating in Vietnamese waters qualify for the Vietnam Service Medal provided that the naval vessel was engaged in direct support of Vietnam combat operations. The U.S. Air Force also grants the Vietnam Service Medal exclusively to flight crews that flew missions over Vietnamese air space, even if the home base of the flight mission was hundreds of miles away requiring in flight refueling.

The Department of Defense established thirty military campaigns during the Vietnam War. (**Seventeen Naval Campaigns**) For those service members participating in one or more campaigns, a service star is required on the Vietnam Service Medal. Silver service stars are issued in lieu of five bronze. Some campaigns apply to all of the military services while others are specific to a particular branch of the U.S. Armed Forces (the United States Marine Corps is considered part of the Navy and is eligible only for Navy campaigns). The exception to this rule is Operation Frequent Wind. The arrowhead device is authorized for campaign participation which involved an aerial or amphibious assault. The Fleet Marine Force combat operation insignia is also authorized

for certain sailors. The following are the established combat campaigns authorized for service stars to the Vietnam Service Medal.

31 campaigns of the Vietnam War 17

- * Vietnam Initial Advisory Campaign (USAF): from 1961-11-15 to 1965-03-01
- * Vietnam Advisory Campaign (Army, Navy, USCG): from 1962-03-15 to 1965-03-07
- * Vietnam Defense Campaign (Army, Navy, USCG): from 1965-03-08 to 1965-12-24
- * Vietnam Air Defensive Campaign (USAF): from 1965-03-02 to 1966-01-30
- * Vietnam Counteroffensive (Army, Navy, USCG): from 1965-12-25 to 1966-06-30
- * Vietnam Air Counteroffensive (USAF): from 1966-01-31 to 1966-06-28
- * Vietnam Air Offensive (USAF): from 1966-06-29 to 1967-03-08
- * Vietnam Counteroffensive, Phase II (Army, Navy, USCG): from 1966-07-01 to 1967-05-31
- * Vietnam Air Offensive, Phase II (USAF): from 1967-03-09 to 1968-03-31
- * Vietnam Counteroffensive, Phase III (Army, Navy, USCG): from 1967-06-01 to 1968-01-29
- * Vietnam Air/Ground Campaign (USAF): from 1968-01-22 to 1968-07-07
- * Tet Counteroffensive (Army, USAF, Navy, USCG): from 1968-01-30 to 1968-04-01
- * Vietnam Air Offensive, Phase III (USAF): from 1968-04-01 to 1968-10-31
- * Vietnam Counteroffensive, Phase IV (Army, Navy, USCG): from 1968-04-02 to 1968-06-30
- * Vietnam Counteroffensive, Phase V (Army, Navy, USCG): from 1968-07-01 to 1968-11-01
- * Vietnam Air Offensive, Phase IV (USAF): from 1968-11-01 to 1969-02-22
- * Vietnam Counteroffensive, Phase VI (Army, Navy, USCG): from 1968-11-02 to 1969-02-22
- * Tet 1969 Counteroffensive (Army, Navy, USAF, USCG): from 1969-02-23 to 1969-06-08
- * Vietnam Summer-Fall 1969 (Army, Navy, USAF, USCG): from 1969-06-09 to 1969-10-31
- * Vietnam Winter-Spring 1970 (Army, Navy, USAF, USCG): from 1969-11-01 to 1970-04-30
- * Sanctuary Counteroffensive (Army, Navy, USAF, USCG): from 1970-05-01 to 1970-06-30
- * Counteroffensive, Phase VII Army – 1 July 1970 - 30 June 1971
- * Southwest Monsoon (USAF): from 1970-07-01 to 1970-11-30
- * Vietnam Counteroffensive, Phase VII (Army, Navy, USCG): from 1970-07-01 to 1971-06-30
- * Commando Hunt V (USAF): from 1970-12-01 to 1971-05-14
- * Commando Hunt VI (USAF): from 1971-05-15 to 1971-10-31
- * Consolidation I (Army, Navy, USCG): from 1971-07-01 to 1971-11-30
- * Commando Hunt VII (USAF): from 1971-11-01 to 1972-03-29
- * Consolidation II (Army, Navy, USCG): from 1971-12-01 to 1972-03-29
- * Vietnam Cease Fire (Army, Navy, USAF, USCG): from 1972-03-30 to 1973-03-28

* Operation Frequent Wind (USMC, USAF, Navy): from 29 April, 1975 to 30 April, 1975

The Vietnam Service Medal (VSM) is retroactive to 1961 and supersedes and replaces the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal (AFEM) which was issued for Vietnam service prior to 1965. Defense Department regulations do not permit the simultaneous presentation of both the Vietnam Service Medal, and the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, for the same period of service in Vietnam, however the AFEM may be exchanged for the VSM upon request from a service member. Veterans of the Vietnam War may exchange the AFEM for the VSM and have military records updated to reflect the difference by contacting the National Personnel Records Center, which is the current agency that provides record corrections reflecting an AFEM upgrade to the Vietnam Service Medal.

The Republic of Vietnam also issued its own version of the Vietnam Service Medal, known as the Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal. This is a separate decoration from the Vietnam Service Medal and is a foreign decoration which was accepted by congress and the U.S. military in accordance with DoD 1348 C7.1. The qualifications are the same.

The United States Army, Air Force and Navy recognizes 17 campaign stars (3 silver and 2 bronze service stars) on the Vietnam Service campaign streamer.