
The Vietnam Cross of Gallantry

Information provided by Gary Smith

If you are authorized the Vietnam Service medal you are authorized the VCOG (or VGC) medal and/or ribbon. (Important website links at the bottom of this report).

Because both myth and deliberate misinterpretation of the Vietnam Cross of Gallantry [VCOG] or Vietnam Gallantry Cross [VGC] has permeated the Vietnam veteran community for almost thirty years -- and because the (South) Vietnam Govt is no longer around to set the record straight -- many people are operating under incorrect information.

In 1974 the VCOG (or VGC) unit and individual citation was awarded by former President Nguyen Van Thieu and the Vietnam Congress to all Americans (and other non-Vietnamese nationalities) as an individual award with respect and in gratitude for sacrificial and valorous service trying to protect and preserve the Republic of South Vietnam from communist aggression.

Prior to President Thieu's "blanket award" the VCOG (or VGC) was officially titled a unit citation as a ribbon, however, it was also issued as an individual award as a full sized medal to those who exemplified individual valor but not at the level (above or below) requisite for receiving a different Vietnamese honor medal.

Issue of the VCOG (or VGC) by the Govt of Vietnam in 1974 to all foreign military personnel who served in Vietnam did not, and was never intended, to devalue or diminish the prestige of the VCOG (or VGC) as it is apparent, some recipients of the pre-1974 awarded have alleged. Just the opposite, all recipients, pre- and post-1974 were elevated to the same status for their noble contribution in Vietnam.

When the VCOG (or VGC) was issued to an individual a medal was usually given, as is always the custom when both a medal and ribbon exist. When the VCOG was issued to a unit a ribbon was distributed (or should have been distributed) to all unit members. This ribbon distribution, however, did not -- repeat not -- prohibit any individual recipient of the ribbon from acquiring the full sized medal. The colors and design of both the ribbon and the medal are identical with the exception of the palm device on the medal and the 'twig' device on the ribbon. Other than that, there is no difference between the two. (More on the 'twig', below).

However, because American unit citations existed only as ribbons and not as medals a myth, if you will, evolved by some Americans who were ignorant of Vietnamese military medal law and policy. These Americans deliberately or mistakenly (depending on their knowledge or motivation) separated the medal from the ribbon. In completing their willful or mistaken error, these same misguided Americans incorrectly assumed that because the VCOG (or VGC) ribbon was authorized by the Department of Defense/Army for Class 'A' uniform wear that only the ribbon and not the medal was intended by President Thieu's "blanket award". These misguided Americans failed to account for the fact that full size medals are never worn on the standard Class 'A' American uniform. They also failed to account for the fact that many American medals are awarded to American naval vessels (vessels are also 'units'). (For example, you never hear it claimed that an Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal awarded to a U.S. Navy vessel can only be worn/acquired by individuals in the ship's crew as a ribbon and not as a medal.)

President Thieu: When interviewed himself in France in 1976 about the dispute over the VCOG medal versus ribbon, which had gained some notoriety even then because Vietnam veterans just learning about their eligibility were requesting DD-215s to display their VCOG (or VGC), President Thieu laughed and said,

"This is silly. The Americans never seem to learn that 'When in Rome, do as the Romans do.' Like the Americans did in Vietnam, they apply their rules to our customs and laws. If we had intended for there to be two different Croix de Guerres (Cross' of Gallantry) there would be two and they would be distinctly different. We were not so backward and unsophisticated as many Americans thought we were when they were fighting in our country for so many years. We have but one Croix de Guerre. We don't have two. This is all quite silly."

Much like some self-proclaimed "combat veterans" of Vietnam who enjoy elevating their "combat" status above others who served in Vietnam in air, naval or combat support roles, a myth has succeeded in the American Vietnam veteran community alleging that only the VCOG (or VGC) ribbon of identical color and name as its parent medal can be obtained and worn by Americans authorized by the 1974 edict. This deliberate misinterpretation is as difficult to extinguish as the myth suggesting that veterans can receive a refund on their military insurance payments.

To support their deliberate misinterpretation of the VCOG (or VGC) ribbon applying to recipients of the 1974 edict, some veterans have gone so far as to:

- a. claim that the VCOG is the medal and the VGC is the ribbon.
- b. claim that the palm leaf on the medal and the 'twig' on the ribbon make them two different awards. (See more on the 'twig' below.)

In 1974 President Thieu and the Vietnamese Congress authorized the VCOG unit citation (or VGC) to ALL Americans who served in Vietnam as an INDIVIDUAL award under the same directive as when this unit citation was previously awarded to an individual.

Vietnam veterans are fully authorized to obtain the VCOG (or VGC) medal and display it as an individual award, as intended by President Thieu and the Vietnam Congress in 1974. Hopefully, over time, a correction to the deliberate misinterpretations by some individuals, and the uninformed misinterpretation by others who believed the deliberate misinterpretation they were told, will be established.

NOTES:

1. There are four RVN Gallantry Cross unit citations' (or, Cross' of Gallantry).
2. The four are: with Palm, Gold, Silver, or Bronze device.
3. The VCOG (Army Level individual and unit) citation was manufactured as a both medal and as a bordered ribbon [Palm Leaf].
4. Although some indivs have erroneously mistaken the medal and the ribbon as two different awards, both the medal and the ribbon represent the same award.
5. The full-size medal was manufactured in the U.S. and France. Bogus copies were manufactured in Thailand, Australia and Hong Kong. The (two) ribbon(s) was manufactured in Japan. The U.S. medal shipped their medal under the name Gallantry Cross. The French shipped their medal under the name Cross of Gallantry because it was the Vietnamese version of the Croix de Guerre, which is also an individual and unit award existing as both a full size medal and ribbon.
6. The Japanese created two ribbons. One was larger and the other slimmer. The larger ribbon was to be worn by Army personnel on their Class A uniform. The slimmer (not smaller) ribbon was to be worn by Air Force and Naval personnel. Both the large and slim ribbons are identical in design. However, when constructing the ribbon on both the Army and Air/Naval ribbons with the palm device the Japanese screwed up the palm making

it appear as a 'twig' (for the simple fact that the Japanese company that produced the ribbon already had 'twig' devices in their inventory that were used on one or more Japanese military medals.) The issue of the 'twig' on the VCOG/VGC ribbon was never changed/corrected. The Japanese also screwed up the inscription. However, the 'twig' and the palm represent the same device (Army or Armed Forces Level unit and individual award).

7. In 1974 President Thieu and the Vietnam Congress issued new orders for the Cross of Gallantry (Gallantry Cross) officially amending it for clarity from a unit award to include individual awarding. (Although it had been previously awarded in some instances to individuals).

The palm version of the citation was hence awarded to EVERY member (individual) of every Allied nation who fought/served in Vietnam.

8. The other three VCOG unit citations, bronze, silver and gold, were amended as follows:

a. individuals who received the (US) Bronze Star medal were to be awarded the VCOG with BS device (formerly/also Brigade/Regiment Level)

b. individuals who received the (US) Silver Star medal were to be awarded the VCOG with SS device (formerly/also Division Level)

c. the gold star device was unchanged in award designation (Corps Lev.)

The Cross of Gallantry Regulations:

<http://www.amervets.com/replacement/vcog.htm#isr>

Vietnam Medals Awarded to All or Groups of US Personnel:

<http://members.aol.com/veterans/vmedal.htm>