

Vietnam Service Ribbon with 2 Stars

Vietnam Service Medal –



The Vietnam service ribbon was awarded to American Service men in the war zone shown in Figure 1 that encompassed Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and parts of Thailand during the period of 1965-1973. The ribbon was awarded for any one individual campaign and bronze stars were awarded for subsequent campaigns. While on the USS Tang, USS Gudgeon, and USS Trout I participated in three separate campaigns that encompassed our mission. The “campaigns” were:

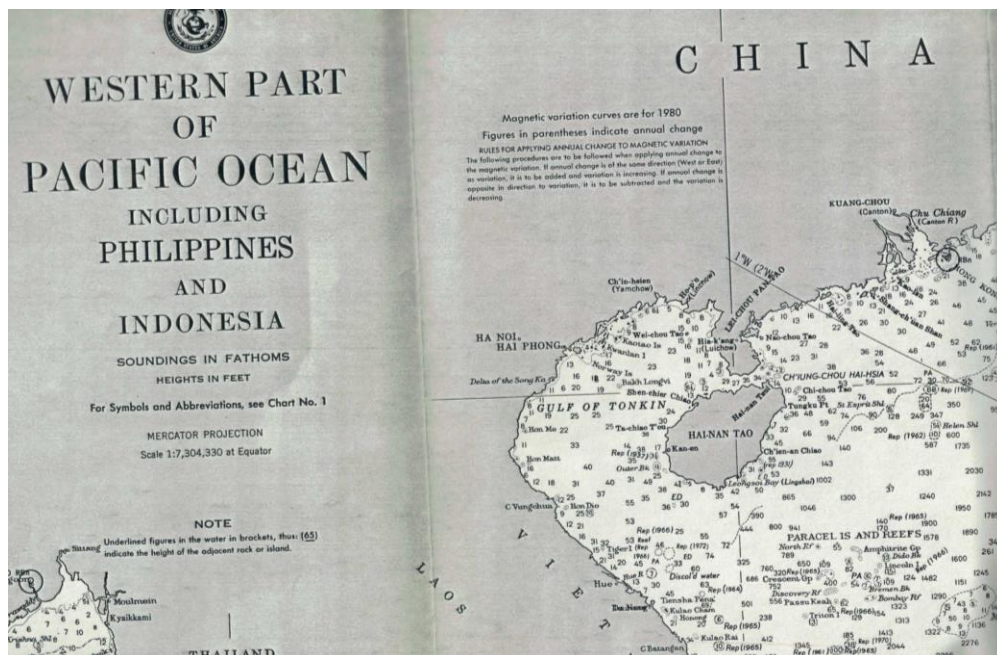
1. Consolidation I – 1971 = Ribbon
2. Consolidation II – 1972 = Bronze Star #1
3. Vietnam Cease-Fire 1972-1973 = Bronze Star #2

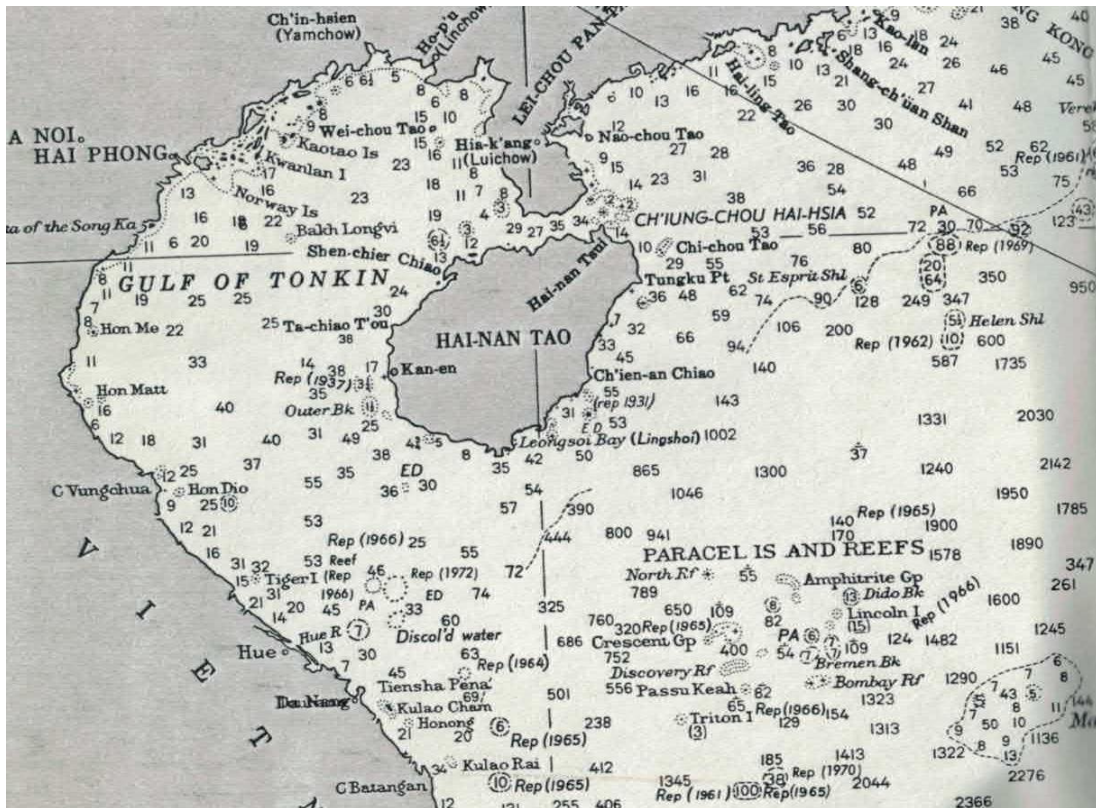


Figure 1 War Zone coverage shown in Yellow Highlight (approximate)

The Vietnam Service Medal was the furthest thing from my mind at the time. I was totally focused on TAX FREE PAY, which included the additional \$75.00/month Submarine Pay. Not like many of my SeeStories, I was NOT a volunteer Sonar Watch stander for this my first mission. I was totally focused on the Vietnam war and our boats contribution to it. I still can’t talk about the actual mission, and you can’t find it anywhere not even Wikipedia. But suffice it to say it had something to do with where we were, and that was in the neighborhood to the east of the Blue Star in the upper right quadrant of Figure 1. Let’s just say the western portion of the South China Sea and east of the “War Zone” whose eastern extreme was the 110° line. I WAS HUGELY DISSAPPOINTED!!!

So, I volunteered to stand watches with the Navigation ET’s and see if I could find a solution to the problem. I immediately immersed myself in the fine print orders and the charts. One of which is shown here and a close-up on the next page (without the classified markings of course).





From where we were the closest, we could get to entering the War Zone (crossing over the 110° line that bisected the Island of Hainan), and through the Hainan Straits was just not going to happen. Clearly, we would have to be on the surface to cross over the 2 fathom waters at the entrance, but additionally we would be in clear violation of territorial waters.

On the plus side, the closest to the surface we could get, because of our need to snorkel for charging the batteries would be periscope (snorkel) depth. So that meant that we could be inside the 100-fathom curve, but not too much. So I then went digging through the fine print of our operational orders.

About five or six pages into it, I found it, and I quote, ('cause I wrote it down). "...on occasion you may depart your patrol area to accomplish a deep charge of the batteries with no more than a 24-hour departure from the patrol area." TAH-DAH. I found it. I called the Captain over and outlined my "read of things". I proposed to him that at noon on the last day of the month we would depart our patrol area, head southwest and enter the war zone during the last hour of the month (pointing at the 54-fathom mark on the 110° line. We would then linger in the war zone for an additional hour of the next day (month), and then return to our patrol area. This two-hour dip fully charted on and in the patrol report, would authorize a "two month" "presence" in the war zone and qualify for the tax-free pay. Could we help it that we would need a "deep charge" on the last day of the month – a strange coincidence of timing don't you think.

To which he said to me; "Genius!" On the two subsequent missions (same operation), I briefed the CO's of both boats on the "trick" the first CO had performed on my advisory.

SO, I got my six months of TAX-FREE pay even though I was only "IN" the War Zone for a total of 6 hours. AND my ship-mates did as well (however only 2 months, not 6), a few of them actually re-enlisted in those two hours such that their re-enlistment bonus was also TAX FREE.

Now then, much later on, while going over my records to get a copy of my DD-214 (proof of service), I discovered I had been awarded the Vietnam Service Ribbon with two stars, and according to BUPERS (Bureau of Personnel), the only American Sailor to have done so in that period.