

FOREIGN SERVICE INSTITUTE

September 28, 1970

Mr. Samuel M. Pinckney, Jr.
Chairman, GVN Awards Committee
U.S. AID Mission
APO San Francisco 96243

Dear Mr. Pinckney:

I am in receipt of your letter dated September 4, 1970, in which you state that your Awards Committee has concluded that the award to me of the GVN Revolutionary Development Medal was not justified in accordance with certain criteria under which your Committee operates, and therefore, that the award is being disallowed, etc. Actually, such awards mean little to me in any bureaucratic sense, but you and your Committee might be interested to know the background of the award.

In 1968-1969, General Hoang Van Lac decided on his own initiative to give this award to certain Americans, who were not connected with the RD Program directly in most cases, but whom he felt had meant the most to him and his Government over the years in Viet-Nam, and such people included, as I recall, Len Maynard, John Vann, myself and Mark Huss. The services rendered by me dated back to 1964 when I was the officer in charge of all USAID provincial representatives in Viet-Nam as what was then known as the Assistant Director for Rural Affairs. After the breakup of the Diem regime, the USAID Rural Affairs Office, of which I became the chief, working closely with the then Colonel Lac, managed to keep the GVN functioning in the provinces of Viet-Nam at a time when the central governmental machinery had broken down, and the ministries were scarcely functioning. Hatcher James and George Reasonover would remember this period. The award from General Lac to myself, Len Maynard, John Vann and Mark Huss related to times, places and relationships of which, I must assume, your Committee has little knowledge. Precisely because the award was not related to the RD Program as such and was a GVN initiative entirely, it had a sentimental significance to Maynard and myself which made it valuable to us, perhaps even more valuable than the much more prestigious award of the National Order which the President of Viet-Nam gave me when I left the country in March 1969. With the exception of George Jacobson, John Vann, Dick Evans, Laddie Stewart and a few others, I doubt that anyone now in the USAID has the slightest knowledge of, or real competence to rule upon, the validity of this GVN recognition of services rendered in years past.

I might add one last thing. The issuance of medals by the GVN has, in recent years, become ridiculously inflated, and almost all of them have lost their original value. In many cases, medals are the result of U.S. pressure exerted on the GVN, which I find highly inappropriate. Had the medal in question been given to me for any services rendered by the Ministry of Revolutionary Development during 1966-1969 -- my last tour in Viet-Nam -- I would have managed in some way to decline it without offending the GVN officials concerned. It did, in fact, relate to a more distant time, prior to the 1965 buildup, when such gestures had considerable significance to the people involved. At the time General Lac obtained this medal for Len Maynard, John Vann, Mark Huss and myself, I believe it was a total surprise to all of us. General Lac indicated that he had felt that many of us were leaving Viet-Nam, and he wanted us to know how his Government felt towards us for what we had contributed in his country over many years. Obviously, your Committee is in a difficult position to render judgments in this regard. On principle, I believe your Committee should reconsider its decision.

Sincerely,

Ogden Williams
Coordinator
Viet-Nam Training Center

cc: Mr. George Jacobson