

## **A QUEEN'S DIAMOND JUBILEE MEDAL FOR QUALIFYING VETERANS**

It is proposed that in the interests of fair reward, genuine and demonstrably tangible respect for the value and dedication of former servicemen, equality and national celebration, the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal be awarded to veterans with the same qualifying service as current intended recipients, i.e. 5 full calendar years on 6th February 2012.

This proposal provides a simple and effective way of doing this, ensuring proper eligibility and at no cost to the Government in terms of money or manpower. It only requires a single pronouncement authorising the wearing of the medal.

### **Context**

There has been a major Government claim to support military veterans which is welcomed and respected, especially since it is recognised that this national period of deficit reduction makes some measures very difficult to implement. This proposal, however, would effectively cost nothing in budgetary or manpower terms. It covers a very sensitive matter for veterans, who feel seriously under-recognised.

The military for the last two decades have been showered with medals in recognition of their service, quite properly, including for many two jubilee medals (Golden and Diamond) within 10 years of each other. Recent operations, such as Iraq and Afghanistan, have not only earned separate medals, but considerable public respect and support for their recipients. Prior to that, the award of medals was severely restricted and troops were poorly supported. As an example a Service person in Borneo (a remote jungle operation akin to the 'Forgotten' 14th Army in Burma, but serious enough for a VC to be awarded) who then went on to serve in Northern Ireland (a vicious, embarrassing conflict on UK soil), 10 years and 10,000 miles apart, received just one campaign medal to cover both of the two totally different operations. As for Royal Commemorative Medals, the 1953 Coronation and 1977 Silver Jubilee medals were only awarded to two or three personnel in each Service unit of some 600 people! The Minister for Veterans has advised that these cannot be retrospectively awarded and we grudgingly recognise and accept that.

Therefore the context is that veterans already feel severely undervalued and unfairly treated, but have had their hopes raised by this Government's pronouncements and actions to repair the covenant and give much more visibility to public support for the Armed Forces and Veterans. To disappoint them now, by failing to fulfil such claims, would create widespread cynicism and bitterness which would be in stark contrast, for example, to the euphoria 'abroad' since Her Majesty approved the wearing of the Pingat Jasa Malaysia medal in November of 2010.

### **Qualification**

In the 28th June 2011 Directgov announcement, the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, Jeremy Hunt, said:

The Queen has dedicated her life to the service of this country.....It is right that we reward those

people who, like the Queen, also dedicate their lives to the public good and who represent the very best of British spirit.

He emphasises that this covers the last period of sixty years. It also requires recipients of the medal to have completed a minimum of five full calendar years of such service on 6th February 2012. It is the view of military veterans who have exceeded that minimum period that it would be totally discriminatory (including in some cases on age and disability grounds) for their service during Her Majesty's reign to be dismissed as somehow less important, or less loyal, than the current military. By what perverse rationale could their dedication be seen as inferior to those still fortunate enough to be serving Her Majesty in uniform? Including military veterans in the award will sweep up, amongst others, those who might otherwise be cruelly denied because:

- they are too old still to be serving

- having been involved in recent operations they have been medically discharged as a result of often terrible injuries sustained in service (and are now a 'categorised' Veteran), but who's fit contemporaries are still fortunate enough to be serving and will get a medal; others have lived with such disabilities sustained in Her Majesty's service for decades and now feel abandoned.

- they have been made redundant (and are now a 'categorised' Veteran) when otherwise they would have expected to be serving on 6th February 2012.

#### Non-Retrospective

This proposal is not trying to re-write history. It is not a bid to have retrospective awards made of the Coronation Medal, Silver Jubilee Medal or even the Golden Jubilee Medal. It is the here and now. It is about the right to wear a new medal, this year, appropriately. It will, as an aside, have the added benefit of redressing earlier inequities, but that is all. It is rewarding the loyalty of Service veterans who have served during, and many almost as long as, Her Majesty's own 60 year period of service.

Nor need this be seen as setting a precedent. This is about the last sixty years and probably the last chance to make an award to those who served in that era, setting the record straight and wiping the medal slate clean! Any future Coronation Medal for a new sovereign would be for a new generation.

#### Eligibility and Cost

There are three considerations which might be used to suggest the award of the medal to Service veterans would be impractical: the cost of the medal itself; establishing eligibility; and the cost in personnel and staff in providing and distributing the medals. However there should be no difficulty in overcoming such constraints, which would appear to be the only possible objections to an otherwise compelling case. It is not envisaged that any Service personnel or civil servants would need to be employed on this if the recent precedent of the award by the Malaysian Government of the Pingat Jasa Malaysia medal to UK recipients is followed.

Contact with eligible veterans will be the main requirement and can be provided through the many

Service Associations; Regimental, Squadron, Ship, as well as ABF-The Soldiers' Charity, Naval and Air Force Associations and organisations. These organisations are robust, well organised, dependable and honest and maintain extensive data bases. They are scrupulous about membership and only bona fide veterans are accepted as members. They are, of course, voluntary, but those I have consulted would be more than happy to be the conduit both for establishing eligibility from claimants and distributing the medals; they would act like a unit orderly room in this respect. If there is any doubt about a claimant they can request referees of them, members with whom they served, to attest to their credentials. The Service Associations could also submit consolidated medal rolls if required. There would be a benefit to them as it will undoubtedly swell recruitment (and thus their income).

Neither is cost a factor. It would be fully understood by all that conducting this exercise outside the MOD and Services infrastructure would create administrative expenses. Recipients would be expected to cover those costs with a modest charge; such charges could also defray the cost of the production of the medals. Where there are veterans who are genuinely unable to afford the administrative charge, the Service Associations themselves are well placed to provide a subsidy, not least if their own finances are boosted by increased membership of those wishing to apply for the medal.

There will be a need to develop and promulgate the detailed rules and procedure and to coordinate with the Service Associations. As a 'veteran' of three appointments in MOD Main Building I would happily undertake this as my voluntary contribution to celebrating the Diamond Jubilee and providing a morale boost to veterans. I would invite assistance from a rear admiral and an air vice marshal with whom I have worked previously in a voluntary role to which we were each appointed by The Queen. There are also a vast number of capable Veterans who would, I know, be only too ready to give the volume of support we considered necessary in order to ensure a viable organisation capable of undertaking what purports to be a National role, perhaps subordinated to the Veterans Agency?

## Intention

The intention of this Proposal is:

- To recognise just how important this is to a large section of society, and not just Veterans, but public and media too, who are at a complete loss to understand why it has not yet happened when it would cost nothing; there is deep frustration.
- To acknowledge that this would be a simple, entirely cost free, win-win measure that would engender a huge amount of pleasure, justice and a sense of being valued widely through the community; this at a time when many are facing considerable hardship as a result the deficit reduction and escalating prices. Causing no harm, only goodwill, why shouldn't veterans be granted entitlement to wear a proper medal (not a lapel trinket) with pride that reflects their loyal service to The Queen during Her Majesty's reign? You see them outside supermarkets wearing their medals on cold November mornings selling poppies, but not one with a Royal Commemorative Medal. Their loyalty to The Queen if ever tested would never be found wanting.

- To suggest that the 28 June 2011 announcement of eligibility of “members of the Armed Forces (regular and reserves) who have completed five full calendar years of service on 6 February 2012” be extended to include “former members of the Armed Forces (regular and reserves) who completed five full calendar years of service between 6 February 1952 and 6 February 2012 and are permitted to wear the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee Medal, procured through Veteran organisation arrangements”

The announcement of this as a further tranche of the award will be seen as a widely applauded Government initiative, at the same time pre-empting public and media supported campaigns by ex-Servicemen and organisations.

Major General A L Meier CB OBE

23rd April 2012