



MO 2/2/6

I think that this is a much better draft.
1) Mr Butler
2) Prime Minister (3) FERB

Draft reply attached, for signature if you are content with this advice.

PRIME MINISTER

1
[Handwritten signature]

Dub 12/2

I have seen Robin Butler's letter to my Private Secretary concerning Robert Maxwell's letter on war medals.

2. David Trefgarne has looked very carefully at the resources devoted to the Army Medal Office. The recent very real improvement in the speed with which medal applications are processed has been one result of his efforts. He is satisfied - and I agree - that it would not be sensible to divert further defence resources from other priority areas to the AMO (apart from providing a word processor as already planned), and I therefore doubt whether there is scope for the further streamlining called for in Robin Butler's letter. I have also established that it would not be practicable to make additional staff available on a temporary basis to deal with the present peak in demand because of the forthcoming commemoration of VE Day. There would not be sufficient time to train the staff recruited for this purpose.

3. I attach a revised draft reply to Mr Maxwell.

[Handwritten signature]

Ministry of Defence
6th February 1985

DRAFT LETTER FROM THE PRIME MINISTER TO ROBERT MAXWELL

Thank you for your letter of 17th January about the Army Medal Office, enclosing a letter from that office to a Mirror reader.

No-one has a greater conviction than mine that we must do all we can to help those who served the country in its time of need to obtain their war medals. I have therefore looked with particular care at the points raised in your letter.

Under this Government the waiting time for medals has been reduced from 2 years in 1980 to 3 months in 1984. This is particularly commendable as the process of checking each claim against the applicant's Service records is a complex and detailed one, requiring the checking of old records to establish exactly when the applicant was serving in a particular unit and when that unit was serving in a particular theatre to confirm that the qualifying period for each medal concerned was met. ~~It would clearly be unfair to those who have already been issued with their war medals if we were now to relax the verification procedures or to reduce the qualifying periods.~~

The volume of work undertaken by the Army Medal Office is ^{very considerable.} ~~much greater than you obviously imagine.~~ They receive between 600 and 1000 applications each month with enquiries peaking as anniversaries occur or publicity in the media about specific events

or campaigns jogs memories. Nonetheless, they can issue about 900 sets of medals a month and so over the year keep ahead of the demand. The understandable wish of ex-Servicemen to receive previously unclaimed medals in time for this year's commemoration of VE Day has had just such a peaking effect, and as a consequence, the waiting period has increased to ^{five} 7 months. The Medal Office recognises the need to do its very best to meet this demand. There is, however, no ready solution which will enable the throughput to be speeded up dramatically given the numbers involved and the need for ~~considerable~~ training for those engaged in the detailed and complex research task. ~~One cannot simply move staff to cope with the peaks: the risk to the standard of verification would be too great to accept.~~

Nevertheless, the Army Medal Office was able to deal with a similar increase in demand for last year's D-Day ceremonies and the vast majority of the claimants seem pleased with the results of the Office's ^{work.} ~~painstaking, but necessarily lengthy, processes.~~ ^{They wish} We shall hope to be as successful with VE Day. Finally, you will wish to know that the Office ^{is acquiring} ~~will shortly have available~~ a word processor which ^{will} ~~should~~ enable your understandable concern about the standard of presentation of the letter to claimants to be met.

FEB 7 1985

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Robert MAXWELL



6/2
Je RE4AAG
Reminded MOD,
Revise with S/S 6/2.

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

1 February 1985

The Prime Minister is not happy with the draft reply to Mr. Robert Maxwell which you sent to us on war medals.

She has commented that in her view it is too defensive. Instead of starting by explaining the difficulties she has suggested that it should say that we do want to shorten the time taken and improve the presentation of the letter to applicants, and then explain the steps we are already taking to do so. She would like to say that we will try further to speed up the process as far as we can consistently with ensuring that medal claims are carefully checked.

The Prime Minister has asked if your Secretary of State will have a look at this matter and consider whether there are ways in which this process can be further streamlined so that applicants do not have to wait so long for their applications to be dealt with.

The impression we want to give will be marred if the reply to Mr. Maxwell is further delayed. Could I ask you to let us have a revised draft within a day or two and a reply in due course on the substantial point about the scope for further streamlining of this process.

DB

Barry Neale, Esq.,
Ministry of Defence.