



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

13 February 1985

*Dear Mr. Harwell.*

Thank you for your letter of 17 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 two years in 1980 to three 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.

The volume of work undertaken by the Army Medal Office is very considerable. 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. None the less, they can

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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 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 training for those engaged in the detailed and complex research task.

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. They will hope to be as successful with VE Day. Finally, you will wish to know that the Office is acquiring a word processor which will enable your understandable concern about the standard of presentation of the letter to claimants to be met.

Yours sincerely  
Margaret Walker

Robert Maxwell, Esq., MC.



D. R.  
MR. ~~BUTLER~~ <sup>FZRB</sup>

Army Medal Office

The Prime Minister overheard me dictating an anodyne reply to the Ministry of Defence, together with a copy of her reply to Mr. Maxwell. She said that I should make clear that she was "astonished" that no further reduction in the waiting time for medals could be made.

In the circumstances, perhaps you should convey this news to the Ministry of Defence - I attach a draft letter to Barry Neale.

*Dub*

13 February 1985





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*From the Principal Private Secretary*

13 February 1985

Army Medal Office

The Prime Minister was grateful for your Secretary of State's minute of 6 February.

CF to BU? ||| The Prime Minister was very disappointed to learn that your Secretary of State saw no scope for a further improvement in the time taken to process applications. She hopes that he may be prepared to look at this again.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister has signed the revised reply to Mr. Robert Maxwell, and I enclose a copy.

FERB

Barry Neale, Esq.,  
Ministry of Defence.