



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Pingat Jasa Malaysia (Malaysian Service Medal)

Manchester, 24th April 2008

Background Notes

The campaign for the right of British citizens to wear the Pingat Jasa Malaysia (PJM) continues apace.

The PJM was awarded to Commonwealth men and women who helped protect Malaysia's independence in the period 1957-1966. The Queen has approved the medal to be worn in all Commonwealth countries except the United Kingdom where she has been advised by Honours and Decorations Committee to withhold permission for British citizens to wear the medal.

This decision was based on retrospective regulations being waived then invoked in such a way that men and women (and the families of those who have died) were told that they could receive the medal but must not wear it. This has resulted in considerable upset amongst the 35,000 people affected, many of whom are aged and most of whom (including conscripts) have nothing to show for their service to Malaysia in Malaysia's hour of need.

The Medal is accompanied by this Citation from Malaysia:

"Pingat Jasa Malaysia - This medal is awarded to the peacekeeping groups amongst the Commonwealth countries for distinguished chivalry, gallantry, sacrifice or loyalty in upholding Peninsula of Malaya or Malaysia sovereignty during the period of Emergency and Confrontation."

British veterans have been fighting for over two years to have the flawed and confusing PJM decision amended so that they can wear their medal with honour ... it will cost this country nothing as Malaysia is funding the manufacture and presentation of the medal.

The Fight4thePJM Campaign Meets The Minister

Yesterday (23 April 2008), two members of the Fight4thePJM Committee attended a meeting with Derek Twigg, Under Secretary of State for Defence and Minister for Veterans at the Ministry of Defence in London. Barry Fleming and Paul Alders from the PJM Association Committee attended, together with Geoffrey Robinson, Paul's MP, who had gone to so much trouble to arrange the meeting with the Minister.

Fight4thePJM Press Release 24 April 2008

The objective of the meeting was to seek Mr Twigg's support for the many initiatives that are currently in train both in and outside Parliament aimed at achieving a flexible response from the Honours and Decorations Committee so that formal permission for the PJM to be worn will no longer be withheld.

A letter was handed to him from the Royal British Legion (Scotland), and another was sent to him by post from the Royal British Legion HQ in London, both pointing out to Mr Twigg the unanimous RBL member votes in support of the PJM being given formal permission to be worn.

The Fight4thePJM meeting agenda listing the initiatives was also handed to Mr Twigg who commenced proceedings with a summary of his position. In essence, he pointed out that the PJM issue was a matter for the Foreign Office. He had already written to the appropriate Departments last year in support of a review of our case. He did not want this meeting to raise inappropriate or false expectations – he would represent the interests of veterans but he could not intrude into the management of the PJM. We fully understood the points he made.

AGENDA - Meeting with the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Defence and Minister for Veterans, Derek Twigg MP on 23rd April 2008

Attending:

Geoffrey Robinson MP (Coventry North West)
Paul Alders (Constituent of Geoffrey Robinson and Fight4thePJM Committee member)
Barry Fleming (Malaya Borneo Veteran and Fight4thePJM Committee member)

Purpose of Meeting:

The meeting was requested:

- to seek Mr Twigg's support for those British veterans eligible to receive the Malaysian medal, the Pingat Jasa Malaysia (PJM), who are seeking formal permission to wear their medal;
- to seek Mr Twigg's support for the many initiatives that are now in progress with the common aim of seeking flexibility from the HD Committee so that they may amend their recommendation to The Queen to the effect that formal permission should no longer be withheld;
- to ask Mr Twigg if he would write to Sir Gus O'Donnell in support of Dr Kim Howells' request to civil servants for flexibility in the matter of the PJM;
- to ask Mr Twigg if he will write to the Foreign Secretary, David Miliband, to ask him to support the current initiatives and to use his influence, as the Minister responsible, to obtain the flexibility that is being sought by Parliament.

Background:

Mr Twigg is already familiar with the background to the PJM issue the management of which is a matter for the FCO. A recommendation has been made and the rights and wrongs of the Ministerial Statement that promulgated the HD Committee's recommendation have been discussed. It is clear from these discussions that within the confused and inconsistent Foreign Decorations regime just about any statement can be made and in part justified. It is not our aim today to prolong those discussions, but to seek Mr Twigg's support for the initiatives that can bring this matter to an end.

The initiatives for which we seek support are:

- Commons Parliamentary support (*a majority of MPs support our case evidenced by five EDMs*)
- Scottish Parliament support (*significant support despite the matter being ultra vires*)
- Don Touhig's statements in the Commons (*Veterans Minister at the time of the PJM recommendation who has states the case for the PJM to be worn*)
- Ian Pearson's support (*ex-FCO Minister who promulgated the PJM Ministerial Statement has changed his view*)
- Royal British Legion (*members voted unanimously in favour of the PJM being worn*)
- Royal British Legion Scotland support (*also voted unanimously in favour of the PJM*)
- Royal Naval Association (*members voted unanimously in favour of the PJM being worn*)
- National Malaya Borneo Veterans Association (*formal support*).
- Media (*BBC Radio People's Petition and their poll of listeners – 100% support*)
- Westminster Hall Debate (*agreeing to ask civil servants to listen to the will of parliament and to be flexible, i.e. to amend the PJM recommendation so the medal can be worn*)
- Kim Howells' letter to Sir Gus O'Donnell, Cabinet Secretary and Chairman of the HD Committee (*based on Westminster Hall debate, asking for flexibility in the case of the PJM so that the amended recommendation will*)

Papers Supporting Our Submission

We attended with papers corroborating the above agenda as well as each and every one of the submissions we made to the Minister.

From those papers we advised the Minister of the anomalies and confusing statements made in defence of what we considered to be indefensible. We pointed out that:

- In connection with the so-called established 5-year rule that must never be broken, we had discovered that those administering the system are on record as saying the rule is “more or less of an arbitrary nature”, i.e. it is not etched in granite, it is there to be used at their whim – invoked whenever they wish to deny ordinary men and women the honour of displaying their medal but waived whenever they it suits their purpose, e.g. the Malta 50th Anniversary and Russian 40th Anniversary Medals.
- In connection with the so-called double medal rule, we have a list of over 40 that have received unrestricted approval for wear – so that is not an established rule either!
- In connection with the so-called rule that we can't wear Foreign medals, we explained we had a list of over 40 that could be worn on the uniforms of British service personnel – therefore another myth.
- Above all, we emphasised that it was mean-spirited and insulting to say to ex-servicemen and women, particularly those who are now civilians, that they could receive a medal but that they must not wear it.
- We explained that in our campaign we are not questioning the HD Committee so much as the civil servants who brief them. We went on to underline the justifiable frustration of British veterans when their grievances and new evidence are answered only with the repetition of the old and flawed dogma.
- We read out statements from supporters including the email from Ian Pearson MP who, having issued the original PJM Statement, now appreciates that it is flawed and is lobbying for it to be amended so that “this official nonsense” could end and the PJM be worn with honour.
- Mr Robinson read out extracts from Don Touhig's Westminster Hall Debate that voted to support our case and to request flexibility from the HD Committee.

We raised many other points, but the above sample provides some flavour of the discussions which emphasised the grave injustice that has been perpetrated on British citizens – that they alone in the Commonwealth must not wear their Malaysian medal.

Support from the Veterans Minister

- █ Mr Twigg listened carefully and was clearly aware of the situation.
- █ He emphasised his ongoing support for veterans and, in that context, he would support the above initiatives when possible *if* they are within his area of Ministerial responsibilities.
- █ Mr Twigg agreed to Mr Robinson's suggestion that we should submit details of our case (focusing on all the new facts we have discovered) and he would raise the matter at Ministerial level. We said we would do so through Geoffrey Robinson MP.

Summary

We achieved our objective in so far as we were able to hand Mr Twigg a list of current initiatives that were lobbying for the PJM to receive formal approval for wear, and he agreed to support them whenever possible.

In addition – and this is important – *in addition* to support for those initiatives (we do not want his support or the initiatives to be delayed or to be dependent upon more of the “I said, you said, I said” arguments) we would supply a list of our new evidence, i.e. evidence that has not been directly addressed and openly discussed by the HD Committee.

The fundamental point is that we have already won the “I said, you said, I said” argument ... look at that list of initiatives. **Can they all be wrong and a handful of civil servants be right?**

A Postscript ... as far as we are aware, Mr Twigg is the first Minister to be able to demonstrate knowledge of the 1957-1966 period of Malaysia's history. Paul presented him with one of our Fight4thePJM Lapel Pins (he had already presented one to Geoffrey Robinson who was pleased to wear it throughout the meeting!).

Interview Contact:

Gerald Law, 6 Knole Close, 1 Crabbet Park, Worth, Crawley, West Sussex.

Telephone: 01293 885121

E-mail: gerald.law@fight4thePJM.org

Web: www.fight4thePJM.org

“Fight4thePJM” ... an organisation established to promote the campaign fighting to reverse the decision that, alone in the Commonwealth, British citizens have been forbidden to wear the Pingat Jasa Malaysia.

“Fight4thePJM”, C/o Barry Fleming and Partners, Trafalgar House, 110 Manchester Road, Attrincham, Cheshire, WA14 1NU

Telephone: 0161 929 9857

Fax: 0161 924 0321

E-mail: supporters@fight4thePJM.org

Web: www.fight4thePJM.org

#