

**“Malaya-Borneo Veterans Respond”  
MoD Oracle, 10<sup>th</sup> November 2007**



Barry Fleming, A Malaya veteran and secretary of 'Fight4thePJM', responds to the recent Guardian article that was published on [MoD Oracle](#).

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Sir,

I refer to your article Veterans: “Malaya Veterans Defiant Over Medals” originally published in The Guardian newspaper (7 November 2007) and quoted verbatim by MoD Oracle on the same date. The article reported MoD views regarding the wearing of the Malaysian medal, the Pingat Jasa Malaysia (PJM), and in so doing included a fundamental misrepresentation of the facts:

- ❖ The PJM is not a British Medal, and certainly not one emanating from the MoD. The MoD should not purport to comment authoritatively on the medal - when it does, its spokespeople get their facts seriously wrong, as they did in your article.
- ❖ The article included reference to an alleged massacre in Malaya. That massacre reference was designed to discredit the service of British forces, but the author has no grasp of history or the facts – the alleged incident took place in 1948, nearly ten years before PJM service began.
- ❖ The article is poorly researched and misleads the reader. The reasons given as to why the medal has not been given formal permission to be worn are fallacious.

### **The History of the PJM**

The PJM is a Foreign medal awarded by the King and Government of Malaysia to all Commonwealth Forces in recognition of their service protecting the country's Independence. The period for which the PJM is awarded is from 31st August 1957 (Malaysian Independence Day) until August 1966 (end of Confrontation). The comparisons in the article between the actions during the PJM period and those that preceded it during the Malayan Emergency, are both spurious and unhelpful. The MoD should have known better.

Until 1957 Britain was the Colonial power and as such deployed troops to defend its interests. Post 1957 British troops were in Malaysia at the request of the newly formed state of Malaysia, firstly to defend it against the rump of Communist-backed terrorism, and later against incursions into Malaysia made by Indonesia to further its territorial and political ambitions over independent Malaysia (known as *Konfrontasi*).

British forces (about 35,000 men and women in total) were part of a Commonwealth force consisting of Malaysian, Australian, New Zealand, Fijian and Gurkha units. The 1957-1966 joint operations, which resulted in the survival of a democratic and independent Malaysia, led to the award of the PJM. Ironically, Her Majesty has granted unrestricted acceptance to the Veterans from Australia and New Zealand to wear their medal whilst withholding such permission from her loyal British Veterans.

A Gurkha soldier won the Victoria Cross in 1965 during Confrontation.

### **The PJM Recommendation**

The PJM falls under the Foreign Decorations rules administered not by the MoD but by the Foreign & Commonwealth Office. The Malaysians offered the medal in 2004 and by early 2005 it was accepted with grace by Australia and New Zealand (the New Zealand government stating that the scope of the award was wider than any existing New Zealand medal – and that would include any British medal).

However, the British civil servants who control these matters deliberated until January 2006 when a Commons Ministerial Statement proclaimed that the medal could be received but not worn by British citizens. During that twelve month interval British civil servants rewrote in secret the Foreign Decorations Rules to include *for the first time* a double medal caveat. Those new Rules were then applied retrospectively to the PJM.

### **Batang Kali – “Britain’s My Lai”**

MoD disinformation in the article is also apparent in the reference to the alleged massacre of innocent villagers by the Scots Guards in 1948. The accusation that this occurred has been made by the Communist terrorist Chin Peng who led the gangs that murdered both Malayan and British civilians during the Emergency.

The allegations were investigated but never proven and, in the context that the incident occurred ten years before PJM service began, one has to question why it was raised at all. *Was it to undermine the PJM? Was it yet another device to discredit British servicemen and women?*

### **The Double Medal Muddle**

Despite what the MoD, or any Government department, might tell you most people eligible for the PJM do not have a British medal. This double medal accusation is used solely to bolster the civil servants’ otherwise untenable argument. They also use this allegation to imply that Malaya-Borneo veterans are disaffected gratuitous medal-chasers.

The truth of the matter is that the double medal rule first saw the light of day in Foreign Decorations rules in November 2005, a year after the medal was offered. Prior to that time it was primarily a British campaign medal consideration. Furthermore, we have some forty examples of where this “rule” has been broken in British medals decisions.

### **The “5-year Rule”**

The second “rule” that was applied to deny the PJM is the 5-year rule, which holds that a medal cannot be received if more than five years have elapsed since the qualifying service. This is spurious reasoning in the context of a Commonwealth commemorative medal. Who has ever heard of commemorating an event a few months after it happened!

Furthermore, there are numerous examples of medals being worn in respect of events more than 5 years ago. The Russian 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary medal (of the end of WW2) was offered to all qualifying personnel forty years after the event. The offer was initially rejected but when the Russians were judged to be politically correct after the break-up of the USSR, the medal was given unrestricted acceptance so that it could be worn. Clearly politics plays a major part in the HD Committee decisions. Incidentally, that medal was an enforced double medal as you had to have a British war medal to be eligible for the Russian one.

Then in 1992 there was the Malta 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Medal awarded 50 years after the event (George Cross award to the Island) and again it is an enforced double medal because you have to have the Africa Star to qualify. Malta is The Queen’s favourite holiday destination.

Those advising the Honours and Decorations Committee are on record as describing the 5-year rule as being “as more or less of an arbitrary nature”. This rule has been applied primarily for political reasons and to deny ordinary men and women an acknowledgement of their service. For many, including National Servicemen, it is their only acknowledgement of their service in the Far East.

*For the widows and families of those who died it is deeply disturbing to be told you cannot wear your relative's medal because his service was more than five years ago.*

### **Support for the Case for the Wearing of the PJM**

The Fight4thePJM campaign has only ever requested a fair and even-handed response from Whitehall but we have been rewarded with obfuscation and prevarication. We have been insulted and branded as “disaffected Veterans” on the Veteran’s Agency web site (a subset of the MoD and supposedly the champions of the Veterans).

We have been told that our requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act will not be answered. What are they hiding?

We have the support of the majority of MP’s across the parties, as well as Lord Dennis Healey who was the Defence Minister at the time of Confrontation. The Conservative Party have formally agreed to review the Rules that have been applied so inconsistently.

At AGMs this year the Royal British Legion, the Royal Naval Association and the Royal British Legion (Scotland) all passed unanimous resolutions calling for the decision to be reversed and for their associations to actively campaign for the PJM to be worn.

The Veteran’s Minister at the time of the PJM decision, the Rt Hon Don Touhig MP, now supports our cause, as do many other senior figures from both main stream parties.

*Critically, the Rt Hon Ian Pearson MP, the Foreign Office Minister who made the original statement to Parliament in January 2006 now admits that his Statement was flawed and incongruous (he calls the civil service case a “nonsense”) and has vowed his active support for our campaign.*


We have the support of the Scottish Parliament, and the general public. Right-minded people simply cannot understand why the Civil Servants should take such a stance. Their antics have been likened to Brian Rix’s farces (staged, ironically, at the Whitehall theatre!)

Across the world the decision has been met with disbelief. We have support in 30 countries.


A lot of talk has been made recently of the nation’s debt to its Veterans. If the charge of further spin and hyperbole is to be avoided, action must be seen to be forthcoming. And a good way to show to the nation that it is deeds and not words that count would be to grant unrestricted permission for the PJM to be worn.

### **A Postscript**

We at Fight4thePJM are not medal chasing. We did not seek any acknowledgement. We did not ask for any medal.

 *We are campaigning solely for the right to wear the medal – a right already given by The Queen to the rest of the Commonwealth.*

We are against ‘Bling’. The Pingat Jasa Malaysia is not ‘Bling’. It was offered by Malaysia and has now been formally accepted by The Queen.

 *Having been accepted by The Queen, the PJM is formally a medal and there are no ‘bling’ implications if worn.*

We are not arguing against the even-handed application of British medals policy in so far as it protects the integrity of a British Medal bar. Unrestrained proliferation of medals should be challenged – as must any potential double medal *if* it were to result in a medal doubling a British medal for precisely the same campaign and the same service.

‡ *The scope of the Commonwealth PJM is quite different to any British medal and is not a double medal.*

We are not arguing against understandable restrictions on Foreign countries awarding campaign medals to serving British forces.

‡ *The PJM is a Commonwealth Commemorative medal.*

We are not arguing against the concept of a 5-year rule in the context of British campaign medals that have been previously considered and rejected by the Commanders, Government and Committees of the day.

‡ *The PJM is a not a British medal and was offered in 2004. It has not been considered before. The reasons for the 5-year rule do not, therefore, apply.*

We are not arguing for a cause that will cost the hard-pressed taxpayer any money.

‡ *Malaysia will meet the full cost of this medal.*

### **The Fight4thePJM Association and Campaign**

“Fight4thePJM” is an organisation run by veterans for veterans. It was 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.

We are non-political and have no connections with any other organisation.

Ours is a single issue campaign. Lobbying is not our natural habitat. When we are successful we’ll pack our kitbags and go home.

Membership of the association is free - we do not seek or raise funds.

The full story can be found on our web site at [www.fight4thepjm.org](http://www.fight4thepjm.org).

**Barry Fleming**

**9<sup>th</sup> November 2007**

Fighting for the Right to Wear the PJM at

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**"Pingat Kami - Hak Kami " > “Our Medal – Our Right”**