



In Brief: Military Medals Review Update

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In 2012 the Government asked Sir John Holmes to review the rules, principles and processes for medallic recognition of military campaigns. The review was prompted by a number of long-running campaigns by veterans groups and individuals seeking redress for perceived injustices in medallic recognition. Some argued for medallic recognition of past campaigns; others were seeking an extension to the qualifying criteria for an existing campaign medal; while some would like broader recognition of service, for example by a National Defence Medal.

Sir John was specifically instructed to look at the process and rules governing the award of medals for military campaigns. In particular, he was asked to look at the five year rule, whereby decisions regarding campaign medals should not be revisited once a period of five years had passed. This had become the custom of successive governments after World War Two, despite never being formally codified, and was often cited as the reason for refusing to review past medallic campaign decisions. Sir John was also tasked with examining the tradition of avoiding double medalling, whereby individuals receive more than one medal for the same operational service; reviewing the 'risk and rigour' approach to awarding medals and looking at the process itself, including the role of the Committee on the Grant of Honours, Decorations and Medals (HD Committee) within the Cabinet Office.

Sir John published his findings in July 2012 in the [Military Medals Review](#). He endorsed the need for a cut-off period but said this should not be elevated into a blanket refusal to reconsider cases which meet certain criteria.¹ He also stated that avoiding double medalling should continue to be "an absolute rule" for British medallic recognition. While this is simple to maintain for British medallic recognition, it becomes complicated when the Government is justifying its decision to reject medals from foreign governments and international institutions. Sir John described the current policy as being in a "muddle" and called for "new, simpler and more consistent rules about when international medals can be accepted and worn".

Sir John also endorsed the risk and rigour principle, that medals awarded by The Queen are hard earned and awarded sparingly. He called for particular care when setting the qualifying criteria for future medals. Sir John noted there was a "strong case" for a separate medal for campaign support. He also thought a National Defence Medal was worthy of consideration and called for a Cabinet-led working group to explore the issue further.

Sir John further recommended that the membership of the HD committee should be broadened and a new sub-committee created specifically to look at military issues. He recommended that the basic principles and rules underlying campaign medal decisions

¹ For example: evidence the issue was never properly considered at the time; significant new information coming to light; facts relied upon during the original decision-making being shown to be unsound; the original decision appearing to be manifestly inconsistent with those of other similar campaigns; the decision appearing to have been taken for reasons which have nothing to do with risk or rigour.

should be codified and published to help make the process more transparent and consistent. Lastly, he recommended exploring funding options to minimise the direct cost to the MOD of any new medal decisions.

The review also recommended further examination of the main long-standing controversies to “try to draw a line under them”. The Prime Minister therefore asked Sir John to lead a second stage of work, based on his recommendations.

Service on the Arctic Convoys and in Bomber Command during World War Two were the first campaigns to be reviewed. After World War Two, campaign Stars were awarded for specific geographic theatres. Veterans of the Arctic Convoys to Russia were eligible for the Atlantic Star. However veteran groups argued the Arctic comprised a distinct theatre of war and therefore warranted a separate Star. They also argued Arctic Convoy personnel were unlikely to meet the qualifying criteria for the Atlantic Star. An Arctic Emblem was awarded in 2005 but was not considered by a number of veterans to be adequate. Equally, those aircrew who served in Bomber Command during the war did not receive a separate clasp after the war, unlike those who served in Fighter Command who were awarded a Battle of Britain clasp to the 1939-45 Star.

In December 2012 the Prime Minister announced that veterans of the Arctic Convoys were to be awarded an Arctic Convoy Star medal; while the aircrews of Bomber Command would be awarded a Bomber Command clasp to the 1939-45 Star.

Further work on other medals campaign remained ongoing. On 29 July 2014 the Government confirmed that the second stage of Sir John Holmes’ review was now complete. As a result, the qualifying period for the South Atlantic Medal, without rosette, will be extended. Those who served in Cyprus between 1955 and 1959 will qualify for the General Service Medal (GSM) 1918-1962, with the clasp ‘Cyprus’ if they served for 90 days or more; while those who served in Cyprus between 21 December 1963 and 26 March 1964 will be awarded the GSM with the clasp ‘Cyprus 1963-64’. The GSM 1918-62 with the clasp ‘Berlin Airlift’ will be awarded to all aircrew, either RAF or civilian, with at least one day’s service in the Berlin Airlift operation.

However, medallic recognition for service in Korea after the ceasefire in 1953, Aden (1960-64), Malta (1940-43), Cyprus in 1974 and for service on HMS Concord in 1949 was not approved. An extension to the qualifying criteria for the GSM in the Suez Canal Zone was also not approved.

The case for a National Defence Medal was also reviewed, although it was felt that a “strong enough case could not be made at this time, but that... this issue might be usefully reconsidered in the future”.²

Background to all of these decisions is available in a series of papers deposited in the House of Commons Library ([DEP 2014-1168](#)). No other historic claims for medallic recognition will now be reviewed, unless “significant new evidence is produced that suggests an injustice has been done”.³

See also: Library Standard Note [Medal Campaigns](#), SN02880; Library Standard Note [Arctic Star and Bomber Command clasp: eligibility and how to apply](#), SN06564, 26 February 2013

² HL Deb 29 July 2014, c147-8WS

³ *Annex: Claims for Medallic Recognition*, DEP 2014-1168