

Correspondence concerning the
Army Medal Office.

January 1985

Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date
13.2.85.							
22.2.85							
5.3.85							
7.3.85							
PREM 19/1438							



WFO
cc mod

10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

7 March 1985

Dear Mr Rawwell,

Thank you for your further letter of 19 February about the waiting period for campaign medals from the Army Medal Office.

I can assure you that there is no complacency about this matter. As I explained in my earlier letter, under this Government there has been a dramatic improvement in the time taken to deal with these applications. In 1984 the Medal Office reduced the period to three months, and they are confident that, once the present surge in demand has passed, they will be able to return to this shortened period of waiting.

Temporary increases in demand which inevitably occur from time to time cannot be met simply by adding staff to the Medal Office because new staff cannot be trained in the short time available. However, by making use of overtime, as they have done in the past, and by redeploying staff in the Record Office at Hayes from other public enquiries to clear any bottlenecks at that end, the Medal Office is currently clearing 200 more applications each month than it is receiving and the present backlog is therefore being rapidly reduced. As I have already said, the Medal Office hope to be as successful in meeting this year's anniversary demands as they were with the D Day celebrations last year.

/If it

JP

If it would help to see things for yourself, you would be very welcome to visit the Army Medal Office in Droitwich. I am sure that such a visit would convince you of the very high quality of work performed by the dedicated and experienced staff there. If you would like to take up this suggestion, the Secretary of State's Office would gladly set in hand arrangements with yours.

Kind regards.

Yours sincerely

Harold Dutton

Robert Maxwell, Esq., M.C.



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
MAIN BUILDING WHITEHALL LONDON SW1

Telephone 01-230 7022 218 6169

D/S of S/PS/10
MO 2/2/6

5th March 1985

*P1. Type attached
draft for PM's signature*

John Robin

You wrote to my predecessor on 22nd February 1985, enclosing a further letter from Mr Robert Maxwell in reply to the Prime Minister's letter about the Army Medal Office and the waiting time for the issue of medals.

My Secretary of State has looked again at this problem but has concluded that attempting to recruit and properly to train staff to meet peaks of demand which are of limited duration would be of little help and a poor use of staff resources. We are, however, making use of overtime by existing staff, and taking some management steps to ease the problem by temporarily redeploying staff in the Record Office to prevent bottlenecks there and by deferring the movement of experienced staff out of the relevant section of the Medal Office for the time being. The present five-month waiting period will reduce to the three months achieved last autumn once the recent surge of applications has been cleared.

The Defence Secretary feels that an offer of a visit to the Army Medal Office would enable Mr Maxwell to see the detailed and specialised nature of the work for himself, and persuade him that we really are doing our best. I attach a draft letter for the Prime Minister to send to Mr Maxwell, with apologies for missing your deadline.

John Woodhead
(D J WOODHEAD)

F E R Butler Esq
No 10



LBAST

DRAFT LETTER FROM THE PRIME MINISTER TO ROBERT MAXWELL

Thank you for your further letter of 19 February 1985 about the waiting period for campaign medals from the Army Medal Office.

I can assure you that there is no complacency ~~either here or~~ ^{about this matter.}
~~in the MOD.~~ As I ^{explained} ~~made plain~~ in my earlier letter, under this
Government ^{there has been} ~~strenuous efforts have been made~~ which have produced
a dramatic improvement in the waiting time ^{taken to deal with these} ~~without any reduction~~
^{applications.} ~~in the quality of the work carried out.~~

~~I too would be worried if I thought there was no possibility of~~
~~improving on the present waiting time of 5 months - but my letter~~
~~did not say this.~~ ^{H&C Medal Off. a} In 1984 ~~we~~ reduced the period to 3 months,
and ^{they} ~~we~~ are confident that, once the present surge in demand has
passed, ^{they will} ~~we shall~~ be able to return to this shortened period of
waiting.

Temporary increases in demand which inevitably occur from time
to time cannot, ~~however,~~ be met simply by adding ~~untrained~~
staff to the Medal Office, ~~as you suggest,~~ because new staff
cannot be trained in the short time available. ~~In any case, to~~
recruit and train more staff over a few months only to shed
them again when demand falls would be very poor management,
particularly as it would produce no immediate or dramatic
~~reductions in waiting periods.~~



~~the Medal Office~~

However, ~~we~~^{by} are making use of overtime ~~to reduce the present~~
~~backlog~~, as ~~we~~^{they} have done in the past, and ~~we~~^{by} are redeploying
staff in the Record Office at Hayes from other public enquiries
to clear any bottlenecks at that end, ~~We are also restricting~~
the posting out of experienced staff from the section that
deals with these medal applications while the peak in demand
lasts.

The Medal Office is currently clearing 200 more applications
each month than it is receiving and the present backlog is
therefore being rapidly reduced. As I have already said, ~~we~~^{the Medal Office}
hope to be as successful in meeting this year's anniversary
demands as ~~we~~^{they} were with the D Day celebrations last year.

If it would help to see things for yourself, you would be
very welcome to visit the Army Medal Office in Droitwich. I am
sure that such a visit would convince you of the very high
quality of work performed by these dedicated and experienced
staff ~~there~~. If you would like to take up ~~this offer~~^{suggestion}, the
Secretary of State's office would gladly set in hand
arrangements with you.

DEFENCE: Army Medal
Office



- 5 MAR 1985

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10 9 8

- 5 MAR 1985

11 12 1 2 3 4
10 9 8 7 6 5



file
15

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

22 February 1985

BF 11
Mr Robert Maxwell has replied to the Prime Minister's letter about the Army Medal Office, and I enclose a copy of his reply. I should be grateful if you would suggest how the Prime Minister might reply to this further letter.

The next reply clearly needs to maintain the position taken in the Prime Minister's letter of 13 February, but without being defensive in doing so. I suggest that it might point out that the Prime Minister said in her previous letter that the Army Medal Office will hope to be successful in satisfying those concerned with the V.E. celebrations and every effort will be made to this end; but, for the reasons given in the Prime Minister's previous letter, the solution cannot be found simply by adding untrained people.

As you know, the Prime Minister has in fact asked your Secretary of State to have another look at the scope for further improvement.

Could you please let me have your advice on a further reply to Mr Maxwell by Friday 1 March.

Barry Neale, Esq.,
Ministry of Defence

ECU

Mirror Group Newspapers

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From the Publisher Robert Maxwell MC

XM/RM/mf

19 February 1985

The Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher MP FRS
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
LONDON SW1

Dear Prime Minister

Thank you for your letter of 13 February about the problems of the Army Medal Office. I am glad to hear that a word processor is to be installed and that the letter sent to applicants will from now on appear to be much more personal.

I am worried, however, that you still accept the departmental advice that a five month delay at this time is inevitable. I feel that the extra cost of either overtime or of employing one or two more people for the period between now and the VE celebrations would be small change compared with the pleasure it would bring to those ex-servicemen who have decided now to apply for their campaign and other medals.

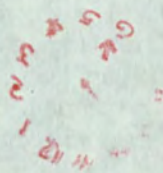
I believe that the Department is being complacent in arguing that it cannot improve upon this waiting period and I hope that you will ask them to consider again whether they cannot shorten it materially.

The present day applicants must be serious in their desire to possess their medals and to furnish them quickly will make them feel that their services are being properly rewarded: long delays will create a contrary impression.

Yours sincerely

Robert Maxwell

Defence: Army Medal Office Jan 85.



23 FEB 1985



10 DOWNING STREET

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.

D. R.
MR. ~~BUTLER~~ ^{FZLB}

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.

DNB

13 February 1985



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

13 February 1985

Dear Mr Hanwell.

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

VC

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 Halton

Robert Maxwell, Esq., MC.



MO 2/2/6

PRIME MINISTER

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.

*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.

Walt

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.

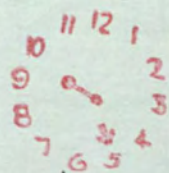
Under this Government the waiting time for medals has been reduced from 2 years in 1980 to 3 months in 1984. This is particularly commendable as the process of checking each claim against the applicant's Service records is a complex and detailed one, requiring the checking of old records to establish 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.

7 FEB 1985



Robert MAXWELL



6/2
JC VC4 AAG
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.

PRIME MINISTERARMY MEDAL OFFICE

Mr. Robert Maxwell wrote to you on 17 January (Flag A) to draw your attention to delays, which he regarded as unacceptable, in the issuing of medals to ex-servicemen.

I attach at Flag B the draft reply for your signature provided by the Ministry of Defence.

The draft reply refers quite reasonably to recent improvements in the turn-round time for medal applications. Even so, however, applicants still have to wait "a few months", reducing to "about 3 months in the near future". Shortening the time further is likely to need a greater staff effort and this is the dilemma.

Robin Butler and I thought it possible that you would not be content with this draft. We therefore enquired whether Mr. Heseltine had approved it. This produced an angry response from Lord Trefgarne who has told us that he had approved it and did not think it necessary to clear it with his Secretary of State. We have told him that, if you are not happy with it, we may have to ask him to involve the Secretary of State.

Content to sign?

Or would you wish Mr. Heseltine to have a look at it?

David Barclay
31 January 1985

Butler
me
1/11/85 won't do. - We must
start by saying we are going to
speed up the process as far as possible
etc.



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

January 1985

Thank you for your letter of 17 January, with a copy of a letter to a Mirror Reader from the Army Medal Office about his application for his war medals.

Applications for war medals run into thousands each year with peaks in demand of over a thousand in some months when anniversaries such as VE Day come up. Each application is dealt with as sympathetically and expeditiously. You will agree, I am sure, that a balance has to be achieved between a staff level leading to idle hands and an unacceptable period of delay. The present few months, is in itself a great improvement on the backlog that existed only a few years ago, when applications took well over a year to process and we expect that the waiting period will be reduced to about three months in the near future.

We could of course take less time and care in the assessment of medals claims but it would certainly offend many veterans to think that some were being issued with medals to which they might not be entitled and that others were denied them for lack of time to do full research into their records. Sir Winston Churchill's thoughts on the subject come to mind:-

"The object of giving medals, stars and ribbons is to give pride and pleasure to those who have deserved them. At the same time a distinction is something which everybody does not possess. If all have it, it is of less value. There must, therefore, be heartburnings and disappointments on the border line. A medal glitters, but it also casts a shadow. The task of drawing up regulations for such awards is one which does not admit of a perfect solution. It is not possible to satisfy everybody without running the risk of satisfying nobody. All that is possible is to give the greatest satisfaction to the greatest number and to hurt the feelings of the fewest."

I must say I found the Army Medal Office letter refreshingly clear and unbureaucratic in style and given the size of the task it is sensible and efficient to use standardised wording and to allow in the letter for the variable delays that peaks in demand create. It is hoped to install a word processor soon at the Army Medal Office which will avoid the need for the present manuscript additions, and this should improve their presentation markedly.

I hope that your reader receives his medals before too long. I am sure he will wear them proudly. Having waited so many years before applying for them, I hope he won't mind waiting a little while longer.

Robert Maxwell, Esq., M.C.

file
Robert MAXWELL

12/2

29 January 1985

Thank you for your letter of 28 January with which you enclosed a draft reply for the Prime Minister to send to Mr. Robert Maxwell about the work of the Army Medal Office.

We have not yet submitted the draft to the Prime Minister. Since it involves a choice between meeting Mr. Maxwell's point through the commitment of additional resources, and the status quo, it would be helpful to know how your Secretary of State views the balance of advantage before the Prime Minister considers the matter.

David Barclay

Barry Neale, Esq.,
Ministry of Defence.

da



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

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D/S of S/PS/10

28th January 1985

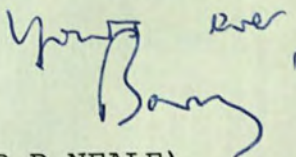
Dear David,

Mr Butler
To see.

SWB
29/1.

In your letter of 22nd January you asked for a draft reply for the Prime Minister to send to Mr Robert Maxwell, who wrote to her on 17th January about the work of the Army Medal Office.

/ I enclose a draft letter for your consideration; it has been approved by Lord Trefgarne, Parliamentary Under Secretary for the Armed Forces.

Yours ever,

(B P NEALE)

David Barclay Esq
No 10 Downing Street

the length of time taken to process applications at peak periods, and the staff level required for most of the rest of the year.

Thank you for your letter of 17 January, with a copy of a letter to a Mirror Reader from the Army Medal Office about his application for his war medals.

Applications for war medals run into thousands each year with peaks in demand of over a thousand in some months when anniversaries such as VE Day come up. Each application is dealt with ^{as possible} sympathetically and expeditiously, but a balance inevitably has to be struck between ~~that a balance has to be achieved between a staff level leading to idle hands and an unacceptable period of delays~~ ^{as possible, but a balance inevitably has to be struck between} ~~at some times of the year, and the length of this period of a few months is~~ ^{as possible, but a balance inevitably has to be struck between} ~~few months, is in itself a great improvement on the backlog~~ ^{as possible, but a balance inevitably has to be struck between} The present waiting

that existed only a few years ago, when applications took well over a year to process. ^{But I accept that the} ~~and we expect that the~~ waiting period is still too long, and we are working to reduce it further. ~~will be reduced to about three months in the near future.~~

In the nature of things, however, some ^{delay} ~~wait~~ is inevitable, because of ~~We could of course take less time and care in the assessment of the time and care which rightly go into the assessment of medals claims, but it would certainly offend many veterans to~~

think that some were being issued with medals to which they might not be entitled and that others were denied them for lack of time to do full research into their records. Sir Winston Churchill's thoughts on the subject come to mind:

"The object of giving medals, stars and ribbons is to give pride and pleasure to those who have deserved them. At the same time a distinction is something which everybody does not possess.

If all have it, it is of less value. There must, therefore, be heartburnings and disappointments on the border line. A medal glitters, but it also casts a shadow. The task of drawing up regulations for such awards is one which does not admit of a perfect solution. It is not possible to satisfy everybody without running the risk of satisfying nobody. All that is possible is to give the greatest satisfaction to the greatest number and to hurt the feelings of the fewest."

I must say I found the Army Medal Office letter refreshingly clear and unbureaucratic in style and given the size of the task it is sensible and efficient to use standardised wording and to allow in the letter for the variable delays that peaks in demand create. It is hoped to install a word processor soon at the Army Medal Office which will avoid the need for the present manuscript additions, and this should improve their presentation markedly.

and that they give him a great deal of pleasure.
I hope ^{too} ~~that~~ your reader receives his medals, before too long, ^{1st} ~~am sure he will wear them proudly. Having waited so many years before applying for them, I hope he won't mind waiting a little while longer.~~

P10
I take your point about the presentation of the Army Medal Office letter, ^{ad I know} ~~They do~~ however that they hope to improve it markedly in the near future with the help of some more up-to-date equipment. ~~I am sure that when your reader receives his medals he will wear them with pride, and I hope that they will give him a great deal of pleasure.~~

I am grateful to you for raising this
matter with me on your reader's
behalf. I hope that he receives his
medals before long, and that they
give him pride and pleasure.

Robert MAXWELL



5/2

SR

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

22 January 1985

I enclose a copy of a letter to the Prime Minister from Mr. Robert Maxwell of the Mirror Group Newspapers.

I should be grateful for a draft reply for the Prime Minister's signature as soon as possible.

(DAVID BARCLAY)

Barry Neale, Esq.,
Ministry of Defence.

SR

Mirror Group Newspapers

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From the Publisher Robert Maxwell MC

XM/RM/mf

17 January 1985

cc FEAR
B1 ✓

The Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher MP FRS
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
LONDON SW1

lia.

✓

Dear Margaret,

I am writing to you directly because I believe that you would wish me to draw your attention to a situation which I think must be offensive to many ex-servicemen.

A Mirror reader has forwarded to me a letter he has received from the Army Medal Office, Ministry of Defence, in response to his application for 1939/45 War medals. The immediate point is that he has been told that the current delay in providing medals to those entitled to them is approximately five months. The impact of this news is greater because it is contained in a stock letter with a blank space for the number of months delay to be inserted in manuscript. It all sounds pretty callous.

I can understand that after all this time there must be a delay for searching and for verification, but I find it hard to understand why it should be so long.

I urge you to intervene and step up the procedures by which these applications are dealt with, particularly in view of the fact that we shall shortly be celebrating the 40th anniversary of VE Day. Any ex-serviceman who has gone to the trouble of applying now for his war medals must be serious, and, I am sure, will wish to have them in time for the victory celebrations later this year.

There cannot still be many such applications and I believe that with a little goodwill it ought to be possible to deal with those there are much more quickly than is suggested by the current stock letter.

Yours sincerely,

P.S. enclosed is a copy of the MDD letter.



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

Army Medal Office Government Office Buildings Droitwich Worcestershire WR9 8AU

Telephone Droitwich 772323 } ext 41
Army Network Droitwich Mil }

Your reference

Our reference
D/Medals/2/1

Date

10 JAN 1985

Thank you for your letter regarding 1939-45 War awards.

I am pleased to tell you that these medals are still available but, unfortunately, for reasons which I shall explain, there is a delay in their issue.

When Campaign Stars and Medals were first ready for issue at the end of World War II their availability was widely published in the press and following the initial flood of applications, there was a steady flow for a long time. But in recent years there has been an upsurge in belated claims and they are now being received at an average of 600 per month. Any publicity in the press or on television regarding 1939-45 war medals can increase this rate to as many as 1,500 a week. To be absolutely fair to everyone, each application is dealt with in strict order of receipt.

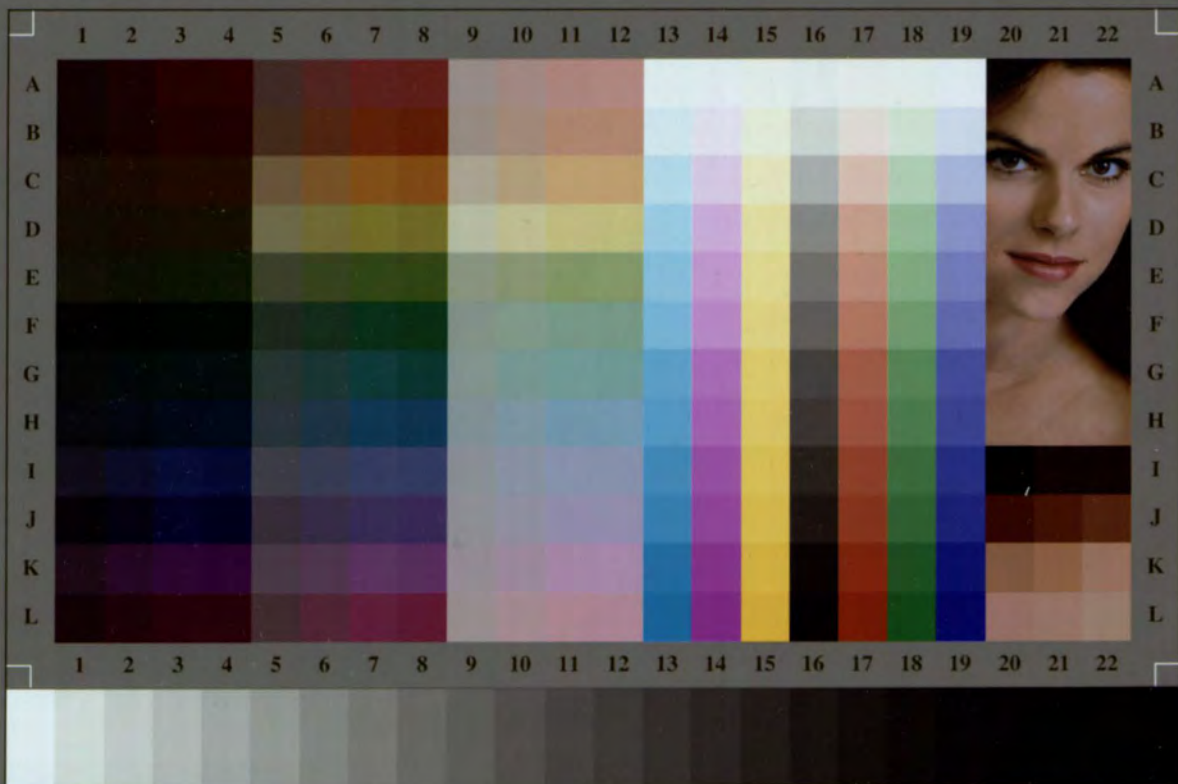
You may be interested to know that the assessment of medal claims is a very skilled and time consuming job involving reference to personal army records (these are held at the Army Records Centre and can prove difficult to trace unless fullest possible details are available), the regulations instituted for World War II medals and the relevant orders of battle which list the units which took part in the various campaigns. There can be no shortcuts in this task as the aim must always be to ensure that each individual receives the medals to which he or she is entitled.

Every effort is being made by the small team involved in the issuing of World War II medals to speed up the processing of claims. However, the current delay period is approximately 5 months.

Your medals will be issued in due course but I would be grateful if you will notify me of any change of your address which may occur in the meantime.

Yours sincerely,

R. Bowles



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