



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

12 July, 1982

Personal and Confidential

Dear William

Thank you for your letter of 3 June suggesting the abolition of distinctions according to rank in the award of decorations for outstanding service in the field.

The range of gallantry awards has been reviewed on a number of occasions in the last twenty years and some changes have been made. For example, prior to 1972 appointments to the Order of the British Empire were made for gallantry, and the level of award was dependent on status; but in that year these awards were replaced by the new Queen's Gallantry Medal.

So far as the specifically military gallantry awards are concerned, a change in the conditions of eligibility would almost certainly mean the abandonment of all present awards below the Victoria Cross and their replacement by a range of "all rank" new awards. I do not believe that such a change would be well received by the Services; opinion within them (including that of senior non-commissioned ranks) has consistently been that there is no desire for a change, and indeed a great pride is taken in the awards that have been in use through many conflicts. For example, the Army's Distinguished Conduct Medal and the Royal Navy's Conspicuous Gallantry Medal (available only to non-commissioned ranks) have been in currency since the Crimean War. Such awards are different from, but not inferior to, those given to officers for similar acts of gallantry. Like them, they are rated second only to

/ the VC;

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the VC; they are highly prized and sparingly given, and a holder is held in high esteem by all ranks.

Although you are right in saying that the VC is the only military award open to all ranks, I believe that acts of heroism or conspicuous devotion to duty are appropriately honoured at all levels. At present there is no pressure within the Services for a uniform system and I believe that the current system which has developed over the years and embodies so much tradition should only be altered if there were overriding reasons for doing so.

That is the official reply after enquiries have been made. But I share your view - bravery is the same quality wherever it occurs and I dislike the distinctions. So I know do some senior officers. But I do not think we could change the present arrangements in time for the South Atlantic Awards. I will however pursue the matter further for the longer term.

The Honourable William Waldegrave, MP.

Yours
Raymond