

## **The Pingat Jasa Malaysia Medal**

by Mike Warren

I am a Committee Member of the National Malayan and Borneo Veterans Association (NMBVA). I am also a member of the Blackpool Branch of the Royal Marines Association (RMA).

The NMBVA was formed in 1994 and one of its aims was to get formal recognition for British ex-service men and women who had both contributed to Malaysia becoming independent and later preserving that independence. The NMBVA spent many years fostering ties at all levels trying to achieve a satisfactory conclusion, which began to bear fruit in the early part of this century.

During 2005 the Malaysian Government approached the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) to seek approval to present their new medal, known as the Pingat Jasa Malaysia (PJM), to British veterans and others who served in operations in Malaya/Malaysia between August 1957 and August 1966. In January 2006 permission was granted for the medal to be awarded to eligible recipients. However, no formal permission was given to wear it.

Prior to the Malaysian Government approaching the British authorities they had had talks with both the Australian and New Zealand authorities. Subsequently both these countries decided to accept the award to their veterans and, more importantly, decided to allow them to wear it. In both cases the respective government departments dealing with veterans issues collated the applications and arranged presentations in order for their personnel to receive the PJM at investitures throughout the country.

The British Government took a very different view and said that applications for the PJM, and its subsequent distribution were a matter for the Malaysian authorities. However, the Malaysian High Commission (MHC) with the relevant British Government departments would work together to determine eligible applicants. Applications can be collected by individual Ship, Regiment, Corps or Squadron associations and in most cases were passed to the Ministry of Defence (MOD) for onward transmission to the MHC.

Early in 2006 the NMBVA agreed that its then Membership Secretary, Mr Fred Burden, would coordinate and collate applications on behalf of its members. Fred and his wife Annie also said to the MHC that they would in addition collect and collate applications from non-NMBVA members. The NMBVA as an association said it did not want to become involved in this process as they felt that the majority of the applications would come from outside of its membership.

As I had been a member of the NMBVA since its inception both my wife Bev and I offered to help by collecting applications from both former Royal Marines and REME and to this end I asked that my details and forms were put on the RMA and REME websites so that people could download and print off applications to send to me. Since then I have had, as word got around, collected and collated from all the services.

Because of our involvement both Fred and I were invited to the MHC in London in July 2006 along with 37 other applicants from ex-servicemen and women, Malay Police and Civil Service of all ranks to receive our PJM from the Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia. These were the first PJMs to be awarded to British recipients. This was, as you can imagine, a great honour and because of that both Fred and I decided to get as many people the PJM as soon as possible. Up until that time the MHC thought it could send the medals out by post but as the numbers grew it soon became obvious that this would cost a small fortune. The MHC then asked if we could arrange some presentations around the country so that they could turn up and award them personally.

We agreed to investigate this possibility but in the meantime the MHC still had not got any medals to give out in large numbers and the applications were pouring in at a rate of knots. Remember that we were volunteers and we had, and still have no funds. This is why we were unable to even acknowledge the receipt of applications. The cost of even a second-class stamp to everyone would not only have been an administrative nightmare but would have cost thousands. This is why people did not hear anything after submitting their application.

Up until Christmas 2007 we had collected over 23,000 applications from British ex-servicemen and women all over the world. These applications were all on the upstairs landing of Fred's house in Essex. The applications had taken over his home almost. Over the 2007 Christmas period another landmark was reached in that Annie had finally managed to put every applicant on a central database.

In October 2006 the MHC began to give out the medals at presentations. These presentations are held in areas where there are large numbers of applicants. However some smaller ones have been held overseas. There are large parts of the country, which have still not had a presentation but we are doing our best to get through as many as possible. There are still people who have waited the full period since January 2006 so please be patient, we will get round to you.

Since last year we have also been joined in our quest by a chap called John Simcock who hails from Manchester. To date between the three of us we have been able to make sure that 11,000 medals have been awarded to the proud recipients.

At this point it may be helpful to explain what we do when an area has been identified for a presentation.

The first thing to do is to look for a suitable venue, which can seat at least 150/200 recipients plus the same number of their guests. It needs to be near a main route and have catering facilities and plenty of nearby parking. Some venues are free but others are quite costly. Lengthy phone calls and emails ensue between the venue and myself. I then go and view the venue myself as I don't want any nasty surprises on the day of the presentation. This often means staying overnight. I sort out a couple of available dates and submit them to the MHC for a decision. This can take several weeks. Once I have a date agreed I then telephone between 600/1000 applicants in order to put together 400 recipients on the day. Even then we are still in the hands of the MHC as they occasionally have to cancel due to unforeseen commitments. Although this has happened in the past and could possibly happen in the future we, and the MHC, avoid this if at all possible. As the MHC bring the medals with them to the presentations we are very much in their hands.

I arrange for a photographer to come along and take a formal picture of each person individually being presented with their PJM. These are available to purchase from him by ordering at the end of the presentation.

It is also usual to host a reception/buffet for the honoured guests from the MHC and/or VIPs. Those of you who have been to presentations will be aware that we ask for a donation on the day to cover these expenses. This does vary according to the costs which have been expended.

As the presentation is a very formal affair, and takes the form of an Investiture, local civic dignitaries are often invited to give a welcome speech to the MHC party. It is the Malaysians day but many towns and cities are honoured to have been chosen for the presentation and like to take part. Press and television are invited along.

All in all it is a wonderful day and the air is charged with excitement as people greet old friends. My wife gets a buzz from the fact that everyone without exception comes out of the presentation with a smile on their face.

Some applicants may have put their forms through an association other than the NMBVA. Because those associations, such as the Royal Naval Association, sent them directly to the MOD who then sent them to the MHC they therefore leapfrogged the NMBVA so you may not be on our database. If we do not know of your existence we cannot telephone you to invite you to a presentation.

As I have said before there are only three of us and our wives doing this so bear with us next time you ring and demand to know why you have been waiting so long and have heard nothing. Remember there is no automatic mechanism in place for you to actually get the medal other than at a presentation! We are all doing our best for you. Another bone of contention is the eligibility dates. It must be remembered that Malaysia did not come into being until 1957 and this is their medal and they are only presenting it to those who took part in the second conflict against communist insurgents and Indonesia. I have every sympathy with those servicemen and women who were there before those dates but we have no control over the decision.

As some of you are aware I presented Maj Gen Sir Jeremy Moore with his PJM five minutes before we went on parade at last year's reunion. He was delighted as like so many others he felt he had been forgotten or not been awarded the medal as it had been so long since he made his application. This was a great honour for me and he wore the medal on parade with pride, as did many others, including myself. The PJM is not a commemorative medal. It is a foreign medal given by a grateful Commonwealth Member Government and, as such, many people are wearing this medal on their medal bars, as do the Australians and New Zealanders.

At the time of writing we are in the process of arranging presentations for Grantham, Lincoln, Surrey, London, Stockport, Leeds, North Wales, South Wales, the whole of Scotland and a second at Portsmouth. There are also going to be presentations in Australia and Canada in the near future. Some of these will have taken place by the time of going to press and I know that you will also wear your medal with pride and take time to remember those who did not make it home.

So, the situation is this. Unless you can attend a presentation in your area you may have to wait a bit longer but rest assured we will be doing our best for you all.

Please also remember that a posthumous application is available and next of kin can collect. If you have any queries for applications, eligibility, the wearing of the medal or just to make sure you are on our lists you can contact me preferably by email on [mikewarren44@yahoo.com](mailto:mikewarren44@yahoo.com) or by telephone, as a last resort because I will be on the telephone trying to arrange presentations, and it might be yours, on 01253 318239.

You can also write to Mike Warren, 189 Hawes Side Lane, Blackpool, Lancashire FY4 4AA. You can also go to [www.nmbva.co.uk](http://www.nmbva.co.uk) to find pals you have lost touch with and to find out about future presentations.

If you have changed your telephone number since submitting your application please make sure we know about it. This is our only way of contacting you.