



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
FLOOR 5, ZONE B, MAIN BUILDING
WHITEHALL LONDON SW1A 2HB

Telephone 020 7218 9000 (Switchboard)

LEO DOCHERTY MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE AND MINISTER
FOR DEFENCE PEOPLE AND VETERANS

MSU/4/4/2/9/is

10 August 2021

Dear Rebecca,

Thank you for your contribution during Business Questions on 15 July 2021 (Official Report, col. 554) in which you called for support and recognition for our Nuclear Test Veterans and their families. The Leader of the House of Commons, The Rt Hon Jacob Rees-Mogg MP has written to the Secretary of State for Defence, The Rt Hon Ben Wallace MP, inviting him to respond with further detail which might address the concerns you have raised and I am responding as the Minister responsible for Defence People and Veterans.

There can be no doubt whatsoever that our Nuclear Test Veterans made a vital contribution to keeping our nation secure during the Cold War and since, by ensuring that the UK was equipped with an appropriate nuclear capability. I would reiterate that Her Majesty's Government continues to recognise and be grateful to all Servicemen who participated in the British nuclear testing programme.

And now, I must sound a note of caution. I am aware that Baroness Goldie has recently been in correspondence with you on these matters and provided full responses on 3 March 2021 and 14 May 2021, both of which remain extant and address the majority of your concerns (references D/Min(Lords)/AG MC2021/01429e and D/Min(Lords)/AG MC2021/04489e, respectively). For that reason, I will touch only lightly on the detail in this letter.

I have the greatest sympathy for those Nuclear Test Veterans who have reported rare cancers, sterility, miscarriages for their wives or birth defects in their children. Each and every such event is a personal tragedy. However, you will already be aware that there is no evidence that, in general, Nuclear Test Veterans or others present at the tests were irradiated or suffer increased incidence of cancers or other causes of mortality compared with their Service peers not present at the tests, or the age and sex matched with the general community. Their health and well-being is comparable with the age and sex matched population. The protection, health and welfare of those involved in the operations was a vital consideration, as shown by the detailed documented safety measures and radiobiological monitoring that took place during the operations.

Rebecca Long-Bailey MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Likewise, you are also aware from your correspondence with Baroness Goldie that follow-up studies of the progeny of atomic bomb survivors have been carried out by the Radiation Exposure Research Foundation since 1945, the latest report being published in 2018. Analysis of the international published peer-reviewed evidence to date, particularly the follow-up studies of those present at the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombings and the incident at Chernobyl, provides no support for increased rates of congenital defects in the children of Nuclear Test Veterans.

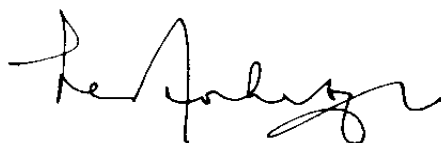
Based on the available peer-reviewed evidence, I am convinced that appropriate support to our Nuclear Test Veterans is provided through the War Pensions Scheme, which affords those who believe they have suffered ill-health due to their Service the right to apply for no-fault compensation. I also remain fully committed to the Government's position that the National Health Service is the primary health provider in England and in the devolved administrations for veterans once they leave the Services and this remains the appropriate channel for any veteran who believes that they have suffered ill health due to their service in the UK Armed Forces.

Turning to the subject of medallic recognition, the Department's position is that this remains a matter for the Advisory Military Sub-Committee (AMSC). I hope you will agree that it is important we accept the independence and judgement of the AMSC. In 2020, the AMSC carefully considered the issue of medallic recognition for Nuclear Test Veterans. The AMSC's recommendation to the Committee on the Grant of Honours Decorations and Medals (the HD Committee) was that a medal should not be issued. The retrospective award of medals is subject to very strict criteria, as set out in the AMSC Terms of Reference, and the AMSC concluded that, based on the evidence presented to them, the case did not meet the necessary threshold. This recommendation was accepted by the HD Committee. However, this decision in no way diminishes the Nation's gratitude for the vital work undertaken by Nuclear Test Veterans.

In light of the Government's clearly articulated position, as reiterated above, I do not consider that a meeting between Nuclear Test Veterans and the Prime Minister would yield any meaningful progress. I am sorry to send what will be seen as a disappointing letter, but I hope this explains the position and that you will understand that, as a Government, we have a duty to ensure that our policies have a solid evidential basis.

I am placing a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Leo Docherty', written in a cursive style.

LEO DOCHERTY MP