



Ministry of Defence

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
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JOHNNY MERCER MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE AND MINISTER
FOR DEFENCE PEOPLE AND VETERANS

Mr Prime Minister,

21 April 2021

It is with a heavy heart that I am forced to offer you my resignation from your Government.

I am very proud of the small team in the Office for Veterans Affairs who have worked hard against a strong prevailing wind in Government to establish themselves and start the significant piece of work of getting the UK Government to realise her responsibilities to those who have served in the UK's Armed Forces.

I had hoped your premiership would signal a step change in Veterans Affairs in the UK. Whilst we continue to say all the right things, you will understand that if we fail to match that with what we deliver, we risk damaging an already bruised Veteran's cohort further; as I told you last month in our first face to face meeting, we crossed that line some time ago.

The challenges of the Office for Veterans Affairs are well known – I have raised them time and again within Government to you and many others. It was always designed in a specific way in the Veteran's Pledge that you signed when you were running to be Prime Minister in 2019. I was not the author; a cohort of charities, stakeholders, veterans and families came together with an ask of the next UK PM and both candidates signed it. However, after signing the pledge your team chose not to configure it in the way it was designed, and from the very first moment you appointed me, I made clear that this was unlikely to be successful.

I am of course, desperately sad events have transpired the way they have – I truly have exhausted my efforts and my team to make it work. But the truth is politics always was a means to change how this Country treats her military veterans, and I remain genuinely appalled by the experiences of some of this Nation's finest people who have served in the Armed Forces. I fought and bled alongside them, I've been far more fortunate than many of them since, and I have a duty to tell their truth to power.

Perhaps nothing embodies this more than what we are asking our Veterans in their seventies and eighties to relive, through endless reinvestigations and inquests, into events often more than fifty years ago in Northern Ireland.

Almost all these events were investigated at the time, and without the emergence of any new evidence and simply a changing of the political tide, we have abandoned our people in a way I simply cannot reconcile. Whilst endless plans are promised and solutions mused, veterans are being sectioned, drinking themselves to death and dying well before their time - simply because the UK Government cannot find the moral strength or courage we asked of them in bringing peace to Northern Ireland, in finding a political solution to stop these appalling injustices.

You have known for some time this was my red line. I am deeply proud of my predecessors who served in Northern Ireland. They are not second-class veterans. They deserve the protections of the Overseas Operations Bill like everyone else. A policy decision was taken not to include them. I made promises on your behalf that we would not leave them behind and would walk through simultaneous legislation for them. No discernible efforts have been made to do so, and I can see no prospect of this changing. I have no choice but to leave Government and campaign for them in Parliament.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a horizontal line, positioned above the printed name.

JOHNNY MERCER MP