

Nuclear test veterans to receive medal as event remembers their service 70 years on

- Prime Minister announces new medal to honour the service of veterans of Britain's nuclear tests on 'plutonium anniversary'
- 22,000 veterans are expected to be eligible for the new honour, marking their service and contribution to the United Kingdom's nuclear test programme.
- Comes as veterans and their families gather at the National Memorial Arboretum today to pay tribute to nuclear heroes, who have kept the country safe for 70 years

A new medal is to honour the significant contribution of veterans and civilian staff from across the Commonwealth, who participated in Britain's nuclear testing programme, the Prime Minister will announce today.

The award comes as the country pays tribute to the veterans of the United Kingdom's nuclear test programme at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire this morning.

The event, which takes place 70 years after the first British test of a nuclear weapon, will be attended by the Prime Minister, the Defence Secretary and Veterans' Affairs Minister Johnny Mercer.

Service personnel, veterans and their families, and representatives from military charities will also attend.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said:

I am incredibly proud that we are able to mark the service and dedication of our nuclear test veterans with this new medal. Their commitment and service has preserved peace for the past 70 years, and it is only right their contribution to our safety, freedom and way of life is appropriately recognised with this honour.

This medal is an enduring symbol of our country's gratitude to each and every person who played a part in this effort and their loved ones who supported them.

The veterans and civilians who participated in the United Kingdom's nuclear test programme, the first of which was known as Op Hurricane, made the UK the third nuclear power. This work contributed to achieving the nuclear deterrent – the ultimate guarantee of UK sovereignty which continues to keep us safe today, and helps guarantee international security.

Minister for Veterans' Affairs Johnny Mercer said:

This medal honours those who served far from home, at a crucial time in our nation's history.

To this day the nuclear deterrent remains the cornerstone of our defence, and that is only because of the service and contribution of the brilliant veterans and civilian personnel.

It's right that we mark this contribution today, 70 years on from Britain's first nuclear test.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

I am delighted that a commemorative medal can be given to our Nuclear Test Veterans, who have made an invaluable contribution to the safety and security of the UK, and who we recognise and value for their enduring service to our nation.

The Nuclear Test Medal will be a commemorative medal that can be worn by recipients.

The medal also recognises the contribution made by veterans and civilians from across Australia, New Zealand, Fiji and Kiribati. All service personnel and civilians under UK command, including close partners from the Commonwealth and Pacific region, who participated in, or were present at, the British or American nuclear tests at the Montebello Islands, Christmas Island, Malden Island and Maralinga & Emu Field, South Australia between 1952 and 1967 will be eligible for the medal. This also includes scientists and local employees..

It is estimated that around 22,000 veterans will be eligible for medallic recognition.

The medal can be awarded posthumously. Veterans, their families and next of kin will need to apply for the medal, which will be free of charge. It is expected that the first awards of the medals will be made in 2023.

To further recognise the contribution of veterans of Britain's nuclear tests, the government is investing £450,000 into projects which will commemorate and build further understanding of the experiences of veterans who were deployed to Australia and the Pacific.

As part of that funding, the Office for Veterans' Affairs is launching an oral history project to chronicle the voices and experiences of those who supported the UK's effort to develop a nuclear deterrent.

Due to start in April 2023 the project will run for two years, giving nuclear test veterans the opportunity to be interviewed, and contribute to an

accessible digital archive of testimonies about their time working on the tests.