Here is a copy of the letter we/you delivered to David Cameron. Please read it as we have now received a reply. I will post the reply when I have scanned it but in the mean-time please read this letter and think of the questions/points it raises

Dear Prime Minister,

Re: campaign for formal recognition for the late Corporal Stewart McLaughlin

I am writing to you today to ask that you personally consider the case of my father, the late Corporal Stewart McLaughlin, of B Company, Third Battalion, The Parachute Regiment (3 Para), who was killed in action during the battle for Mount Longdon in the Falklands War, 1982. As you will be aware from previous letters to you (dated 4th and 22nd June 2014), written on behalf of myself and my family by Mr John Ross, my father’s former Platoon Sergeant, my uncles and I are appealing for your personal intervention to consider how Corporal McLaughlin may be properly, and formally, recognised for his outstanding bravery and leadership during the bloody and bitter battle for Mount Longdon. The campaign for formal recognition for this exceptionally gallant and devoted soldier has its origins some thirty two years ago, and began in October 1982 when my grandfather was informed by my father’s former Company Commander, Major Mike Argue, that his son had been cited for “the highest award”.

I was four months old when my father was killed and was to learn of my father’s gallantry some years later. However, my grandfather and uncles made the obvious interpretation of Major Argue’s comments at the Parachute Regiment memorial parade in October 1982 as a clear reference to a Victoria Cross (clearly, it could not mean anything else). Thus, Corporal McLaughlin’s family were understandably at a loss to explain why, when the awards for the Falklands operation were published, Corporal McLaughlin did not receive “the highest award” and also why he did not, in fact, receive any recognition at all. The family’s dismay was matched only by that of his comrades who, with their clear and widespread knowledge of his gallant and inspirational actions during the battle, had fully expected him to be decorated with a major award. Since that time, in October 1982, our family have continued to seek formal recognition for Corporal McLaughlin. The duration of this campaign contradicts the comments made by Lord Astor in a response to a letter from my M.P, Angela Eagle, that there had not been any comment made regarding the lack of award for Corporal McLaughlin in the “weeks, months or even years after the campaign.” That is categorically not true – our family has sought answers concerning recognition for my father continually following the memorial service of October 1982. His comrades too, always voiced their discontent but, as serving soldiers, were in no position to protest.

The fact that his former comrades have sustained their interest and support for the family’s campaign over such an extended period of time up to the present day suggests in itself that the case of Cpl McLaughlin is significantly different to that of other soldiers who may act with some distinction during an operation and yet may be omitted from any list of honours. There are many reasons why such omissions may occur, not least that their actions were not witnessed or corroborated. That cannot be said of my father, Corporal McLaughlin. His actions were not only noticed by many but have been corroborated by numerous participants of the battle. Those same participants also bear testimony to the absolutely instrumental impact that he had on that battle.

History now records the battle for Mount Longdon as perhaps the bloodiest of the Falklands Campaign and subsequent accounts highlight the nature of the bitter fighting and the eventual victory achieved by 3 Para. What the historical accounts do not reveal is that the outcome of that battle, fought in the dead of an Antarctic winter’s night, eight thousand miles from Britain, was very far from certain and that for much of the night there was the very real prospect that 3 Para’s attack could have been beaten back by the defending Argentinians, who held all the necessary advantages for victory: they held the high ground, were very familiar with the terrain, they outnumbered the attacking troops of B Company (who made the initial attack) and had significantly greater firepower, in particular heavy machine guns. Nevertheless, after many hours of close-quarter fighting, B Company managed to gain the foothold necessary to provide the platform that enabled other elements of the Battalion to join the battle and eventually carry on to victory - a victory, that a few hours earlier had seemed extremely unlikely (a fact recorded in the Battalion’s own war diary and transcripts of the battalion radio log during the battle).

Consider for a moment the impact that a defeat of British Forces may have had at that moment in the campaign (an attack by 3 Commando Brigade involving 3 Para, 45 Commando and 42 Commando to capture key positions surrounding Port Stanley). Consider, too, that the outcome of the battle on Mount Longdon, and the potential military and political implications, lay not in the hands of generals and Prime Ministers but in the hands of the Non-Commissioned Officers and private soldiers who were fighting the battle with bayonets fixed - men like Corporal Stewart McLaughlin, who fought and won the battle for Mount Longdon. Amongst the ranks of 3 Para, there is no single individual whose contribution to the success of that battle is lauded more than Corporal McLaughlin; and this in a battle in which 3 Para was awarded a Victoria Cross, two Distinguished Conduct Medals and three Military Medals amongst other awards. A citation written by his commanding officer describes his actions as being “absolutely instrumental”, and that his leadership of the soldiers under his command was “indeed exemplary”. Another record of his actions, written by Major Argue immediately following the battle, recalls that “he led his section like a demon on the rocks of Mount Longdon.” Lt. General Pike writes that Corporal McLaughlin is “strongly deserving of formal recognition”. And yet, despite the corroboration amongst the senior officers of his battalion that my father’s actions on Mount Longdon were fully deserving of recognition, he has never received any formal recognition whatsoever. In the view of his family and his former comrades, this is simply wrong. Rules, regulations, policy, processes and systems cannot be used to overshadow this fact and repeated reference to these barriers by the M.o.D. and government ministers is not acceptable to us as a suitable form of argument.
Several hundred of his former comrades have marched today to support our family in delivering this letter to you - hundreds of former comrades who still feel the sense of injustice as they did in 1982 that this hero has been so shamefully unrecognised by the nation for whom he fought so heroically and in whose service he died. It is perhaps significant to note that amongst those former comrades who marched today were his former Commanding Officer, Lt Gen Hew Pike, the Battalion second-in-command, Major Roger Patton, his Company Sergeant Major, his Platoon Sergeant and members of the section that he led with such distinction on Mount Longdon. It is perhaps unique that such a collection of ranks have come together in support of an individual soldier so many years after the battle in which he fought so heroically.

Whilst it may be unique for these men to march together in such circumstances, it is perhaps not surprising. They are a group of men who know only too well what it took to achieve the victory amongst the rocks of Mount Longdon and they are united in their belief that my father’s actions should have been recognised many years ago. The ranks of his comrades were swelled today also by hundreds more supporters of other services, including Royal Navy, Royal Marines and Royal Air Force as well as many from various regiments of the British Army and numerous civilians, all of whom have heard the accounts of Corporal McLaughlin’s actions and who, like us, believe that he deserves to be formally recognised for the astonishing bravery and exemplary leadership that he displayed in the service of his nation. Support of this magnitude speaks for itself and for the exceptional circumstances surrounding the lack of recognition for Corporal McLaughlin.

Those marching today are joined in their quest by five thousand signatories to an e-petition posted on the government’s e-petition site. These signatures have been acquired despite extremely limited public exposure and my family and I have absolutely no doubt that many thousands more signatures will be forthcoming when the campaign is publicised to a national audience.

You will be aware, Prime Minister, that current Ministry of Defence policy debars retrospective gallantry awards, partly on the basis of an established practice that has become known as ‘the Five Year Rule’ (although it is not, in fact, a formal rule at all but an archaic practice arising from a pragmatic need following the end of the Second World War). The position currently adopted by the Ministry of Defence does not, in our opinion, provide sufficient opportunity to address the circumstances of those very few, exceptional cases where clear evidence of error, unintentional omission, lack of relevant information or flawed due process in the original awards process can be identified. Indeed, the current policy and awards system does not allow any opportunity for review or redress. Whilst those defending these limitations point to ‘parsimony’ of the awards system in order to retain the value of awards, and point also to potential ‘floodgates’ of appeals should the system be amended, these arguments are in fact both weak and flawed.

Any system or process should be open to evolution and improvement. Simply reaffirming the known flaws and limitations of the current system and defending it as being “imperfect but the best system we have” (Admiral Williams, Chairman, Operational Awards Committee; meeting with Mark McLaughlin, January 2014) should not be good enough for anyone concerned with seeking the best possible outcomes. There is scope for the current system to be flexible enough to consider the very occasional, exceptional case to be considered on a case-by-case basis. Such cases would, of course, necessarily meet given criteria and thus would not leave the system at risk of ‘floodgates’ of appeals. The nature of such criteria can easily be extrapolated from those recommended by Sir John Holmes for campaign medals. (Military Medals review, July 2012). Indeed, the evolution of the former restrictions placed on campaign medals, once subject to the same ‘Five Year Rule’ has seen two campaigns receive recognition fully seventy years after the operations were conducted.

Further, the additional condition that gallantry awards must be considered in the light of “contemporaneous accounts” need not necessarily be the all-limiting factor as currently described (verbal comments by Admiral Williams at the meeting in January 2014 and written comments in a letter to John Ross from Mr G Krishnasamy, Defence Personnel Secretariat,18thJune 2014). One need only look to the recent example of President Obama who, within the last few months, awarded the Congressional Medal of Honour to several American veterans forty years after they were overlooked by their country on the basis of their ethnicity. Unafraid to face the mistakes of the past, President Obama seized the opportunity to pay America’s dues and to recognise its heroes. The medals he awarded did not ‘devalue’ the awards of the past or those of the future (as repeatedly argued by the M.O.D as an inevitable consequence of retrospective awards) nor has it opened the floodgates for other appeals. It was simply an act of doing what is right: identifying where the system had failed and correcting the mistakes of the past.

The passage of time should not be a limiting factor where exceptionality can be established. We strongly suggest that the circumstances surrounding Corporal McLaughlin’s lack of recognition are indeed exceptional and that there exist many good reasons for him to receive some form of formal recognition. Not least amongst those reasons is, as President Obama recognised, the simple fact of doing what is right. Any fair-minded, reasonable person looking at the facts of this case would be hard pressed to come to any other conclusion.

**Pertinent facts relating to this case:**

• It is known that a citation for Corporal McLaughlin was written contemporaneously during Operation Corporate by his Commanding Officer, Lt Colonel (later Lt. General) Hew Pike (who has confirmed the fact).
• There is clear evidence that due process was not followed in the gathering of witness statements and corroboration – thus any citation written for Corporal McLaughlin was not representative of his full actions.
• Blatant inaccuracies in other citations that resulted in awards demonstrate that the awards system is not as rigorous as claimed by the M.O.D.
• It is known that the Chief Clerk of 3 Para during Operation Corporate is adamant that he did not type up a citation for Corporal McLaughlin. There is, therefore, some doubt as to whether the citation written by Lt Colonel Pike was ever submitted for consideration by an awards committee. (It follows that if it was not submitted it could not have ‘failed’).
• No record of the original citation written by Lt. Colonel Pike exists within the M.O.D (thus it cannot be confirmed that it was ever seen by an awards committee).
• Corporal McLaughlin’s gallantry has been consistently acknowledged by every senior officer that has discussed his case (Chief of the General Staff; Parachute Regimental Colonel; Admiral Williams; Lt General Pike) as deserving of recognition.
• The Parachute Regimental Colonel has described Corporal McLaughlin’s actions as “being in the DNA of the regiment”
• Lt General (retired) Pike has written a new citation in support of the family’s campaign for formal recognition for Corporal McLaughlin (see attached)
• There is historic precedent of retrospective awards being made to members of the British Armed Forces (King Edward VII awarded several retrospective Victoria Crosses in 1907 for actions dating back almost fifty years).

We respectfully request, Prime Minister, that you personally give my family and I the opportunity to meet with you and discuss a way forward in this matter. We also respectfully request that you do not simply refer the matter back to the M.o.D. – we have corresponded with the M.o.D. on several occasions and also at the meeting with Admiral Williams, where he informed us that he was at the top of the relevant chain of command for this matter. At that meeting he acknowledged the gallant actions of Corporal McLaughlin, describing his case as “extraordinary”, and added that “if I could give him a medal I would – but I can’t.” Admiral Williams advised that as the current system did not permit retrospection his only suggestion was that the family’s way forward may be to “seek an exceptional award directly from the Prime Minister.” That is where we are now. We respectfully ask you to rise above the responses dressed in policy and regulations that have typified the responses received from the M.o.D. and government ministers so far, including the extremely cursory and inadequate response given by Mark Francois MP, Minister of State, M.o.D., in the House of Commons to a question concerning formal recognition for Corporal McLaughlin raised at Defence Questions by Dan Jarvis, M.P. (March 2014). As a consequence of the inadequate response given by Mr Francois to Mr Jarvis’s question, a meeting was arranged between Mr Francois and both Angela Eagle and Dan Jarvis. This meeting took place on 2nd July. That meeting did not arrive at any conclusion as Mr Francois requested additional information from Angela Eagle and Dan Jarvis. A further meeting is imminent.

My family and I urge you, Prime Minister, to resist the circuitous reference to existing policy and the sanctuary of the status-quo that have stymied a fair and proper discussion of this case so far. We urge you to consider, instead, how Corporal Stewart McLaughlin, who fought so fiercely in the service of his great Regiment and for this nation, might be properly and formally recognised. We ask you to consider also, Prime Minister, how you might feel if your father or brother had fought like a lion in the dead of night on a mountain eight thousand miles from home; how you might feel when you heard and read, time and time again, that he was the man, above all others, that had been “absolutely instrumental” in securing an almost impossible victory. Imagine too how you would feel if your father or brother, who had fought and died to ensure the battle was won, was left shamefully unrecognised for his valour. I have no doubt that you would be marching with us today, requesting that your father or brother received the formal recognition that is his due.

We recognise, Prime Minister, that real concerns for the integrity of the awards system do exist and we respect those concerns, and indeed share them. However, we feel that there is some way that the deserved recognition my father earned can be bestowed upon him and we request that you will meet with us and allow us the opportunity to discuss with you how this might be achieved in a manner that fulfils the needs of the awards system and my family.

Yours sincerely,

Stewart McLaughlin Jnr
Son of Corporal Stewart McLaughlin

Mark McLaughlin, Russell McLaughlin, Duncan McLaughlin
Brothers of Corporal McLaughlin.