

A VERY RARE SECOND WAR 'CHINDITS' SPECIAL FORCES M.M. GROUP WITH A FINE FIGHTING CITATION AWARDED TO BLACK WATCH SERGEANT, A VETERAN OF CRETE AND TOBRUK WHO WAS TWICE WOUNDED IN THE ACT OF WINNING HIS M.M. WHILST COMMANDING HIS PLATOON ON AN OFFENSIVE PATROL IN THE VALLEY EAST OF THE KYSENLEI PASS, BURMA, IN JUNE 1944 “..APPROACHING A VILLAGE HE WAS ENGAGED BY FIRE. THE PADDY ROUND THE VILLAGE WAS THREE FEET UNDER WATER, BUT HE TOOK UP HIS POSITION IN ELEPHANT GRASS AND RETURNED THE FIRE WITH BREN GUNS AND GRENADES FROM A CUP DISCHARGER...” HIS M.M. WAS ONE OF ONLY 88 SUCH AWARDS TO CHINDITS, 3 OF WHICH WERE AWARDED TO MEN OF THE BLACK WATCH



MILITARY MEDAL, G.V.I.R. '2752845 Sjt. C. Mcluskey. Black Watch.' 1939-45 STAR, AFRICA STAR, BURMA STAR, DEFENCE AND WAR MEDALS

M.M. *London Gazette* 4 January 1945.

The original recommendation states: *'On 10 June 1944, Sergeant McCluskey was ordered to take two infantry sections from his platoon and carry out an offensive patrol in the valley east of the Kysenlei Pass. The patrol encountered enemy in the position in an unnamed village near Kontha and came under heavy and accurate fire, which wounded Sergeant McCluskey and caused other casualties in the patrol. In spite of his wound, however, Sergeant McCluskey retained full control of his small force and hotly engaged the enemy, and only when it became apparent that the enemy was present in considerably superior force did he start to organise a withdrawal. This he did with inspiring coolness and disregard for his personal safety going from one section to another and organising the evacuation of our wounded. While engaged on this task, Sergeant McCluskey was again severely wounded, and although in considerable pain, continued to retain full control of his force. Sergeant McCluskey had for some weeks been in command of a platoon and has on many occasions shown himself to be an outstanding leader, while his conduct on 10 June was beyond all praise. He has previously served with distinction in the Carrier Platoon in Crete and Tobruk.'*

Charles McCluskey was born in Cumbernauld, Dumbarton on 9 January 1914 and enlisted in the Black Watch in June 1932, direct from the Territorials. Originally posted to the 1st Battalion, he was promoted Lance Corporal on 2 December 1936. Transferring to the 2nd sometime before the outbreak

of hostilities, he saw extensive action in the Carrier Platoon in Crete and Tobruk, prior to joining Orde Wingate's Chindits in Burma in March 1944. Posted back to the UK, he was posted to 8th Infantry holding battalion at Stewarton (Ayrshire) and on 26 February 1945, he married Elizabeth Rae Gilliland at Kilmarnock, the registration noting he was a Sergeant in the Black Watch, engaged on War Service.

Carrier Platoons:

<http://www.lloydianaspects.co.uk/vintageSite/wargames/crossfire/carriers.html>

The following extracts, taken from The Black Watch by Philip Howard (part of the Famous Regiments series), neatly summarise the actions and experiences shared by McCluskey and his comrades in the 2nd Battalion:

CRETE MAY 1941

'After a tremendous battering by dive-bombers, the sky suddenly filled with puffs of thistle-down. There was a gasp of amazement, and a moment's hush along the whole Black Watch position. It was the first big parachute invasion in history. The Black Watch picked off the German paratroops as they fell, like plump pigeons. But for the next ten days more and more were dropped, prudently behind the mountains now, and out of range of Heraklion. The Battalion hung on grimly by its finger-nails, in isolated pockets unable to move by daylight, except for the piper who always played Reveille around the airfield after the dawn air raid. At last London decided to evacuate the island. At midnight the Highlanders crept down to the beach to the cruisers waiting to ferry them away. They had a terrible journey to Alexandria, dive-bombed and torpedoed all the way through the narrows at the eastern end of Crete. More than 200 of the Black Watch were killed on the voyage.



A year later the Commanding Officer of the first German parachute battalion dropped at Heraklion was captured in Libya. He told his interrogators: *"My first surprise was when I found the position held. The second was when I discovered who the infantry were. The battle continued with great ferocity for two days. The Black Watch never surrendered. Had it been any other regiment, any other, all would have been well. I had but 80 men left of my 800, no food, little ammunition; our food was being eaten by the Jocks."*

See the following for more details of the 2nd Black Watch in Crete:

<http://www.blackwatch.50megs.com/2bwcrete.html>

TOBRUK

'Next the Battalion was put into Tobruk to relieve the Australians, who had been besieged in that bulldogged citadel for six months. The short dusty perimeter was defended by wire, mine-fields, and subterranean galleries. Dismembered vehicles and litter lay everywhere. The big German gun called "Bardia Bill" barked and boomed over the fortress. In November the Battalion broke out of Tobruk on a sortie to link up with the Eighth Army advancing from Egypt. The plan was far more complex than the things which the Black Watch had been asked to do in old-style battles of far-off forgotten wars. But for once the Highlanders had been given a generous ration of infantry tanks. In fact the tanks lost themselves in the flat, featureless desert, in which the only landmarks were tangles of wire. And there was plenty of wire around to confuse the issue. So the Black Watch had to go in alone with the bayonet, as they had been doing ever since Fontenoy. The pipers played the Battalion in with "*Highland Laddie*", the regimental march, and "*The Black Bear*". This last tune has a pause for a yell at intervals, and is traditionally played when a final effort is needed from tired men.

Two hours later 8 officers and 60 men were left to take the final objective out of 32 officers and 600 men who set off from the Start Line. A Gunner Major wrote after the battle: "*I class this attack of the Black Watch as one of the most outstanding examples of gallantry combined with high-class training that I have seen. Not one of us who was there will forget such supreme gallantry.*"

See the following for more details of the 2nd Black Watch at Tobruk:

<http://www.blackwatch.50megs.com/tobruk.html>

BURMA AND THE CHINDITS

'Over on the other side of the world, the 2nd Battalion had become guerillas themselves - Chindits dropped for long range penetration beyond the Chindwin. The Battalion was split into two columns, numbered, inevitably, 73 and 42. They were flown into blind green jungle in March 1944, and for the next six months skirmished, and marched, and survived the monsoon, the steaming heat, and accidents by flood and field. It was probably the most unpleasant terrain for fighting into which the Black Watch had ever been plunged, worse even than the fever-swamps of the West Indies in the eighteenth century, or the dense jungles of Kandy. They were gnawed by starvation and disease. In one month alone 70 men died of typhus. It was a dripping world where clothes were never dry, and leeches had to be stripped from bodies at night. Tracks were often waist-deep in water and mud. Leather girths rotted on mules. A 10-mile march took four days. And once it took two days to haul their tottering half-dead bodies to the top of a four-mile pass. Most of the actions were small and untidy - the general strategy of the Chindit campaign lost direction after the death of Wingate. In May, at an ambush to cover the evacuation of "*White City*", 200 Black Watch scattered 1,200 Japanese. In August the last emaciated remnants charged and captured the village of Labu with the bayonet, played in on pipes specially dropped by parachute for the occasion. They were then flown back to India to recuperate.'

And of McCluskey's individual heroism near Kontha in June 1944, The Black Watch & The King's Enemies states:

"There were reports, however, that the Japs were in various villages below the pass; and it was in one of these, Kontha, that the second patrol was sent. It consisted of a weak platoon under Sergeant McLuskey. Leaving at 8 a.m. on 10 June, he approached Kontha and was engaged by fire. The paddy round the village was three feet under water, but he took up his position in elephant grass and

returned the fire with Bren guns and grenades from a cup discharger. As the enemy began to work round them, the patrol withdrew, having had one man killed and several wounded, but having got their information. They returned with their wounded at 6 p.m. The difficulty of keeping weapons in a working condition in circumstances such as these may be imagined."



Approximately 800 Black Watch soldiers went into the jungle in March 1944. When they were withdrawn, only 5 months later in August 1944, only two officers and 48 men were judged fit for duty.

The following outstanding 'Chindit' website can be viewed here:

<https://www.chindits.info/index.html>



Condition GVF minor official correction to last two letters of unit. Sold with copy research, including the recommendation and a copy of 'Over The Hills and Far Away: A Black Watch Chindit's story Burma 1944'

A very rare Second War 'Special Forces' M.M., one of only 84 awards for the 1944 Chindit campaign (just 4 for 1943), 3 of which were awarded to men of the Black Watch.