

CITATIONS OF AWARDS IN SICILY

Following are Citations of Awards to officers and other ranks serving in Sicily:

D.S.O.

Captain (temporary Major) Henry Conyers Baker-Baker, M.B.E.
(58154) The Black Watch, (Royal Highland Regiment) (Sherbur
Hill, Co. Durham.

Major Baker-Baker, The Black Watch, was ordered to take command of the Battalion during the battle of Gerbini at 0600 hrs. on 22nd July, 1943, as the C.O. had been wounded.

At the time he took over command two companies of the Black Watch were attacking the southern outskirts of Gerbini. The remainder were moving up to the anti-tank ditch some 300 yards south of the village.

The woods north of and round Gerbini had been occupied by the H.Q. and two companies of Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders and fierce hand to hand fighting had taken place in that area from midnight the night before. The areas had been subjected to fierce counter-attacks and infiltration throughout the night and morning; considerable pockets of resistance were still holding out on the southern outskirts of Gerbini.

The task given to Major Baker-Baker was to attack and clear the enemy out of Gerbini and to reorganise in conjunction with the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders the position against further counter-attacks.

This task he accomplished and at 1000 hrs. the area was in process of being reorganised when a heavy counter-attack developed. A squadron of tanks, which at this stage should have been covering the reorganisation, were forced to withdraw, leaving the flanks of the position open.

Major Baker-Baker maintained a thorough grip of this difficult situation, and was seen on many occasions rallying tired men and encouraging them to still greater efforts.

At about 1100 hours the situation deteriorated, as enemy tanks and armoured cars had positioned themselves on the flanks and were bringing considerable fire to bear from positions on the southern exits of Gerbini. Major Baker-Baker was unable to communicate with Brigade Headquarters owing to the fact that his wireless set was damaged and himself made the decision to withdraw to the anti-tank ditch some 800 yards south of Gerbini. There is no doubt that this was a wise decision and a bold and difficult one to take by a comparatively junior officer. The withdrawal was systematically carried out under Major Baker-Baker's directions. The rifle companies of the Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders who were now practically without officers were safely extricated.

The decision to withdraw and the handling of the withdrawal by Major Baker-Baker averted the serious consequences which might have resulted had the Gerbini locality, in the absence of our own tanks, been surrounded by enemy armour. His action throughout the battle was beyond praise. During the whole action he was under heavy fire and in spite of this conducted operations coolly and soundly.

D.S.O.

Lieutenant (temporary Captain) Alan Frazer Campbell Buchanan
(134631) The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders (Princess
Louise's) (London S.W.3)

During the battle for Gerbini on the night 20/21 July, 1943, Capt. Buchanan, the adjutant, was left in sole charge of Bn. Headquarters whilst the Colonel and Second-in-Command were reorganising companies. The situation became critical owing to enemy infiltration and attacks on the H.Q. itself. Captain Buchanan who had been wounded before dawn, immediately set about the task of organising Bn. H.Q. and some other soldiers whose leaders had become casualties, into a fighting force. This he did under intense fire, at close quarters. He not only succeeded in maintaining Bn. H.Q. intact, but in holding with a handful of men a serious gap which had occurred in the general defensive line. Throughout confused and close fighting, despite his wounds, he not only maintained the initiative but coolly carried on with his normal duties as adjutant. The signal officer had become a casualty, and throughout, Capt. Buchanan personally maintained wireless communication with forward coys. and Brigade Headquarters.

Shortly afterwards, the commanding officer was killed, and the second-in-command, who was seriously wounded, had to rely very largely on the competence of the adjutant

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to direct the battle. Later, when a withdrawal became inevitable, Captain Buchanan, now with no officers whatever to assist him, reorganised his forces, and continued to command the remnants of the battalion until after nightfall. He was then ordered to withdraw his force to a rest area. In this final phase, he personally collected and led his troops on foot, partly through enemy occupied country, to an assembly area some miles away. Not until he was satisfied that every possible man had been brought to safety, did he admit to being wounded or allow himself any rest. By his cool courage, resource and mental stamina, Captain Buchanan averted what might have been a serious break through, and throughout the battle maintained his battalion position.

Bar to Military Cross

Lieutenant (temporary Captain) James Walter Ritchie, M.C.
(155088) The Gordon Highlanders.

In the early hours of the morning of the 20th July 1943 the companies engaged in Sferro village began to run short of ammunition; fresh supplies had been sent for but would have arrived too late had not Capt. Ritchie acting on his own initiative intercepted the 3-ton lorry carrying the ammunition to Bn. Headquarters and taken it personally straight along the main road to the village. The road was under very heavy shell fire and the village was being subjected to concentrated mortar and small arms fire. Capt. Ritchie delivered the ammunition and although dawn had broken before the return journey could be made he succeeded in bringing the 3-tonner out of the village and back to Bn. H.Q. The position of the forward troops would have been untenable had these supplies not been made available. Throughout the action Capt. Ritchie set a fine example and displayed great coolness and courage and was an inspiration to the men of his regiment.

M.C.

Captain (temporary Major) Charles Anthony Hay Mackintosh
Noble (56425) The Queens Own Cameron Highlanders.

The plan for surrounding Francofonte on the morning of 14th July 1943 was made by Lt. Col. J.S. Cameron who was wounded shortly after the commencement of the operation. Major Noble, who was then acting as second in command of the battalion, took over command at very short notice. While another battalion was involved in clearing the village Major Noble by his personal energy and leadership succeeded in infiltrating his companies to the rear of Francofonte and thus considerably hastened the evacuation of the area by the enemy forces. Next day he led his battalion as brigade advance guard from Francofonte to Scordia with outstanding initiative and courage. Due to his personal skill and energy scattered parties of enemy were rapidly rounded up and the town of Scordia overrun and cleared early in the day with the capture of over five hundred prisoners.

M.C.

Lieutenant Kenneth Cecil Perry (251053) Corps of
Royal Engineers (Ashford Kent)

On 20th July 1943 Lt. Perry was in charge of clearing a track running south from CATENANUOVA to allow passage of tanks, under heavy and accurate shell fire. His personal courage and coolness was an inspiration to those under his command and around him, and was largely responsible for the successful completion of the work. This he carried on although the forward troops were forced to withdraw through his party by enemy counter-attack. The work completed, he saw to the successful withdrawal of all his men and plant. He then returned and personally saw to the evacuation of a number of wounded before reporting back to his Company Commander for further duty.

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D.C.M.

No. 2824467 Sergeant John Archibald MacLean,
The Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders (Conon
Bridge, Ross-shire)

During the heavy fighting against German troops on 14th July, 1943 at Francofonte, Sergeant MacLean consistently showed the highest personal courage and initiative in leading his platoon in battle. His bravery and disregard for danger culminated about 1700 hours when the whole of his company was temporarily held up by an enemy position consisting of two anti-tank guns, an infantry gun and light automatics. Sergeant MacLean at once began the engagement of this post by the fire power of his platoon. This done, he personally led the attack and went into the final assault himself with the bayonet, leading the charge and encouraging his men with the war cry of the Clan MacLean.

As a result of his dash and bravery, the surviving enemy abandoned their position, leaving eight prisoners and all their weapons in our hands. Quite apart from this specific act of gallantry, Sergeant MacLean's leadership and distinguished conduct during the recent fighting in Sicily has been in the highest traditions of the Cameron Highlanders.

D.C.M.

No. 2754743 Corporal Robert Stevenson. The
Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) (Preston-
pans).

During the advance on Gerbini on 19th July, 1943, the company was ordered to take up a position astride the cross-roads at Crociata Jannarello. During the advance, a German gun was firing on the company from the right flank. Corporal Stevenson's platoon made a detour to the left to get on the enemy's flank. Close to where they made contact, an enemy armoured car opened up with two automatics causing casualties in the Company. This, and the fact that the gun was firing over on the right, made Corporal Stevenson realise the seriousness of the situation and the urgent necessity of silencing the armoured car. Disregarding the heavy fire in this area, and the fact that our own troops were firing at the armoured car, Corporal Stevenson worked his way right up to the armoured car and put a grenade inside it through a small opening below the gun. The car burst into flames and was thus silenced. This action enabled the Company to gain its objective. Corporal Stevenson's complete disregard for his personal safety was an inspiration to all ranks with him. His courage and determination were of the very highest order, and beyond praise.

M.M.

No. 6213814 Private John Hamerton Burgess-Allan,
The Gordon Highlanders (Dagenham)

During the attack on Sferro village on July 19th/20th Private Burgess-Allan was acting as company runner. He showed remarkable courage and determination in the way he carried messages to forward platoons over ground subjected to very heavy shell fire. Private Allan set a very fine example to men of his company and owing to his outstanding devotion to duty was largely responsible for the successful communications being maintained within the company.

M.M.

No. 6409896 Private John Joseph Hyland, The
Gordon Highlanders (Bray, Co. Wicklow).

At Sferro on 22nd July, 1943 information was required of enemy movements and dispositions in the area as an enemy attack was considered likely. This area completely dominated the battalion position and observation was restricted. Private Hyland volunteered to act as an observer. He left the lines at 4 a.m., moved out a distance of 1,500 yards and lay up the whole day within 200 or 300 yards of the enemy forward defence lines. In spite of the fact that the enemy were continuously moving around the post which he was occupying, he managed to escape detection and returned at night-fall with valuable information concerning the location of the enemy defences and H.Q. areas. He also brought in details of a raid which was carried out by the enemy that night which enabled a clear picture to be obtained of the enemy's intentions.

Private Hyland showed qualities of courage and resource much above the average and his efforts helped to clarify considerably the position on the battalion front.