

Charles Arundel Moody

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With the story of Walter Tull very much in the news at the moment, I hope no-one minds if I recall the story of Charles Arundel Moody, the second black officer in the British Army. Like Walter Tull from Folkestone, his military career was surprisingly close to home, and began in the dark immediate post-Dunkirk days of 1940.



Charles Arundel Moody

His father Dr. Harold Moody, from Jamaica and then living in Peckham, had formed the first Civil Rights movement in Britain for ethnic minorities known as the League of Coloured People in 1930. He had protested to the government about the "Colour bar" in the armed forces, which had prevented Charles Moody and other black men from undertaking officer training. Dr. Moody wrote to the Colonial Secretary and the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, complaining of such discrimination and by speaking out on the subject at public meetings. Following a number of meetings Churchill agreed to lift the bar and Harold Moody's son, Charles, became the second black officer, the first to be commissioned in WWII, and commenced training in February 1940.

Following his basic training as a 2nd Lieutenant, on the 7th June 1940 he was posted to his first duty, with the 50th Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment here at The Citadel at the Western Heights. I discovered his posting date in a list of transferred officers arriving at Dover in the 50th's War Diary obtained from the National Archives. Charles Moody's duties at Dover

would have involved anti-invasion defences and manning pillboxes. The Irish Guards records have a mention of him being trapped outside a drawbridge during an invasion exercise at the Heights forcing them to lower the drawbridge to let him in. He served right through the Battle of Britain summer in Dover before the Royal West Kents were posted elsewhere. Moody then served

with distinction in the Infantry and the Artillery in England, Africa, Italy (mainly Prisoner of War escort duties), and finally Egypt, where he became a Major in 1945.

At the end of the war he returned to Jamaica with B Company of the Caribbean Regiment, settling there for the next forty years. Charles Moody became a Colonel in the Jamaican Army in 1961. He later became the first Commanding Officer of the Jamaican Territorial Army and was awarded an OBE in 1966.

In 2006 he was on the short list for a blue plaque to be erected on the house in Southwark where he was born. The proposal was outvoted and the award went to a pie and mash shop! By an incredible coincidence that very shop is owned by the parents of Western Heights Preservation Society member Richard Doust.

The photo shows him straight out of training - note the Invicta horse cap badge of the Royal West Kents. Born 15th April 1917 Camberwell, Greater London, died January 11th 2009: Lt. Col. Charles Joe Arundel Moody of West Palm Beach, Florida.