

## KING, HAROLD - Died 1<sup>st</sup> June 1940 aged 26

### 2655491 Guardsman, 1st Battalion, Coldstream Guards



Photograph courtesy of Tony King, grandson of His cousin, Albert.

Harold was a bachelor, the son of Harry and Sarah Antcliff (nee Pettit) King. He was born on 19<sup>th</sup> June 1913 and spent his early childhood in Doncaster.

Following the death of his mother in 1922 he came to Scotter to live with his Uncle Walter and Aunt Demaris, while his sister Violet stayed in Doncaster.

Harold was over 6' 2" tall and enjoyed being called Tarzan by his friends. His height allowed him to join the Coldstream Guards in the 1930's.

After serving his time, he left and came back to lodging in Sands Lane at the home of his close friend Albert 'Bill' Birkett, who is also listed on the village memorial.

Following the German invasion of Poland in 1939 he was immediately conscripted from the Reserve List.

In the old bottom room of the White Swan there was a large mirror. He stood by it and said:-

*'Take a good look at that man because you'll never see him again. I'm going to France tomorrow and I'm never coming back...'*

The British Expeditionary Force was sent to the Franco-Belgian border with his Battalion part of the 7<sup>th</sup> Guards' Brigade in II Corps. They landed at Cherbourg on 30<sup>th</sup> September and spent one of the coldest winters on record preparing trenches, pillboxes and wire emplacements.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> May 1940, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion moved forward into Belgium to check the German invasion of the Low Countries. They held positions on the River Dyle and the Herent canal, north of Louvain.

When the Germans attacked on the night of 14<sup>th</sup> May the Coldstreams had to make a series of fighting withdrawals. The outlying Belgian defences were falling rapidly to German airborne and armoured forces and the line of the River Dyle was coming under rapidly increasing pressure.

A procession of Belgian cavalry, artillery and civilians had been streaming back through the Battalion's position for two days, attracting heavy enemy bombing of the village and approach roads.

At 6pm motorised troops came into view and German artillery opened up on their positions. The Belgian units received orders to withdraw, which thinned the Coldstream outposts, and made their position even more difficult to hold.

Later that evening, in view of the strength of the enemy offensive, orders were received to withdraw from the outposts. With considerable difficulty forward troops were removed from close contact with the enemy forces and the Battalion retired some two days later.

On 30<sup>th</sup> May the Germans succeeded in pushing back the 4<sup>th</sup> Royal Berkshires. The 1<sup>st</sup> Coldstream Guards counter attacked, maintaining their drive into the hours of darkness and holding the line. There was heavy fighting between the British and Germans with rifle fire across the two sides of the Furnes Canal lasting between six and seven hours.

They fought with great professionalism and tenacity. Their General was confident his men could hold out for as long as it took to evacuate the BEF. Harold and his comrades were told to fight to the death, and that if they retreated past a certain point, they would be shot.

Finally they were allowed to retire and the survivors reached the beaches at La Panne, east of Dunkirk on 1<sup>st</sup> June. He was one of nearly 200 casualties in his battalion with the remaining men embarking for England on the evening of 2nd June.

Guardsman Harold King is interred in Dunkirk Town Cemetery. PLOT – Sp. Mem. Plot 2. Row. 14 Grave 1.

His memorial stone carries the words

*'Buried near this spot'*

and:-

*'Sweetest memories,  
Silently kept,  
Of one we love dearly,  
And can never forget'*

His cousin Roland King was killed in the Great War and is also remembered on the village monument.

