



Clockwise from top: Dennis King served as a squadron tank commander in the 7th Armoured Division of the British Army during World War II. King rides a camel during a trip to Egypt in the early 1970s. King and his late wife, Doreen, are pictured with their first born son, Dennis Anthony. King (far left), his sons Paul Alexandre and Mark Andrew, daughter Caroline Michele, wife, Doreen, and son, Dennis Anthony sit in the family's home in Ghent, Belgium, in 1963. King married Doreen, in September 1951.

FACES OF THE MILITARY

A storied life

89-year-old British WWII vet reflects on service, work in cotton

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Growing up in Oldham, Greater Manchester, in Great Britain, Dennis King wasn't expecting war to break out.

As a young teen in 1939, the now Lake Highlands resident traveled to Kandersteg, Switzerland, with his British Boy Scout troop.

There were Scouts from all over the world, including some from France and Germany. Though on the eve of World War II, King said there were no signs of tension as he and other Scouts spent time climbing in the mountains in Switzerland.

"It was a great party with no thought of killing each other or anything," King said.

To King's surprise, about the time his group returned home in September 1939, Great Britain declared war on Germany.

"I didn't even believe a war would happen, truthfully. I just didn't think it could be so," he said. "But it was, and I found out about it."

In 1941, at 17, King enlisted in the British Army. He was sent to Bovington Camp in Dorset, England, for training. Soon after, he was ordered to the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst to receive condensed officer training.

"It was set to do the course there in two years, and we had to do it in six months because, you know, there was a war," King said.

Fighting abroad

He celebrated his 18th birthday abroad as a squadron tank commander in the 7th Armoured Division, fighting against German troops led by Field Marshal Erwin Rommel.

During the North African Campaign, his division earned its famous nickname, "Desert Rats." The moniker originated from the jerboa emblem soldiers began wearing on

their uniforms during that campaign.

King took part in the Allied invasion of Italy before withdrawing to England with his division to prepare for the D-Day invasion.

On June 6, 1944, the Desert Rats landed on Gold Beach in Normandy. King was among the soldiers who came ashore in an amphibious tank, which used a specially designed flotation device to stay buoyant in water.

As he approached the shore, King said the flotation device on his tank malfunctioned. "When you were touching the ground, then you would blow off the thing," King said. "Well, it wouldn't blow off, so I had to get into the water and pull it off."

King, now 89, said he can recall the faces of those he served with just as if they were standing in front of him today. But those faces and the experiences are not something he likes to reflect on often.

"I don't want to remind myself of [the war] because you lose so many dear comrades that you've worked and lived with ... that's the unhappiness of war — if war is ever happy," King said.

His daughter, Caroline King, said her father has never talked much about the war. However, she remembers as a young child her father putting on all his medals to mark Armistice Day at church.

"From being very young we were aware that he had done something special," she said. "It was only later on when we kind of figured out [by] watching documentaries on TV and stuff like that what exactly he was involved in."

King cotton

After the war, King came to the United States on a Fulbright Scholarship to learn the cotton industry along with other former



Staff photo by HEATHER NOEL/neighborsgo

Lake Highlands resident Dennis King stands next to a case displaying medals from his service as a squadron tank commander in the British Army during World War II. Among King's honors is the Military Cross (middle row center). See a related story on World War II veterans on **Page 16**.



Dennis King stands with his wife, Patricia Halford, and their dog, Winston.

ing at the King Mill, his family's cotton spinning business which dated back to 1898 in Oldham, he said.

Following his studies in the United States, King began working in the industry in Ghent, Belgium. It was there that he raised his four children with his late wife, Doreen.

His work sent him all over the world, from Australia to Turkey.

Caroline King said she and her siblings enjoyed hearing stories from their father's travel, whether it was about an encounter with a notable public figure or the details of a country's culture and history.

"When we were kids, we actually thought he might be a spy, because he would go to all these exotic places and then we'd see on the news there was some invasion or some coup or somebody had been assassinated," Caroline King said.

Dennis King wasn't a spy, but in his spare time, he would serve as a guide to tourists in Ghent or as an English interpreter during events at nearby castles.

"He loved Ghent, and he's very knowledgeable about the history. It was kinda fun to go into town with him and he'd describe the different things about the different buildings," Caroline King said.

A new chapter

After working about 30 years in Ghent, Dennis King moved to the United States to work at the Dallas Cotton Exchange in 1980.

Years after his wife Doreen died, he married his second wife, Patricia Halford.

Halford said the two met while working in downtown Dallas.

"My building abutted the cotton exchange building, so we ended up meeting in the little restaurant where everybody went to lunch," Halford said.

Before his recent move to Lake Highlands, King lived for years in Highland Park, he said. Longtime friend John Luttrell of University Park, like many others, met Dennis while walking in his neighborhood.

Luttrell, 81, said he was too young to fight in World War II, but he has always respected King for the sacrifices he made during his service.

"He's one of these people who I think needs to be recognized because he's the last of the last," Luttrell said.

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