

William John Roberts

William Roberts was born in December 1918 at Tonypany in South Wales, where his father worked as a coal miner. After he left school, William went to work in a local bakery but moved to London to look for work in the late 1930s.

William Roberts was conscripted into the Army in September 1939 and was sent to join the DLI at Fenham Barracks in Newcastle upon Tyne. After completing basic training at Spennymoor in County Durham, 4457717 Private Roberts was posted to the 8th Battalion DLI.

In January 1940, 8 DLI, after training for war in the Cotswolds, was sent as part of the 50th Division to join the British Expeditionary Force in France. In May 1940, German forces invaded France and Belgium and at Arras the only major British counter-attack to halt the German advance launched. It failed and in the confused fighting that followed, William Roberts was taken prisoner and sent to a prisoner of war camp in Poland.

In September 1940, William Roberts and another 8 DLI prisoner, Tony Bainbridge, escaped and moved by night eastwards towards the border with Soviet Russia. After many weeks, they eventually met up with the Polish Resistance fighters, who helped them with food and money until they could cross the border into Russia in February 1941.

Only released by the Russians in July 1941, William Roberts returned home, where he was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for his daring escape.

After the war, Bill Roberts joined the Prison Service and worked in Durham until his retirement in 1982. He died in October 1994.

William Robert was interviewed for the Imperial War Museum in 1994.