

Richard Atkinson

Richard Atkinson was born in July 1920 in Jarrow on Tyneside, where his father worked on the railways. He went to school in Felling and left when he was 14 years old to work as a delivery boy, before he became an apprentice bricklayer.

In March 1939, Richard Atkinson decided to volunteer for the Territorial Army and joined the 9th Battalion DLI at its Headquarters at Gateshead. When the Second World War began, 9 DLI was sent south to the Cotswolds to train for war before it was sent to France in January 1940, as part of the 50th (Northumbrian) Division. During the fighting in May 1940, Private Atkinson was a driver in the Motor Transport Section and took part in the failed counter attack at Arras.

On its return from Dunkirk, 9 DLI was first sent to the south coast of England on defence duties but, after the threat of a German invasion faded, the battalion sailed for the Middle East in May 1941. Over the next two years, Private Atkinson served in Egypt, Cyprus, Iraq and the North African Desert, seeing action at Gazala, Mersa Matruh (where he was wounded), El Alamein and Mareth. At Mersa Matruh in June 1942, he witnessed the action in which Adam Wakenshaw from Newcastle was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross.

Richard Atkinson took part in the Sicily landings in July 1943 and saw action at Primosole Bridge before 9 DLI returned to England, along with the rest of the 50th Division, to prepare for D-Day.

On 6 June 1944, Private Atkinson drove his lorry off a landing craft and onto a Normandy beach. During the fighting near Mont Pincon in August 1944, he was wounded by friendly fire and spent time in hospital. After recovering, he rejoined 9 DLI and the final advance towards Germany. At Nijmegen, he drove his lorry full of wounded soldiers across the bridge under heavy artillery fire. At the end of the war, Richard Atkinson served with 9 DLI in the Army of Occupation in Germany.

Dickie Atkinson was finally demobilised from the Army in 1946 and returned to civilian life.

Richard Atkinson was interviewed for the Imperial War Museum in 1994 at his home in Whitley Bay.