

## **Thomas William Atkinson**

Thomas Atkinson was born in June 1920 at Hendon in Sunderland. His father was a bottle-maker but was often unemployed. Thomas left school when he was 14 years old and began working on his brother's market stall selling gramophone records.

In July 1940, Thomas Atkinson was conscripted into the Army and joined the newly-formed 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion DLI, then based near Edinburgh. Training of this new battalion lasted until December 1942, when 16 DLI sailed from Liverpool for Algeria and service overseas.

In early March 1943, 16 DLI went into action for the first time at Sedjenane in Tunisia. The battalion suffered many casualties at the hands of experienced German soldiers and many men were taken prisoner, including 4465566 Private Thomas Atkinson. These prisoners were loaded on to a prison ship and taken to Italy and prisoner of war camp near Capua.

In September 1943, when Italy surrendered, Thomas Atkinson, along with hundreds of other POWs decided to escape before German guards took over the camp. The escaped prisoners soon split up and Tomas Atkinson and two others headed south to meet up with the advancing Allied forces. Evading German soldiers, they were helped by friendly Italians who gave them food and shelter.

In December 1943, the group escaped through the German lines and linked up with British forces. Thomas Atkinson left Italy for home on Christmas Eve 1943. He was Mentioned in Despatches for his escape.

Once back in England, Lance Corporal Atkinson was re-trained as a driver with the Royal Army Service Corps and served in Italy and Austria at the end of the war.

After he was demobilised in July 1946, Tommy Atkinson went back to selling records, which he continued to do until his retirement.

*Thomas Atkinson was interviewed for the Imperial War Museum in 1997 at his home in Sunderland.*