

Alan Hughes Watcham

Alan Watcham was born in July 1918 at Tantobie, a small coal mining village in County Durham, where his father worked as a schoolmaster. After Alan left the local grammar school in 1937, he began to train as a Physical Training teacher at Bede College in Durham. At Bede, he joined the Officers Training Corps.

In September 1939, Alan Watcham was conscripted into the Army and was posted to the DLI's Depot at Brancepeth Castle for his basic training. At the end of this training, 4457510 Private Watcham was posted to the 10th Battalion DLI at South Shields and joined 'B' Company.

10 DLI left for France in April 1940 to join the British Expeditionary Force. As the battalion was neither fully trained nor equipped it was put to work building air strips. When the German forces invaded Belgium and France in May 1940, 10 DLI was thrown into the battle and suffered many casualties in the confused fighting near Arras. Alan Watcham was taken prisoner and was sent to a prisoner of war camp in Poland. He spent the next five years in camps, often working as a camp interpreter as he could speak German.

In early 1945, Alan Watcham was freed by advancing US forces and flown home to England. His health had deteriorated so much whilst he had been in the prison camps that he was demobilised from the Army in late 1945.

Alan Watcham returned to teaching after the war, though no longer as a PT teacher, and eventually retired as a Headmaster in Consett.

Alan Watcham was interviewed for the Imperial War Museum in 1989.