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**Corporal Bill Robins**

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**THE ARMY SERVICE LIFE OF  
CORPORAL BILL ROBINS  
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I joined the army as a Private when I was 18 years of age and as it happens had I not joined voluntarily when I did, I would have been conscripted into the army as many of the young men in my district were and sent to New Guinea with the NSW 55<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion who joined with the Victorian 39<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion and were the first to meet the Japanese invasion force on the Kokoda Trail.

Instead, I was sent in July 1942 to Western Australia with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division to join the Victorian 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and together with the 1<sup>st</sup> Armoured Division formed the 3<sup>rd</sup> Australian Corps to form the basis of the planned defence of the West Coast against the threatening possible Japanese invasion.

There were 50,000 troops spread between Fremantle and Geraldton. I was a despatch rider and my role was to ride up and down the convoy of trucks heading to Geraldton to help to keep them together. There were no radio communications between the vehicles in the convoy so it was my job to watch for any vehicles lagging or to report to the lead vehicle if any vehicles broke down.

On arrival at Fremantle, we were camped at Melville Camp (where soon after arrival I met my wife-to-be Joyce) and from there, we spent three months at Bellevue before going north to Geraldton where we were deployed to Moonyoonooka, Kojarena and then outside Geraldton.

While at Geraldton, I was made a Corporal.

At Kojarena, which is on the way to Mullewa, we did training and army manoeuvres to pass the time. We were camped on one of the Grant family's farms and of an evening, rabbits used to come down from the hills to drink and we would try to stone them so that we could add some fresh rabbit meat to our diet but we were not very successful. Another member of the Grant family, Gordon Grant, was also in our unit.

Once a week, we went into Geraldton for some R & R and we went to the yacht club for a dance night. We found the people of Geraldton very friendly and they made us feel quite welcome, especially the Herbert Family who lived next door to the high school.

We also used to go swimming in the Geraldton harbour and in the summer time, it was a very pleasant activity.

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After the danger of the possible Japanese invasion had passed, we were to be broken up as units and returned to the Eastern States to become general reinforcements for New Guinea and the Solomon Islands but the Australian Government insisted on the 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Divisions being experienced and having served so well in the Middle East be brought back to Australia to assist in the defence of our country.

This is why our deployment in WA was extended and our units were eventually broken up and returned to the Eastern States (in cattle trucks on trains) where I spent three months in the 5<sup>th</sup> Reinforcements Depot at Townsville.

From there we were put on a fleet of 12 American L.S.T's (Landing Ship Tanks) with 350 Australia troops on each.

Due to overcrowding, I spent the 17 days to Morotai sleeping on a camp stretcher on the deck amongst the chained-down vehicles.

A few weeks later, we were sent to Balikpapan, Borneo as part of the 7<sup>th</sup> Division invasion landing on 10<sup>th</sup> July 1945 where I remained until being returned to Australia in January 1946 where I was discharged in WA.

During my four years of army life during World War II, I served in eight different units and one cannot but envy those who served in the one unit for the entire time spent in the army.

I learnt early in my army career that you have no say in where you go – you are sent to where needed.

I served in the infantry for almost two years as a motorbike despatch rider for 18 months and after several moves was with the 7<sup>th</sup> Division Reception Camp in Balikpapan in Borneo handling troop movements.

Six months after the war ended and the majority of the troops had been returned to Australia by Liberty ship, I got the opportunity to take up a vacancy on a Catalina flying boat flying to Darwin in the morning, if I could get my gear together in time.

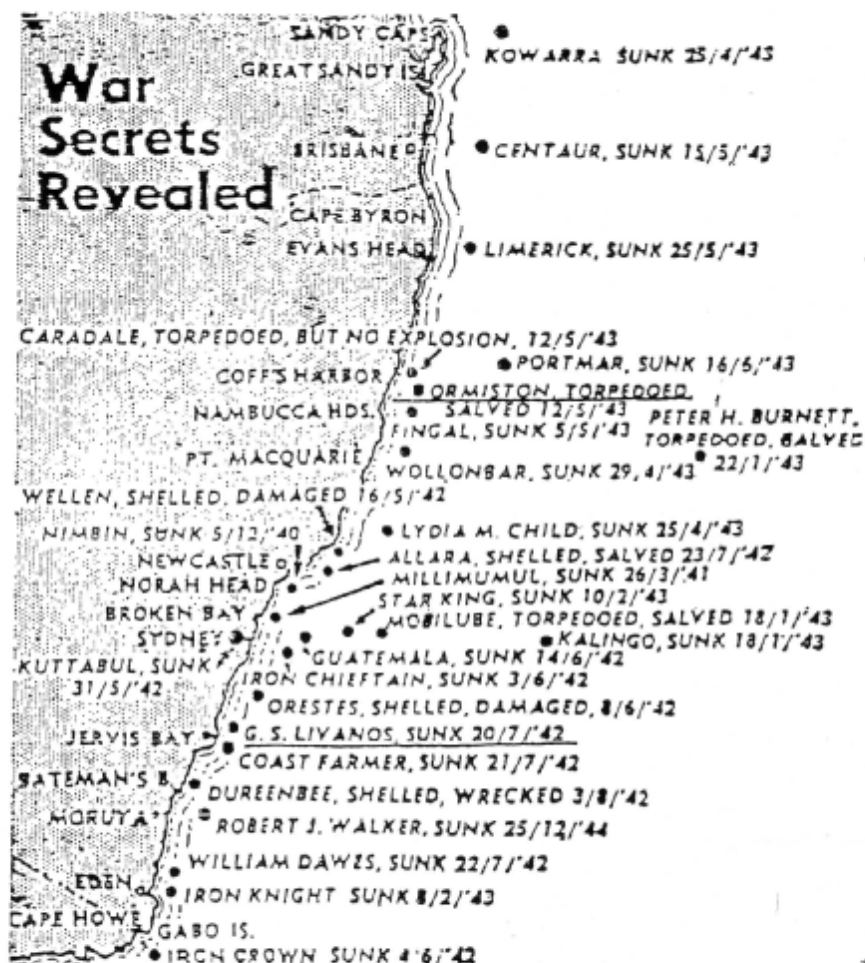
There were 20 on board and when the aircraft attempted to take off in the harbour, the pilot decided to abort the takeoff because of the high hills around Balikpapan harbour so I was quite concerned that the first time I was having a ride in an aircraft, it was likely to come to grief.

The pilot turned around to attempt another takeoff and asked all the soldiers in the back to lean forward to keep the weight forward and we almost pushed the cabin door in with our enthusiasm to help get the plane off. We were successful and we later landed at Darwin and I expected to come home via the centre of Australia on the narrow-gauge train and then by truck to Adelaide but there was a Liberator bomber going to Perth that was empty and about 12 of us were put into the bomb bay for the flight to Perth.

It wasn't a very pleasant flight home because of the cramped quarters and we could not see anything but we were very glad to be going home.

I was married to Joyce in January 1944 before being posted overseas and today, we have three sons and 12 grandchildren and 4 great-grandchildren and we have been living in Perth ever since.

WAR SECRETS REVEALED. Many people would not be aware of the vast number of ships which were sunk off the east coast of Australia during 1942/43 and 44. The accompanying map shows how close to our coastline enemy action took place and the loss of life inflicted. A total of 605 lives lost in nearly 40 ships which were in convoys and protected by Corvettes and destroyers.



THERE WERE 167 ALLIED  
SUBMARINES BASED IN  
FREMANTLE DURING WWII  
L.S.A. 125 11 LOST IN ACTION  
BRITISH 31 1 LOST IN ACTION  
DUTCH 11



WAR EFFORT: Fremantle was home to submarines in World War II.