

<b>Surname:</b> Robins	<b>First Name(s):</b> Jean	<b>Army Number:</b> W/768	
<b>Maiden name (if applicable):</b> MacKay	<b>Name used during service:</b> MacKay / Robins	<b>Rank:</b> Sergeant	
<b>Main base:</b> Fort Borstal Fort Bridgewoods Hounslow	<b>Training base:</b> Otterpool, Nr Lympe/Hythe, Kent	<b>Enrolled at:</b> Rochester Police Station	
<b>Platoon/Section:</b>	<b>Company/Battery:</b>	<b>Group/Regiment:</b>	<b>Command:</b> South Western
<b>Year(s) of service:</b> Summer 1938	<b>Reason for discharge:</b>	<b>Trade:</b> Communications	
<b>Uniform Issued:</b>	<b>Photo:</b>		
<b>Description of daily tasks:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>At Fort Bridgewoods there were radio masts in the middle of the camp, and men in rooms took down the morse code ... later known as the famous Enigma Code. They then passed it to us and we teleprinted it to No. 4 Intelligence School – later Bletchley Park. We did shift work and later night duty.</li> </ul>		
<b>Pay book:</b>			
<b>Memorable moments:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Early in 1938 my sister (who is 6 years older than I) were living at home in a village in Kent called Petham. One day father said to us, "I think you should volunteer for some 'war work training'". This at the time meant nursing, VAD or Army (no WRNS yet). We both opted for the Territorial Army, training one night a week, with men – I don't think they liked it much having about 6 or 8 women marching with them.</li> <li>In early August came 'annual camp'. It was at Ottapool (near Lympe, which is on top of the steep hill out of Hythe, Kent, just off the Ashford Road). It was a sea of mud and I seem to remember it rained all the time. Peggy was allowed to sign on for 'general duties' as she was older – I was only allowed 'home service', as I was the tender age of 19 years old and sadly, then, 'mummy's little darling pet'. However, I was allowed to go to camp. My first vivid recollection was of filling Palliasses (bags) with straw which we were going to use to sleep on, on the ground sheets, 8 to a tent, feet all facing the centre pole of a bell tent – it was very hard too. I do not remember, but expect everything was done to bugle calls.</li> <li>As 'home service' I was assigned to the Camp Commandants Office tent, where I spent hours going through attestation papers (the paper signed by the recruit to swear allegiance etc). I do not know what I was looking for! I think maybe, we were trying to decide what trade training was best for each man. I still get letters from one of my husband's raw recruits! He worked in a shop like B &amp; Q (as the shops were different then!) He sold garden plants I think. Ended up as a CQMS</li> </ul>		

	<p>running Dad's Quartermasters stores! He came all the way from London to Salisbury for Dad's funeral too. A true best friend.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I got my call up to report to Rochester Police Station. We were taken to our billets. Mine was with a self employed builder. I had never lived in a three bedroom semi before and found it difficult being so close to everyone else. We were taken to R.E. Barracks at Chatham for 'dinner', the tea was like treacle and served in a sort of jam pot mug. I bought myself a mug ... I still have it! Not much choice of food, but most of it was edible and one soon learnt bad manners, like wiping ones plate clean with the crust of bread provided for that purpose!?</li> <li>• Then to work, taxi again – I think only 4 of us. We went to one of the Napoleonic Forts overlooking the Medway Estuary. Borstal was one – the first 'bad boys' training centre, later moved inland to a proper camp. Ours was Fort Bridgewoods. Entry through a gatehouse and more or less circular. There were radio masts in the middle, and men in rooms took down the morse code ... later known as the famous Enigma Code. Passed it to us, we teleprinted it to No. 4 Intelligence School – later Bletchley Park.</li> <li>• Sometimes the code was 5 letter code which was so boring, but was enlivened by 'Japanese Diplomatic' in plain language. Due to the shift work our group enlarged. Most of the other girls were from Sharps Toffee Factory in Maidstone. I really quite enjoyed that part. Being a late arrival of six years into a family of four, it was fun meeting other girls with totally different backgrounds and experiences. I think I learnt quite fast!</li> <li>• In 1940 when the invasion scare was on, we were closed down and everyone moved on. I went to HQ South Western Command at the old barracks at Hounslow. I forgot to mention that we were all Sergeants at Bridgewoods – maybe because we were doing 'secret' work, so at Hounslow I was in charge of a shift, and doing a job I had had no training for. But it was a lot of fun and I had a lovely shift of operators who tolerated my ignorance and trained me!</li> <li>• We lived in married quarters, four to a room. The Camp Commandant thought we would be safer on the floor, rather than iron beds, so we lost our beds and all slept on the floor throughout the raids which we largely ignored. I found a nice boyfriend – he wanted me to marry him, but my protective mother wouldn't allow such goings on – I was then 20. How things have changed. I enjoyed my job at Hounslow, but later got posted to GHQ Cheltenham, a much bigger War Office communication centre. We were taken from our Hotel billets by lorry out to the centre which was housed in what was intended to be a reservoir! I wonder if it ever got converted after our occupation? Here I was thrown in at the deep end again. I was taken to a huge room, the switchboards, 9 of them, stretched across the room. Lights flashing, every other position with an operator to make the connections, a bit like an old fashioned telephone switchboard. I sat at a desk to answer queries, questions on routing, and reading terrible handwriting often. We did three weeks on this, then we were back in the War Office communication room – it made a change. I had a lovely team, who gave me a lovely present when I left for OCTU.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Photos:</b></p>	