

## NX113835 LANCE CORPORAL

### LESLIE LEONARD HODGES



Left to Right Jack Seigert Koorawatha  
Les Hodges Greenethorpe  
Eric Cramp Cowra



Photo taken in Rust Grand Bdyk 14.9 Southport.  
standing L to R Les Hodges Greenethorpe  
Jack Seigert Koorawatha  
Ralph Gruber Cowra  
sitting L to R Frank Ryder Grenfell  
Charlie Stendell Cowra  
Alf Burt Koorawatha.  
Approx position left of New Fire Station Southport  
Nerang Rd.

Leslie Leonard Hodges was born in Hurstville, Sydney, on the 8th June 1917. His parents were William and Edith Hodges of "Redbank", Greenethorpe. Les was the youngest in his family. He had a brother William (Bill) and a sister, Gwendolyn Elizabeth (Betty).

Les grew up on the family farm at Greenethorpe. He attended Greenethorpe Public School as had Bill and Betty and it was here that he established many friendships with other local children some of whom he was later to serve with in the Army. Les did all his schooling at Greenethorpe until the age of 14 when he began full time work on "Redbank" with his father and brother Bill. Over the years he and Bill formed an inseparable team and by the time he was 20 they ran the farm together. Like many of their neighbours they grew wheat and raised sheep. Les became adept at operating and maintaining all farm machinery, a skill which would be of great benefit in his time in the Army.

At this time Les' life and friends revolved around "Redbank" and the surrounding area. He and Bill worked hard. Les was a keen photographer and had a 16mm movie camera with which he recorded local events, weddings and the Bathurst motor bike races. Some of these movies remain today and they give a great insight to his life in the 1930s.

When war broke out in 1939, Les was working on "Redbank". He registered for service as was required and in November 1941 he was called up for service in the Citizen Military Forces. He, along with some of his friends from the Greenethorpe area including Jack Seigert and Alf Burt from Koorawatha, Ralph Gruber and Charlie Stendell from Cowra and Frank Ryder from Grenfell, enlisted at Koorawatha on 24 November 1941. After some initial recruit training in Goulburn and Kapooka, he was posted to the 3rd Army Tank Battalion on 30th December 1941 and moved with his unit from Goulburn to Greta in the Hunter Valley. His unit was equipped with Matilda Infantry Tanks but much of their early training was conducted using two-man Dutch Light tanks. On 1 March 1942 Les was promoted to Lance Corporal.

In July 1942 Les was transferred to the 2nd AIF and became eligible to be posted overseas on operational service. In September 1943 he was posted to the South Queensland area and continued his training in the areas around Southport, Nerang and Caloundra. He was by this time qualified as a Driver Operator and trained on Matilda tanks as well as variety of other military vehicles. In March 1944 he was transferred from 3rd Army Tank Battalion to the 4th Australia Armoured Brigade and became involved with the trials of specialist armoured vehicles and further preparation for overseas service.

On 25 August 1944 he embarked on the MV Duntroon and later disembarked in Madang to commence his operational service in New Guinea. His unit provided specialist Armoured Corps personnel and vehicles for operations in the jungle and to support infantry actions against the Japanese forces remaining on New Guinea. Les was also involved with further trials of armoured vehicles for use in the jungle.

After 6 months in New Guinea Les embarked on the Liberty Ship, MV Charles Goodnight on 12 February 1945 to return to Australia. He landed in Sydney on 20 February 1945 and returned to his unit in Queensland.

The name of this ship was a constant source of amusement for Les for the rest of his life. The Charles Goodnight was one of thousands of Liberty ships built during the war to transport men and equipment in all theatres of the war. The Charles Goodnight was named after a famous cattle rancher and Indian fighter from Texas who had also fought as a Confederate in the American Civil War.

Les spent the remainder of his service in Southern Queensland with the 4th Armoured Brigade which at this stage, was the only Armoured Brigade remaining in the Army. He continued to be involved in trials of new and specialist armoured vehicles, but the war was winding down and the chance for further operational service in the Armoured Corps was remote. During this period he was hospitalised twice, once for malaria picked up while in New Guinea. In October 1945 he sought discharge from the Army and was moved to Sydney to undergo the discharge process. He was discharged on 1 November 1945. He had served 1403 days as a soldier including 1118 days on active service in Australia and 180 days active service overseas in New Guinea.

He returned to Greenethorpe and to "Redbank" and to farming in partnership with his brother, Bill who had looked after the farm and family while Les was away. That partnership was to last 60 years.

After the war he enjoyed travelling with members of his family and they visited much of Australia together. On a trip to Manly in NSW with his mother and sister he met Helen Luxton from Caulfield North and they married in Melbourne in August 1958. Les and Helen came back to the farm and the house Les had had built for them by Alf and Reg Burt called "Cudgee". This was their home for the rest of his life and remains Helen's home today. Here they raised their children Leanne and Warwick.

Warwick still farms "Redbank" and Leanne owns "Bonnie Doon" next door. Les had made many friends while in the Army such as Alf Burt, Vic O'Malley, John Day, Ron Armstrong, Alan French, Ralph Gruber, Arthur Jones and Frank Ryder. Some of these he had known well before the war and their war service cemented the earlier relationships. All had done their part as soldiers during the Second World War, all returned safely and all remained great friends and regularly caught up for the rest of their lives.

Presented to the Soldiers Memorial Hall, Greenethorpe 25th April 2019