

Australian Postal History & Social Philately



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JAPAN'S SIGNING of the END of WWII & HMAS SHROPSHIRE at TOKYO BAY

Amongst Australian covers celebrating this important event, I consider that these two covers deserve to be called unique, the first for the exquisite artistry of the black ink drawing, and the second for the availability of the enclosed letter. The first cover suffers imperfections of 'foxing' on the front and tears on the reverse, but the rendition of Mount Fuji, the cherry blossoms and the Japanese script, more than compensate. There is a hand-printed AIR MAIL, a faint black "H.M.A.S. SHROPSHIRE"/ Official Signing Of / Japanese Surrender handstamp, and the 3d brown KGVI Australian stamp is postmarked TOKYO BAY/ 2 nd SEPT/ 1945/ JAPAN. Even the addressee's name is carefully printed and it was sent to a Randwick, Sydney, N.S.W. address. The reverse has no postmarks or other markings (Figure 1).



The second cover is a relatively ordinary Air Mail cover addressed to a Mr. H.G. Waterman of Adelaide. The same 3d stamp is postmarked identically and there is a large purple H.M.A./SHIPS handstamp (Figure 2).



The reverse has the identical "H.M.A.S. SHROPSHIRE"/ Official Signing Of/ Japanese Surrender purple hand-stamp and the sender is identified as 'Teleg Waterman WH, HMAS "SHROPSHIRE", Tokyo Bay, Japan (Figure 3).



The bonus is an almost completely legible letter which I was able to transcribe as follows:

Dear Dad

Tokyo Bay

1st September 1945

I guess you know my whereabouts from the BBC without reading this. Anyway, you will probably be pleased to receive this envelope as well. If it is marked as I selected it to be, it should be worth something in the stamp collector's world later on. I believe it will be stamped Tokyo Bay Mail or something like that. Hope you got my last letter OK written 21 st Aug., when I was at Manila. That was the city I told you I had a few afternoon's leave in. Don't know when I will be home again, but hope it won't be too long as I have no desire to remain here at Jap land. They can put it up their jumpers now. Old Hiro Hito has to sign on the dotted line to-morrow anyway, and he won't need to try any funny business either with the force we've got here comprising all allies. That damned Jap battle ship *Nagato* that we at the (Navy) squadron i.e. Shropshire, Warramunga, Hobart & Bataan..... had been after but she had too much start on us each time. She is lying just offshore from Yokohama away in a corner of her own, she stinks anyway. Will finish off now Dad, hoping you are well, Cheers now, love Bill.

I have confirmed that the Shropshire was part of the force at the Balikpapan landings on 3 July 1945, and then returned to the Philippines where she was at the time the Japanese surrendered. She sailed for Tokyo Bay and was present for the surrender ceremony. She remained in Japanese waters until 17 November when the Broad Pendant of the Commodore Commanding Australian Squadron was transferred to HMAS Hobart and the HMAS Shropshire departed for Sydney.

William Holmes Waterman, Telegraphist in The Royal Australian Navy (Service Number PA/3233) has been identified as the sender of the letter to his father. He was born on 14 March 1924 at Riverton, South Australia and he enlisted on 1 December 1942 at the age of 18, and was discharged on 26 September 1946.

The photograph taken on the deck of the USS Missouri during the surrender ceremonies on 2 September 1945 shows in the front row Japanese Foreign Minister Mamoru Shigemitsu, in top hat and with cane, and General Yoshijiro Umezu, Chief of the Army General Staff, as well other Japanese political members and armed forces members (Figure 4).



This cover shows that the HMAS Hobart was also in Tokyo Bay as evidenced by an unusual purple unframed postmark H.M.A.S. HOBART/ 2 SEPT/ 1945/ TOKYO JAPAN. Another feature was that the usual 3d Australian stamp was cancelled with a barred obliterator (Figure 5).



A memorable day celebrated by many Australian philatelic history items.
Could Mr. H.G. Waterman of Adelaide been a stamp collector?

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