

## The Small Wooden Box – A Man's Life from World War 2 Christian William John (Jack) Watson

The wooden box, with sliding lid, is believed to have been made by TX5466 Jack Watson, while a Japanese Prisoner of War, and used to store his rice ration. It measures 17.5 cm long by 12 cm wide and 5.5 cm deep, made from scraps of timber of varying thickness, from 5 to 10 mm, joined by nails. The two straps that secure the lid, with 78 D.D.2 carved in it, are light steel bands. The box is a rare example of a homemade item that an Australian soldier used to survive.

The Watson family later used the box to store Army documents issued to Jack, along with documents they were sent doing his incarceration. The documents provide a greater insight into the life of a POW than that detailed in an Army Record.



**Jack Watson's Box 78 D.D.2**

From bottom left, clockwise: Demobilisation Procedure Book, Record of Service Book, Original Pay Book, Mor Pork Tin, Missal Religious Booklet, Subsequent Paybooks, RSSAILA (NSW Branch) Welcome Home Card, Telegrams and Japanese POW Status Cards. What the numbers and letters represent is yet to be identified, but could relate to a POW identification, used by the International Red Cross Organisation. Not shown are Jack's war medals and ribbons, unit colour patch and Service Identification Tags.

## Telegrams

The six surviving Telegrams sent to Caroline Watson, from 1942 through to 1945, are five from the Government (with the incorrect second initial), and one from Jack. As Telegrams were charged by the word they are succinct, and interestingly the Official ones are not in Jack's WW2 Service Record.

**Government Telegrams.** They were all sent from Hobart to the Currie Post Office on King Island where they were typed or handwritten:

12 June 1942, from the Minister for the Army advising that TX5466 Pte C W J Watson has been reported prisoner of war and extending his sincere sympathy. By this time Jack had been a POW for four months.

20 June 1943, sent from Hobart, again from the Minister advising that Jack is interned in a Camp in Java.

29 September 1945 sent from Hobart, from the Minister for the Army; finally some good news for the family:

T.G. 42A.

FUNDS MAY BE QUICKLY, SAFELY AND ECONOMICALLY TRANSFERRED BY MONEY ORDER TELEGRAM. (PLEASE TURN OVER)

AUSTRALIA.—POSTMASTER-GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT.

**RECEIVED TELEGRAM**  
**URGENT RATE.**

The first line of this telegram contains the following particulars in the order named.

Office of Origin. Words. Time Lodged. No.

HOBART 64/1 3pm

Remarks. Sch. C 2253—11/1938

To PERSONAL POSTAL ACKNOWLEDGMENT DELIVERY  
MRS C D WATSON  
CURRIE KING ISLAND.

IT IS WITH PLEASURE THAT I HAVE TO INFORM YOU THAT TX 5466 PTE C W J WATSON WAS RECOVERED FROM JAPANESE ON 15 SEPTEMBER 1945 AND IS IN MANILA CONCENTRATION AREA STOP RECEIVING ADDRESS FOR MAIL UNTIL RETURN TO AUSTRALIA LIBERATED AUSTRALIA P W CARE 3 AUSTRALIA P W RECEPTION GROUP AUSTRALIA

MINISTER FOR THE ARMY.  
3 55p/eab.

13 October 1945, from the Tasmanian Echelon and Records (Army) informing that TX5466 Pte C W J Watson is expected to arrive Sydney per HMS Speaker Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> October.

18 October 1945, from the Tasmanian Echelon and Records advising that TX5466 Pte C W J Watson is expected to depart Essendon for King Island at 10.30 Friday 19<sup>th</sup> October.

**Jack's Telegram.** This was sent from the Military Post Office (Mil PO) at Royal Park in Melbourne, on 18 October 1945, to his wife with the words, 'Leaving Melbourne tomorrow by plane for home Jack'.



T.G. 42. COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA—POSTMASTER-GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT.

Funds may be Quickly, Safely and Economically Transferred by **MONEY ORDER TELEGRAM.**

Sch. C.3873—7/1942.

**TELEGRAM**

This Telegram has been received subject to the Post and Telegraph Act and Regulations. The time received at this office is shown at the end of the message.

The date stamp indicates the date of reception and lodgment also, unless an earlier date is shown after the time of lodgment.

Office Date Stamp  
T. 180045 PM  
No. 1618

Office of Origin. No. of Words. Time of Lodgment.

Royal Park Melbourne 15

Mrs J. Watson  
East Wickham  
King Island Tas  
Leaving Melbourne tomorrow by  
plane for home Jack

331/88

Royal Park was the Army Recruiting and Reinforcement Depot used, during the earlier years of WW2, to prepare trainees for posting to units and later as a holding depot, while soldiers awaited eventual discharge.

### POW Status/Notification Cards

Caroline Watson was sent four cards by the Japanese Imperial Army where Jack was able to essentially advise that he was still alive. The format was initially sentences that could be struck through and later where the POW could write a short paragraph. They are:

Three were sent while Jack was in the Number 4 Camp Thailand working on the Burma - Thai Railway (12 January 1944, 10 June 1944 and undated).

The last one was sent from Fukuoka in Japan, and although undated must have been sent in 1945 before he was liberated.

Although the information is scant it does allow his condition and circumstances to be gauged, along with what the Japanese Censor would allow as the war progressed.

**IMPERIAL JAPANESE ARMY**

Date 12 Jan 1944

Your mails (and ) are received with thanks.

My health is (good, usual, poor).

I am ~~ill in hospital.~~

I am working for pay (I am paid monthly salary).

I am ~~not working.~~

My best regards to GEORGE, RAY, DORRIS, THELMA,  
LINDSAY, LEO, LOUIE,

Yours ever,  
JACK

**SERVICE DES PRISONNIERS DE GUERRE**

Name C. W. J. WATSON  
Nationality AUSTRALIAN  
Rank PRIVATE  
Camp No. 4 P. O. W. Camp, Thailand.

To: MRS CAROLINE WATSON,  
EAST WICKHAM  
KING ISLAND  
TASMANIA  
AUSTRALIA

3 PASSED BY CENSOR

The card sent on 12 January 1944 was of the strikethrough type, and Jack mentions seven people by Christian Name; however, on 10 June he just states Wife and Son, and the final undated one from Thailand he wrote, 'Yourself and Geoff'.



福岡俘虜收容所俘虜郵便

IMPERIAL JAPANESE ARMY

Well, Carrie, I hope you and Jack are well,  
as I am very well myself. I am always thinking  
of you and Jack, and won't I be glad to get  
home to you two.

With the best of love. *Jack.*

FROM:

Name Christian William John Watson, TX 5466.

Nationality Australian.

Rank Private.

Camp Fukuoka.

3  
PASSED  
BY  
CENSOR  
260

TO :  
Mrs. J. Watson,  
East Wickham.  
KING ISLAND.  
Tasmania.  
Australia.

俘虜郵便

きがは便郵

The undated card, circa 1945, sent from Fukuoka camp in Japan allowed Jack to use his own words (albeit still subject censorship). The camp was located near the Mitsui Kozan coal mine on the island of Kyushu, the most southerly Japanese island. The capital of Kyushu is Nagasaki where an atomic bomb was dropped (see Geoff Watson's document – A Son's Memories of his Parents).

Jack's words to his wife Caroline, noting that 'Jack' is his son Geoff:

Well, Carrie, I hope you and Jack are well, as I am very well myself. I am always thinking of you and Jack, and won't I be glad to get home to you two.  
With the best of love. Jack.

## Summary

Combining all the information indicates that after Jack's imprisonment on Timor, he was moved to Java, then Thailand and finally to Japan. Because of the delay in identifying where a POW was located, the Java date of June 1943 should only be taken as indicative.

Although Jack survived his imprisonment, he suggests through his scant words that he was suffering physically and mentally. However, there was an undoubtable will to survive and his return to farming at East Wickham on King Island enabled him to achieve some sense of normality.



*Jack and his horse on the family farm at East Wickham, circa 1950, with the home in the background. It is understood that he never had a car driver's licence but did buy a Chev for his son Geoff.*

## Acknowledgements

The author gratefully acknowledges the Watson family – Geoffrey, wife Peg and son Peter – for allowing the information including the photo of Jack and his horse, on Jack Watson to be shared with the Veteran and wider community.

**Gary Barker ©**

President King Island RSL Sub branch  
10 January 2025