



On 23 April 1945 this message from an Australian prisoner of war in Japan echoed across the world on short-wave radio.

Dear Mother, my health is excellent. Love to family, Ted and everyone, hope happy ending soon. Jack Dooley of Maroubra, Kirk Nicholas of Croydon, Jim McHugh, Roseville, Jack McLennon, Armadale, here and all well. Your loving son, John.

The message was read by an English-speaking announcer on a program named *Postman Calls*, who went on:

We're right there with you, John, on that happy ending and hope the good folks around Sydney will pass your message on to your mother, Mrs Ivy Mary Down, 54 Macquarie Street, Parramatta, Sydney.

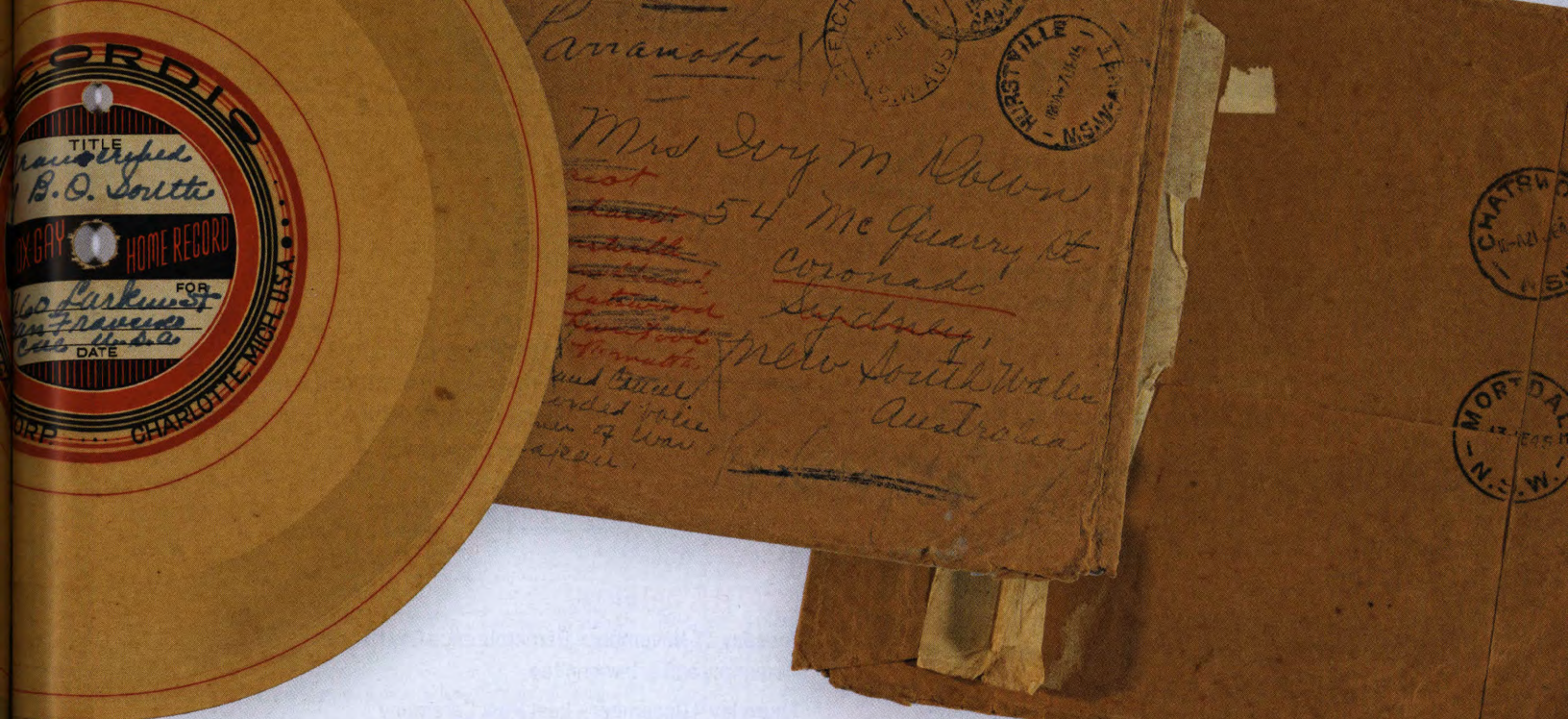
The message was from Sergeant John Down, a prisoner in Taisho camp, to his family in Sydney. By 1945 thousands of prisoner-of-war messages like John's had been broadcast by Radio Tokyo as



SHORT WAVES OF HOPE?

RADIO MESSAGES FROM ALLIED PRISONERS WERE BROADCAST BY RADIO TOKYO.





part of Japanese propaganda tactics. In 1942 Major Shigetsugu Tsuneishi, of the Japanese Imperial Army's Psychological Warfare unit, began producing radio content aimed at dividing Allied forces and demoralising the enemy. Though he knew nothing of broadcasting, Major Tsuneishi forced prisoners-of-war with broadcasting experience to host the propaganda programs.

The first prisoner he manipulated was an Australian, Major Charles Cousens, a radio announcer who had worked for Radio 2GB in Sydney before the war. Cousens was captured by the Japanese at the fall of Singapore and was instrumental in providing content for the first program, *The Zero Hour*. Cousens edited propaganda scripts, announced the news, and read prisoner-of-war messages in a flat, monotonous voice, often with double meanings undetectable by the Japanese.

He was also influential in the hiring and training of Iva Toguri, notorious as Tokyo Rose. Iva was a Japanese-American, introduced as "Orphan Ann", whose broadcasts were aimed at American troops, and who many believe helped to undermine the propaganda broadcasts by speaking in a kitsch, over-the-top way. After the war Major Cousens was subject to a court of enquiry in Australia for treason, but the case was later dropped. He also testified at Iva Toguri's treason trial in America in 1949. She served six years, and after a long campaign was finally pardoned by President Gerald Ford in 1977.

The Zero Hour led to other programs with the same structure, such as *Postman Calls*, on which Down's message was read by an English prisoner of war. Although at the time his family did not hear the message, many others picked up the broadcast on short-wave radio. In San Francisco, California, the broadcast of John's message was transferred to a magnetic wire spool recorder by an audio engineer identified only as B.O. South. It was then copied from the wire spool to a cardboard record and sent to John's mother, Mrs Ivy Down, eventually reaching her in Parramatta, NSW.

This record and its original envelope were recently donated to the Australian War Memorial, along with documents such as letters, record cards from short-wave listening posts, and postmaster telegrams like the one that informed Mrs Down of the broadcast. From 1942 to 1945 it had become common practice for official army listening posts, as well as civilians, to monitor short-wave radio for messages. These messages offered families some hope that their loved ones were still alive. Though the Memorial holds a good collection of documents relating to prisoner radio messages, an actual sound recording is quite rare. This recording is one of only two at the Australian War Memorial, both by B.O. South. It may be heard online at www.awm.gov.au/collection/S05891/.

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Above left:
Celebrating after their release, prisoners of war including John Down in the front row, second from left. AWM 019218

Bottom left:
The Radio Tokyo building in Japan. AWM DUKJ4432

Above: The record and envelope, front and back views of each. AWM S05891