

Thomas J Welch

The Motor Ship – “Anshun”

The “Anshun”, a motor ship of 3165 tons was built at Greenock in 1930, and spent her first service time based on the China coast.

With the commencement of World War II, she left Asian waters for Australia, from which she continued to operate in the area of New Guinea and adjacent islands against the enemy thrust southwards until the “Battle of Milne Bay”, where she was shelled by a Japanese warship.

Being in a position of discharging supplies at the time, there was no way of avoiding the confrontation, and she rolled onto her “Port” side but not submerged, and so remained in that position until the end of World War II.

In the interim, the United States had joined Australia, and brought over some previously “moth-balled” coastal freighters, and was staffing those with Australian officers and crews.

I had returned from the Australia-India Service, intent on joining this American Service, to find myself on the American steamship “West Cactus” as Third Engineer. The Chief Engineer was on Reginald B. Peck, who was, prior to the Milne Bay Battle, the Chief Engineer of the M.V. “Anshun”.

On our return to Milne Bay in late 1943, the Chief announced that he was going off to his “old ship” “Anshun” to try to find his typewriter. The “Anshun” was lying on the Port side, leaving the Starboard side accommodation “high and dry”.

Reginald Peck was not altogether of a slim build, but managed to enter through a cabin “Port Hole” of approximately sixteen inches diameter. He emerged in a short time carrying his beloved typewriter. The instrument was complete and not damaged. It was rusted and inoperable due to the effects of the tropical atmosphere over quite a long period.

For quite some weeks the Chief set about dismantling every moving part, every screw, spring, lever and tab etc, all de-rusted, polished and oiled and set out on cloths across his desk. Eventually it was re-assembled as only a man of meticulous approach would achieve. The instrument operated as a new machine.

With the cessation of hostilities, we all “went our own way”, the “Anshun” was raised and “patch-repaired” in the hull and towed to Sydney where it underwent a complete major repair, and then taken over by the Australian Shipping firm of James Patrick Company. “Anshun” was renamed “Culcairn” in keeping with the naming pattern of the Company. It operated on the Australian East Coast trade from 1946 to 1962, finally being sold to Hong Kong interests.

Long years since, my mind often goes back to those two ships and a good Chief Engineer, and his beloved typewriter.