

IT WAS AN OCCASION tinged with sadness when *ATHLONE CASTLE* sailed from Cape Town on 23rd July; she was given a rousing send-off by a large crowd of well-wishers and by all the ships in port at the time, the port tugs putting up a spectacular firehose display.

For this was the Mailship's swan song and on arrival at Southampton she was destined to make for Taiwan and the breakers yard.



The Athlone Castle leaving Southampton for Taiwan. Norman Hodson, our Southampton correspondent, took this farewell picture

INTO OBLIVION

In command for her last voyage in the Mail Service was Captain John Fisher, who had sailed as Fourth Officer in the ship on her maiden voyage in 1936. Another shipmate aboard, who had served in the vessel during her first two years afloat, was Mr. J. Painter, Chief Barman. As he brought her to her home port Captain Fisher was proud of his command, which he considered looked almost as well as on the first time she left England.

Built by Harland & Wolff Ltd., Belfast, the 25,567 ton liner completed 141 voyages in the South African Mail Service and, during the war, covered almost half a million miles as a troopship.

From former Radio Officer Mr. J. Hodgson comes a recollection of those

unsettled times just prior to the outbreak of hostilities: He writes:

"I joined the ship in 1938 and, as the Department concerned with keeping everyone on board informed about world news, we were soon involved in what came to be known as the 'Munich Crisis'.

"While tension was mounting in Europe, we left Cape Town for England carrying, among a full passenger list, the returning M.C.C. team. The cricketers had a boisterous send-off, and they were in a happy mood when the time came for the B.B.C. news to be relayed throughout the ship. In those days, neither the power of the B.B.C. transmitters nor the efficiency of the ship's broadcast receiving equipment were adequate for really satisfactory

results over long distances. However, it was just possible to understand most of what the news reader was saying, and the majority of the passengers were able to follow the trend of the news. Not so the M.C.C. They had installed themselves in the First Class Balcony, overlooking the Lounge, and they had settled down to sample the varied contents of the bar. Naturally, this had induced a general mood of hilarity and unconcern about distant political crises, and when a bigger than usual burst of laughter echoed through the Lounge, a very annoyed lady approached me as I stood in a corner checking the quality of the broadcast as it came from the loud speakers. She protested at the noise from the balcony, and asked me to have it stopped.

"I politely suggested that she should ask one of the Lounge stewards to see what he could do. The lady then asked me, 'Who are they?' I said 'The M.C.C.' She was obviously not cricket fan, for her only remark then was 'Ugh! Probably Germans!'

"I told Hammond (M.C.C. captain) later about the good lady's remark. He was not flattered."

ATHLONE CASTLE slipped quietly away from the Eastern Docks, Southampton, on Monday, 16th August. There was very little shipping to give her a fitting farewell, but the salute of the tugs was distantly echoed by the Mail vessels on the Western Docks.



Commemorative pewter tankards were presented by the senior officers to Captain J. B. Fisher (right) and Chief Engineer Mr. H. Stewart on the last northbound voyage of Athlone Castle.

Photo: Transocean Photographic Services