

= USS Siboney ( ID @-@ 2999 ) =

USS Siboney ( ID @-@ 2999 ) was a ship transport for the United States Navy during World War I. She was the sister ship of USS Orizaba ( ID @-@ 1536 ) but neither was part of a ship class . Launched as SS Oriente , she was soon renamed after Siboney , Cuba , a landing site of United States forces during the Spanish ? American War . After her navy service ended , she was SS Siboney for the Ward Line and American Export Lines . During World War II she served the U.S. Army as transport USAT Siboney and as hospital ship USAHS Charles A. Stafford .

As a transport during World War I , Siboney made 17 transatlantic voyages for the navy carrying troops to and from Europe , and had the shortest average in @-@ port turnaround time of all navy transports . During her maiden voyage , her steering gear malfunctioned which resulted in a collision between two other troopships in the convoy .

After her World War I service ended , Siboney was returned to the Ward Line and placed in New York ? Cuba ? Spain transatlantic service ; the liner ran aground at Vigo , Spain in September 1920 . Despite considerable damage , she was repaired and placed back in service . In late 1921 , Siboney was switched to New York ? Cuba ? Mexico routes , which were a popular and inexpensive way for Americans to escape Prohibition . In late 1940 , she was chartered to American Export Lines to return Americans fleeing Europe at the outset of World War II , making seven roundtrips from Jersey City , New Jersey , to Lisbon .

During World War II , Siboney was requisitioned by the War Shipping Administration and assigned to the War Department as a U.S. Army transport . She made several transatlantic trips and called at ports in Africa , the Middle East , Canada , the Caribbean , and the United Kingdom . During a 1944 overhaul , the ship was selected for conversion to a hospital ship . Renamed USAHS Charles A. Stafford after a U.S. Army doctor killed in action in Australia , the ship served in both the European and the Pacific Theatres . After the end of her army service , the ship was laid up in the National Defense Reserve Fleet in February 1948 , and sold for scrapping in 1957 .

= = World War I naval service = =

SS Oriente was a combination cargo and passenger vessel built by William Cramp and Sons , Philadelphia , for the Ward Line . In mid @-@ 1917 the United States Shipping Board ( USSB ) commandeered and received title to all private shipbuilding projects in progress , including the still @-@ incomplete Oriente and her sister ship Orizaba . Plans for both ships were modified for troop carrying duties . Oriente was launched on 15 August 1917 , renamed Siboney on 28 February 1918 , delivered to the navy on 8 April , and commissioned the same day , Commander A.T. Graham in command .

Siboney sailed from Philadelphia on 16 April as a unit of the Cruiser and Transport Force , and arrived at Newport News two days later to embark her first contingent of troops . She departed Hampton Roads on 23 April and joined her first convoy the following day . On 25 April , her rudder jammed ; and , in the ensuing confusion , transports Aeolus and Huron collided and had to return to New York . On 4 May , the convoy was joined by the war zone escort of eight destroyers and , on 6 May , Siboney arrived at Brest . Debarking her troops , she sailed the following day and arrived at Hoboken , New Jersey , on 15 May .

Siboney embarked her second contingent of troops at Lambert 's Point , Virginia , on 25 May and sailed the following day . The New York section of the convoy joined two days later and the ships entered the war zone on 6 June . In French waters , they were met by USS Corsair , a squadron of minesweepers , an American dirigible , and two French hydroplanes . Siboney arrived in Bordeaux on 8 June and departed the following day but remained anchored in the mouth of the Gironde until 13 June , awaiting the tanker Woonsocket . On 15 June , the convoy passed six empty lifeboats from the torpedoed transport USS President Lincoln . Siboney entered the American war zone on 20 June , and the next day rescued survivors of the British vessel , SS Dwinsk , which had been torpedoed three days previously . The transport arrived at New York on 22 June and anchored in the North River .

Siboney sailed for France on 30 June ; after delivering her troops at Brest on 12 July , she returned to New York on 25 July . She sailed again on 31 July . Before arriving at Brest on 12 August , she had to maneuver several times to evade possible submarine contacts . She arrived at New York on 22 August and was given a two @-@ week repair period .

On 4 September , Siboney sailed from New York on her fifth crossing and arrived at Saint @-@ Nazaire nine days later . On 15 September , she embarked a number of wounded troops and left Saint @-@ Nazaire the same day , but , due to heavy submarine activity , swung at anchor for several days before her convoy sailed . She arrived on 29 September at New York . On her sixth eastward crossing , between 6 and 15 October , an influenza epidemic broke out among the troops , killing a number of soldiers . Sailing from Brest on 16 October , the transport returned to New York on 24 October .

Siboney had already embarked troops for her next voyage when , on 3 November , she was ordered to disembark them . She sailed the following day with an army brigadier general and his staff , and a naval draft of 500 men . She arrived at Saint @-@ Nazaire on the 12 November , shortly after the announcement of the Armistice , and was met by a cheering crowd .

Siboney then began her peacetime mission of returning American veterans from Europe to the United States . After embarking 513 wounded men at Saint @-@ Nazaire , she moved to Brest on the 15th and took on 600 more passengers . She sailed the same day under escort and reached New York on 24 November . During the next ten months , Siboney made ten more round trips between the United States and France , returning over 3 @, @ 000 troops per trip when fully loaded . On one such return trip in August 1919 , Siboney carried Admiral Henry T. Mayo and Congressman Thomas S. Butler home from France .

Siboney returned to New York on 2 September at the conclusion of her 17th trip , having traveled over 115 @, @ 000 nautical miles ( 213 @, @ 000 km ) and transported approximately 55 @, @ 000 military passengers to and from French ports . According to the Statistical Department of the U.S. Navy , Siboney had the shortest average in @-@ port turnaround time out of 37 U.S. Navy transports used during World War I. The ship completed 17 round trips and had an average turn @-@ around time of just under 30 days per trip , almost ten days shorter than the average of 39 @. @ 8 days .

On 10 September at Hoboken , Siboney was decommissioned and turned over to the War Department , who returned the ship to the Ward Line , her original owners .

= = Interwar civilian service = =

After her reacquisition , the Ward Line placed SS Siboney in transatlantic service on a New York to Havana , Tenerife , Bilbao , Santander , and Vigo route . On 9 September 1920 , the ship ran aground in the harbor at Vigo . Initial efforts to re @-@ float her were unsuccessful , but by late October , Siboney had been repaired enough to make it to Shields . Despite considerable damage , Siboney was refitted and placed in service again and , by March 1921 , the Ward Line was advertising passage to Spain via Havana aboard her . The Ward Line , however , abandoned the New York ? Cuba ? Spain service later in 1921 due to a lack of passengers .

By November 1921 , Siboney was placed in New York ? Cuba ? Mexico service , where business thrived , in part because of Prohibition in the United States . Ward Line cruises to Havana were one of the quickest and least expensive ways to what one author called " alcohol @-@ enriched vacations " . A typical route from this time period would sail from New York and call at Nassau , Havana , Progreso , Veracruz , and Tampico , skipping Nassau on the return . Prohibition also had a more direct effect on Siboney and her crew . On 27 June 1922 , Siboney ? freshly returned from Havana with a load of pineapples ? was raided by United States Customs Service inspectors who seized 300 bottles of smuggled liquor on board . In December 1923 , four boiler room workers were arrested when police became suspicious of a man who had apparently just delivered a supply of alcohol to the docked ship .

Siboney underwent a major refit in 1924 during which time she was replaced on her routes by SS Yucatán , formerly the North German Lloyd ship Prinz Waldemar . After returning to service for the

Ward Line , Siboney was the first to relay messages from Miami about the severity of the Great Miami Hurricane when she passed there shortly after the storm hit in September 1926 .

On 18 February 1928 , Siboney rammed and sank the coal barge Seneca off Ambrose Light during a snowstorm ; the barge had been cut down in 1915 from SS Seneca , coincidentally , a former Ward Line ship . Bad luck continued for Siboney on 5 January 1929 , when she rammed and sank the Bauer Towing Company tug Phillip Hoffman off the Battery , killing the tug ' s engineer .

Siboney continued her same routes into the 1930s , and by 1933 typical runs for Siboney were from New York to Havana , Progreso , and Veracruz and back , omitting Progreso on the return . On one such return trip from Veracruz and Havana in April 1935 , a passenger had \$ 5 @, @ 000 worth of diamond and platinum jewelry stolen while on board . By 1935 , multiple public relations disasters for the Ward Line - the fire and sinking of Morro Castle off New Jersey in 1934 and the grounding of Havana and the sinking of Mohawk in the months that followed - caused the " Ward Line " name to be dropped in favor of the " Cuba Mail Line " moniker . By 1939 , Siboney , still on the New York - Cuba - Mexico route , sported a new paint scheme of " dove grey " hull and black funnels with white markings to reflect this change in name . In late 1940 , however , the struggling Cuba Mail Line chartered Siboney to American Export Lines which employed her on Jersey City - Lisbon service . During her American Export service , one of her passengers to the U.S. was French aviator and writer Antoine de Saint Exupéry , when he immigrated in January 1941 to Asharoken , New York after Germany ' s armistice with France .

On 12 April 1941 at 13 : 30 , 320 nautical miles ( 590 km ) out of Lisbon , the ship - painted with a large American flag and " American Export " lettering on each side - was accosted by " two submarine chasers flying British ensigns " that fired shots over Siboney ' s bow , one of which landed less than 100 feet ( 30 m ) away from the ship . According to Siboney ' s captain , Wenzel Habel , the two ships were British corvette types marked " K @-@ 25 " and " K @-@ 125 " - which may have been Flower @-@ class corvettes HMS Azalea ( K25 ) and HMCS Kenogami ( K125 ) . After answering questions from " K @-@ 25 " shouted via loudspeaker , Siboney was allowed to resume her course . Habel filed a protest with British officials when Siboney docked at Bermuda .

= = World War II Army service = =

At the conclusion of her seventh and final journey for American Export , Siboney was handed over on 28 May 1941 to the U.S. Army for transport duty . After a hasty outfitting , the redesignated USAT Siboney was put to work transporting troops . Based in New York , she made trips up and down the Atlantic and into the Caribbean , and , by the end of 1941 , had called at Bermuda , San Juan , Trinidad , St. John ' s , Charleston , Newport News , Cristóbal , Jamaica , and Panama .

December 1941 saw Siboney depart from New York to Trinidad and on to Cape Town , then sailing up the east coast of Africa to Basra , Iraq , and Bandar Shahpur , Iran . The ship returned to Cape Town via Aden and underwent routine boiler repairs there , before returning to New York in April 1942 . After undergoing six weeks of repairs at Bethlehem Steel Company , the transport sailed for Halifax , Iceland , and the Clyde , Scotland , in late May , returning to New York in July . Another trip to England and back followed in September 1942 .

In early December 1942 Siboney departed for Newfoundland but put into Halifax for two months of drydocking and repairs after she collided with SS City of Kimberly . After returning to New York in February 1943 , she made several transatlantic runs , calling at Casablanca , Oran , Gibraltar , Clyde , Durban , Rio de Janeiro , Trinidad , and Cuba over the next 11 months . Siboney returned to New York for major repairs and reboiling at Bethlehem Steel Co . In January 1944 , while undergoing this work , the ship was selected for conversion to a hospital ship .

The ship was renamed USAHS Charles A. Stafford after Captain Charles A. Stafford of the U.S. Army Medical Corps , who was killed during the air raid on Broome , Western Australia , while participating in the evacuation of Java on 3 March 1942 . With her conversion complete in September 1944 , the Stafford , equipped with new boilers , a single stack in place of her original two , and other improvements , moved to her new homeport of Charleston . From that port the ship made monthly runs to the United Kingdom and back until May 1945 , interrupting the pattern only

once for a trip to Gibraltar and Marseilles . Steaming to New York at the conclusion of her last transatlantic run , Charles A. Stafford was overhauled for duty in the South Pacific .

With the alterations complete , the veteran ship ? now homeported at Los Angeles ? sailed in August 1945 for Cristobál and on to Honolulu , Manila , Biak , Leyte , and Mindoro . After returning to Los Angeles in October , the Stafford sailed for Honolulu , Manila , and Eniwetok and back .

After sailing to her new homeport of New York via the Panama Canal during February 1946 , Charles A. Stafford resumed her North Atlantic runs to the UK , which continued until February 1948 , at which time she was laid up in Maritime Commission 's James River Reserve Fleet . Kept on reserve under her original name of Siboney , the ship was delivered by the Maritime Administration to Bethlehem Steel for scrapping on 22 January 1957 .