

= SS El Oriente =

SS El Oriente was a cargo ship built in 1910 for the Morgan Line , a subsidiary of the Southern Pacific Company . During World War I , she was known as USS El Oriente (ID @-@ 4504) in service with the United States Navy . At the end of war , she reverted to her original name of SS El Oriente . During World War II she was chartered by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) as SS Henri Dunant (sometimes also spelled Henry Dunant) , but reverted to her original name of SS El Oriente at the end of the charter .

SS El Oriente was one of four sister ships that carried cargo and a limited number of passengers for the Morgan Line . She was acquired by the U.S. Navy in July 1918 , and converted to carry horses and mules to France , and after the Armistice , was converted again to carry American troops home from Europe .

El Oriente returned to the Morgan Line in 1919 and sailed with them until June 1941 , when the entire Morgan Line fleet was purchased by the United States Maritime Commission . El Oriente served as a civilian @-@ crewed cargo ship during World War II , sailing primarily between the United States and the United Kingdom . In September 1944 , she was chartered by the ICRC and sailed under the Swiss flag carrying food parcels to American prisoners of war held in German camps . Henri Dunant continued to sail under Swiss charter until October 1945 , when she was returned to the United States and reverted to her former name . El Oriente was placed in the James River Reserve Fleet in November 1945 , and was sold for scrapping in July 1946 .

= = Early career = =

SS El Oriente was a cargo and passenger steamship launched on 11 May 1910 by the Newport News Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Co. of Newport News , Virginia (yard no . 132) , and delivered to the Atlantic division of the Morgan Line on 24 October 1910 . She was the third of four sister ships ; the other three being El Sol , El Mundo , and El Occidente . El Oriente was 6 @,@ 008 gross register tons (GRT) , was 430 feet 2 inches (131 @.@ 11 m) long by 53 feet 1 inch (16 @.@ 18 m) abeam , and made 16 knots (30 km / h) . The vessel sailed for the Morgan Line , the brand name of the Southern Pacific Steamship Company (a subsidiary of the Southern Pacific Railroad) , which employed her to carry cargo and a limited number of passengers between New York ; New Orleans , the eastern terminus of the Southern Pacific line ; and Galveston , Texas .

= = World War I = =

After the United States declared war on Germany in April 1917 , it 's unclear what role , if any , El Oriente played early on in the war . Her sister ships El Occidente and El Sol were both requisitioned by the United States Shipping Board (USSB) on behalf of the United States Army , and both were designated as animal transport ships . If El Oriente were used by the Army as an animal transport ship , she would have needed a refit which typically meant that any second- or third @-@ class passenger accommodations had to be ripped out and replaced with ramps and stalls for the horses and mules carried . It is known that El Oriente sailed in an American convoy to France on 16 April 1918 with U.S. Navy transports Maui , Calamares , Pocahontas , and Madawaska , British transports Czar and Czaritza , and U.S. cruiser Seattle , and reached France on 28 April .

The next recorded activity of El Oriente was on 29 July , when she was acquired by the U.S. Navy and commissioned the same day with Lieutenant Commander William Delahanty , USNRF , in command . El Oriente was assigned to the Naval Overseas Transportation Service (NOTS) and carried animals and supplies for the U.S. Army , joining her two sister ships , El Sol and El Occidente in that duty .

El Oriente 's first Navy voyage to France began when she sailed from Newport News with 500 animals on 11 August . Unlike earlier animal transport crossings for the Army , where there was as much as a 4 % mortality rate , the voyages in August 1918 and after carried a transport veterinarian and a permanent veterinary detachment to care for the animals while on board the ship . As part of

this new program , El Oriente delivered her full load of horses and mules ? suffering no losses ? at Bordeaux on 2 September . El Oriente made an additional roundtrip with 500 more animals in October , losing only three of her equine cargo during the voyage . El Oriente continued sailing for the NOTS through April 1919 , sometimes carrying a small number of troops on return voyages to the United States . At that time El Oriente was converted to carry troops , and assigned to the Cruiser and Transport Force to help return larger numbers American servicemen from Europe .

She sailed on 11 June for Bordeaux and returned with officers and men of the 6th Cavalry Regiment on 4 July . She made additional voyages in July and August , returning 978 members of the 3rd Infantry Division to Philadelphia on the latter voyage . In all , El Oriente returned 2 @, @ 986 healthy and wounded American servicemen from France in three voyages . On 15 September at Philadelphia , El Oriente was decommissioned , and returned to the Morgan Line soon after .

= = Interwar civilian service = =

El Oriente resumed cargo service with the Morgan Line , and enjoyed a quiet career , typically sailing between New York and Galveston . One event of note occurred in February 1922 when El Oriente came upon the wreck of the schooner , Caldwell H. Colt , which had run aground on a reef near the Tortugas Light during a gale . When El Oriente came upon the hulk , only her captain remained alive , surviving without food or water for several days before his rescue . El Oriente continued on to Galveston and landed the man there .

= = World War II = =

In June 1941 , the United States Maritime Commission (USMC) announced that it had requisitioned the entire Morgan Line fleet of ten ships , including El Oriente and her remaining sister ships , El Occidente and El Mundo . The ships were to finish previously scheduled cargo runs and be handed over to the USMC over the following six weeks . The USMC had been charged with assembling a 2 @, @ 000 @, @ 000 GRT U.S. fleet to " aid the democracies " fighting Germany in World War II , and paid \$ 4 @. @ 7 million for the ships and a further \$ 2 @. @ 6 million for repairs and refits .

El Oriente was handed over to the USMC and assigned to United States Lines , Inc . , for operation . The cargo ship was placed under Panamanian registry by U.S. Lines . Little is known of El Oriente 's movements over the next eight months , but on 17 February El Oriente sailed from Houston , Texas , to Philadelphia and on to Reykjavík . From Reykjavík , she sailed to the Clyde , arriving there at the end of July . Over the next 5 months , El Oriente sailed around the British Isles , calling at Kirkwall , Belfast Lough , Barrow @-@ in @-@ Furness , and Liverpool , and back to Clyde in late December . From there , she sailed on one trip to Murmansk where she arrived on 27 January 1943 .

Murmansk had limited port facilities and slow unloading of cargo (often performed by Soviet women and political prisoners) , which , coupled with inclement weather and long waits for convoy escorts , often required lengthy stays by Allied cargo ships . El Oriente was no exception , staying in Murmansk for nearly five weeks . To compound the lengthy wait (and , often , accompanying boredom) faced by cargo ships waiting to unload , the nearest German airfield was 35 miles (56 km) away ? about 7 to 10 minutes flying time ? which gave almost no advance warning of air raids . German dive bombers would silently glide in below Soviet anti @-@ aircraft fire , drop their payloads , and fly away . El Oriente was caught in one such attack on 27 February , with four of the ship 's Naval Armed Guards men killed in the attack .

El Oriente departed Kola Inlet on 1 March and returned to Liverpool , from which she sailed in a convoy for New York on 6 April , and returned to Belfast Lough in late June . After calling at Barry and Milford Haven , El Oriente began two roundtrips to New York at the end of June . In October the ship visited Loch Ewe , Methil , and Immingham before returning to New York again in November . After another transatlantic crossing and circuit amongst British ports , El Oriente returned to New York in May 1944 .

In June , the cargo vessel sailed to Cuba , calling at Havana and Puerto Tarafa before returning to New York . She next sailed to La Guaira , Venezuela ; Maracaibo , Venezuela ; and Júcaro , Cuba , before returning to New York in mid August . El Oriente sailed to Philadelphia in mid September in preparation for a charter .

= = Red Cross ship = =

On 28 September 1944 , El Oriente was chartered by the International Committee of the Red Cross , reflagged as a Swiss ship , and renamed SS Henry Dunant (sometimes erroneously spelled as Henri Dunant) , after Red Cross movement founder Henry Dunant . She was last of 14 ships chartered by Swiss interests to sail under the Swiss flag during World War II . On 5 October , Henry Dunant departed Philadelphia with a cargo of mail and 900 @, @ 000 food parcels intended for Allied prisoners of war interned in German camps .

Henry Dunant continued sailing for the ICRC through 24 October 1945 . The ship returned to Norfolk , resumed her former name of El Oriente , and entered the James River Reserve Fleet on 7 November 1945 . On 3 July 1946 , El Oriente was sold for scrapping to the Patapsco Scrap Co . , of Baltimore , Maryland , for \$ 12 @, @ 175 .