

## Great Ships of the Seas: *America*

One of the most beautiful of ocean liners, she was certainly one of the finest and most popular liners of her time. Commissioned in 1940, the *America* was soon taken over by the government and outfitted for her wartime use as the troop ship *U.S.S. West Point*. She was not released until early 1946. For several years, she worked alone, until finally teamed up with the newer, larger, and faster *United States*. Many passengers preferred the *America's* slower pace, however.

In the early sixties, as transatlantic trade fell into decline, the *America* occasionally sailed to the Caribbean, but she wasn't designed for such cruises (no outdoor pool, for example).

In September 1963, she was seriously affected by a labor dispute and was laid up for several months, but she set sail again the following February. It was to be her final American season. With business falling off, she was rushed into early retirement.

The *America* was sold in November 1964 to the Greek-registered Chandris Group. She was renamed *Australis* and underwent conversion for transport of immigrants to Australia. Her accommodation was more than doubled from 1046 births to 2258, and she was noted as having the largest passenger capacity of any large liner then afloat.

As the *Australis*, the former *America* was a huge success, at least until the mid-seventies. By then, her Greek owners had lost the lucrative contract with Australia. She left Southampton on her last run in November 1977 and was then laid up in New Zealand. She was reactivated as a New York cruise ship, under her

original name, the *America*, but was withdrawn from service after two short trips.

Chandris once again renamed her, the *Italdis* this time, in 1979, and put her to work in the Mediterranean. She was soon sold as a hotel ship, the *Noga*, based in West Africa. She spent the rest of her remaining time in oblivion. She deserved better.

