



## *The Pamir*

The *Pamir* was a four masted steel barque, the last of the great square-rigged sailing ships to make a commercial voyage around Cape Horn, and a ship that had a special significance to New Zealand.

She was built in 1905 for the 'Flying P' line of Hamburg and originally used for carrying nitrate from Chile to Europe. During the First World War the ship evaded capture by sheltering in the neutral Canary Islands, but in 1920 she was allocated to Italy as part of war reparations and largely laid up until 1924, when her original owners re-purchased her for use on the nitrate trade again.

In 1931 she passed into Finnish ownership and formed part of the last fleet of large cargo carrying sailing ships operated by Captain Gustaf Erikson of Mariehamn.

*Pamir* began her visits to New Zealand in 1938 carrying guano (a type of manure). In 1941, while the ship was en route to Wellington from Mahe in the Seychelles Islands, Germany invaded Russia and because of the involvement of Germany in Finland that country technically became an enemy state. As a result, upon her arrival in Wellington *Pamir* was seized as a prize of war.

It was decided the Union Steam Ship Company would operate the ship for the New Zealand government. After an extensive refit she made five voyages to San Francisco and three to Vancouver, carrying crews that had a few Finns but were mainly made up of New Zealand officers, seamen and deck boys. When the war had ended the *Pamir* made a trip to Sydney and one to the United Kingdom, but suitable cargo was becoming difficult to find. In 1948 she was formally restored to the Finnish Government after the New Zealand government abandoned the idea of retaining her as a sail training ship. *Pamir* left the country for the last time on 1 February 1949, bound for Port Victoria to meet up with her near sister ship *Passat* for what was to be the last grain race from Australia to the United Kingdom. *Pamir* took 128 days to reach Falmouth in England; *Passat* 110 days to Queenstown, Ireland.

Both ships were idle for a time and then sold to be broken up as scrap at Antwerp, but received a last minute reprieve when purchased by a German ship owner, who had engines fitted to them and modern cargo handling gear installed. They were also converted to accommodate about 50 cadets. In 1954, however, the company went bankrupt and the vessels were sold. A trust was set up by a group of 40 German ship owners to operate the ships in a sail-training role for the West German navy whilst carrying cargo, usually to South America, returning with grain for Europe.

On 21 September 1957, while carrying a cargo of barley from Buenos Aires to Hamburg, *Pamir* was hit by hurricane 'Carrie' in the North Atlantic Ocean. She sent out a distress call that all sails had been lost, she was listing at 45 degrees (her cargo of loose barley probably shifted) and in danger of sinking. When rescue ships reached the area about 600 miles west south-west of the Azores only 6 survivors out of the 86 crew were found. *Passat* had also suffered in a storm and never again would a sailing ship combine the roles of carrying cargo and training cadets.

Many New Zealanders received their seafaring training on the *Pamir* (including two who later became harbour masters at Wellington) and the many people who remembered with great affection her association with this country from 1941 to 1949 felt the loss of this great sailing ship.

The New Zealand Pamir Association and the New Zealand section of the International Cape Horners preserve her memory. On 31 October 1998, during an international reunion of former crewmembers of the *Pamir*, a plaque in memory of the *Pamir* and those who sailed on her was unveiled on the Wellington waterfront.

Further reading: *Tall Ships Down*, Daniel S. Parrott. (Available at the Museum of Wellington City & Sea Shop).