



The Barque Pamir

Saturday afternoon in early August 1946 was a good time for a small boy to be hanging out on the Denman Wharf. He could fish for shiners. He could watch the tug *Billie B* pushing a barge that served as the vehicle ferry making many crossings from Buckley Bay. The *Billy B* was always worth watching as all travellers were required to make the crossing in the tug's cabin and they usually had to scramble over the railings between barge and tug. The barge carried three vehicles at a time. Some days the CPR steamship *Princess Mary* called at the wharf on her way up through the Gulf Islands and on to Comox and Powell River. But on this Saturday, the 3rd of August, there was a special treat. A four-mast sailing ship, the barque *Pamir* would be towed by, fully laden with coal from the Cumberland mines, outbound for New Zealand.

Pamir was a true working sailing ship, launched in 1905 to carry nitrates (guano) from the west coast of South America around Cape Horn to Germany. She made many such voyages up until 1931, interrupted by the First World War, and in the 1930's carried wheat from Australia to Britain under the Finnish flag.

When *Pamir* arrived in Wellington, New Zealand in 1941 with a cargo of guano she was seized by the government as a war prize. Sailing under the NZ flag during WW2 she made seven return crossings of the Pacific from Wellington to San Francisco and Vancouver.

Cumberland coal was highly regarded as 'steam coal' and in 1946 a trial cargo was bought for the NZ Railway steam engines. It took a week to load *Pamir* at Union Bay. The coal was directed down chutes into the holds,

and it had to be trimmed and levelled by hand into all the corners. She was the last of the big wind ships to load there. The mines were closed in 1953.

Pamir was towed by the steam tug *Island Warrior* from Baynes Sound down Georgia Strait and out Juan de Fuca Strait to be released beyond Cape Flattery. She was not again seen in these waters.

In 1949 *Pamir* was returned to her Finnish owners. They organized the last-ever working windjammer race between *Pamir* and the four-mast barque *Passat*, carrying wheat from Australia round the Horn to England and Ireland. The two vessels were extraordinarily well matched: *Passat* claiming the honors of making landfall at Cobh, Ireland after 124 days and *Pamir* docking at Falmouth after 128 days at sea.

In 1951 *Pamir* was refitted as a cadet training cargo ship sailing under the German flag. She made many voyages across the Atlantic between Germany and South America until in September 1957 she sank in a hurricane with the loss of 80 lives, only 6 of the crew surviving.

Perhaps someone here remembers *Pamir's* classic silhouette as she passed by that day 70 years ago. My own treasured memory is of seeing *Pamir's* towering spars when she was moored at the quay in Wellington in August 1947 and again in the summer of 1948-49.

John Millen