



Harbor pilot Lyman dead after accident

By Paul C. Curtis - The Garden Island

It was Capt. David "Kawika" Lyman who first told reporters about the local custom of members of the Hawaii Pilots Association taking the day's daily newspaper to captains of cruise ships they escorted in and out of Nawiliwili Harbor and the state's other ports.

He honored that tradition with copies of The Garden Island while here, and loved this island.

At one point in time not too long ago, while reporters and editors were in discussions with HPA leaders about the need to dredge, expand and reconfigure the entrance to Nawiliwili Harbor so that the largest of cruise ships had more than a few feet of maneuvering room before hitting shallow reef, Lyman, then president of the Hawaii Pilots Association, was considering allowing a reporter with a camera to accompany him on one of his assists in bringing one of the floating cities in or out of Nawiliwili.

He explained that, when he was at the helm of one of the large cruise ships, going out of the harbor, the act of turning over the helm to the ship's captain, and getting aboard the waiting pilot boat, is akin to a leap of faith, literally and figuratively.

It involves jumping from a 900-foot-long cruise ship to the deck of the waiting 20-foot-long pilot boat, a drop of a distance of around 10 vertical feet, sometimes in windy, stormy seas, with the tugboat rocking.

It was probably for that safety concern that the reporter-captain connection was never consummated.

On Sunday night, repeating a maneuver he had done countless times in the best and worst of conditions, something went terribly wrong.

While transitioning from the Island Princess cruise ship to the waiting pilot boat, Lyman was pitched overboard, injured by the pilot boat, possibly even the propeller, recovered by the pilot boat captain, and brought to Nawiliwili Small Boat Harbor, where members of an awaiting American Medical Response ambulance crew brought him to Wilcox Memorial Hospital, where he was pronounced dead.

He had successfully piloted the cruise ship into Nawiliwili Harbor earlier that day, and saw it safely seaward in what would be his last official act as a captain and pilot.

United States Coast Guard marine safety investigators were on the scene Sunday night, and continue their investigation because of the seriousness of the accident, said Petty Officer Brooksann Epiceno.

State and federal laws mandate that licensed, experienced harbor pilots be at the helm of large, foreign-flagged ships, including many cruise ships, maneuvering in and out of Hawai'i's harbors, with Nawiliwili considered the trickiest of them all.

While it is an occupation with high wages and built-in job security, because there are only a handful of licensed, experienced pilots in the state, it is also one that involves inherent dangers, including regular exposure to unpredictable elements, and that hazardous leap of faith that cost Lyman his life Sunday night.

The Nawiliwili Harbor entrance requires captains to perform a full "S" turn in order to avoid the protective seawall and jetty, sometimes with only a few feet to spare before shallow reefs come into play in the shallows of the northern section of the harbor, not far from Kalapaki Beach.

Waves along the eastern shore of Kaua'i Sunday night were around five to eight feet.

"Captain Dave Lyman was well known not only through-out all Hawai'i, but well across the United States and through-out the international seafaring world," said Tom Heberle, current HPA president.

"We are deeply saddened by the loss of our colleague in the course of duty on January 29, 2006. Pilots are critical to the safety and management of traffic throughout our harbor systems, and we will miss Dave's years of experience and expertise," Heberle said.

Information on services will be forthcoming, he concluded.