Hana Hou!

THE MAGAZINE OF HAWAIIAN AIRLINES

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Fakarava Dreaming

French Polynesia's atoll magnifique

One Step Beyond

Diamond Head's hidden coast

Living Makai

Honolulu Harbor's floating world

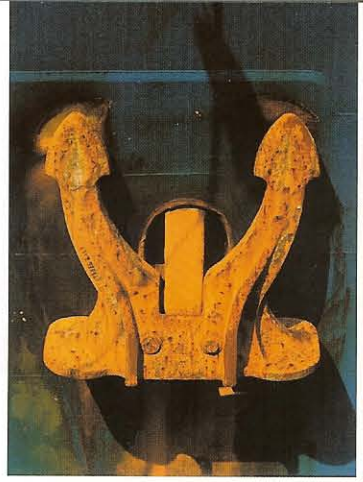
Your Complimentary Copy

Captain Steven Baker (left) pilots the container ship *Matsonia* into Honolulu Harbor while *Matsonia* captain B.J. Diggins looks on.

Opposite: Honolulu Harbor has been the focal point of Island commerce for more than a century. This photo was taken circa 1890—note the tugboat in left foreground.
(Photo: Ray Jerome Baker Collection, Bishop Museum)

To many of us locals, Honolulu Harbor is an abstraction— a big blank spot in the cartography of our minds. It's over there, on the other side of the highway from CompUSA and Restaurant Row. Driving past its fifty-three piers along Nimitz Highway, we may glimpse the Matson gantry cranes squatting on Sand Island like giant yellow golems. Impressive, but we've got to get to Dave & Buster's for pau hana drinks. And for the average tourist, the harbor is barely on the radar—a blot of industrial nastiness beyond the manicured frontier of Aloha Tower Marketplace. Unless you work on the waterfront or have to pick up a car you've shipped from the Mainland, the harbor is about the last place in paradise you'd choose to be. But cross the Rubicon of Nimitz Highway that divides the harbor from the city and you'll come to appreciate—in an unsettling way—just how tenuous life on an archipelago can be. Fully 80 percent of Hawai'i's consumer goods are imported, and of that 80 percent, nearly all of it (98.8 percent, according to a recent estimate), arrives by ship. Cement, clothing, PVC tubes, aquarium fish, decorative stone, ice cream, toilet paper, rubbah slippahs—you name it. If you've eaten it, worn it, watched it, driven it, smoked it or blown your nose in it, odds are five-to-one, it got here by ship.

All harbor work is inherently risky, but the transfer of pilots on to and off of massive, ocean-going vessels is particularly treacherous. Here Captain Ed Enos climbs down off the container ship *Navigator* after piloting it out of Honolulu Harbor.



"There's what I call the *mauka* side of Nimitz, and then there's the *makai*," said Captain Dave Lyman, who until his death last January had been one of Honolulu's most experienced pilots—the guys responsible for guiding the leviathan container ships in and out of the state's harbors. Mauka is Hawaiian for "toward the mountains," and makai is its opposite, "toward the sea." In Hawai'i, we use them simply to indicate direction, but Captain Lyman saw the terms as metaphors for different, often conflicting, attitudes about living on this island. "These days, people in Hawai'i have an agrarian mindset ... they look from the land to the ocean. But look at it from the sea. You get a completely different perspective on Honolulu."

He's right. Cruising past Buoy 7 on one of the harbor's zippy new pilot boats, Captain Lyman schooled me about life on the "other side of the highway." Seen from the water, Honolulu makes sense. The city's gleaming downtown buildings—every rivet of which came by sea—huddle around the harbor like kids at an ice cream truck. From this vantage, you realize that the *raison d'etre* for the city, and by connection for the whole state, is Honolulu Harbor.

Though today's harbor is a specialized high-tech industrial container port where few choose to tread, it wasn't always so. Captain Lyman, who piloted ships in and out of the harbor for thirty-one years, saw it all. He'd piloted every kind of ship there is: the old-style break-bulk freighters (the kind with the twin booms fore and aft), the goliath Matson and Horizon Lines container ships, cruise ships like the *Queen Elizabeth II* and *Queen Mary II*, even the Hawaiian sailing canoe *Hōkūle'a*; indeed, he was skipper that fateful night in 1978 when the vessel capsized in heavy seas near Lāna'i. It was Captain Lyman who eventually gave legendary waterman Eddie Aikau permission to take his surfboard and paddle for help. Aikau was never seen again; Lyman and the rest of his crew were rescued later that night.

Captain Lyman, an affable old salt with a breezy sense of humor and a permanent squint, wistfully recalled for me the days when the harbor was recognized as central to daily life in the Islands. "When the passenger ships like the *Lurline* would come in, Pier 10'd be crowded with people, streamers coming down, kids running to catch 'em, coin divers in the water, entertainers, newspaper reporters, forty lei-sellers out front. And this was a weekly occurrence, sometimes more. Every morning at 5:30, KGU radio would broadcast the day's instructions to the longshoremen: 'Gang A to Pier 1 to discharge hides, Gang E to Pier 19 to backload pineapple...' Everyone would hear it. If your dad or uncle wasn't a longshoreman, then you knew someone who was. Before jet airplanes started coming—don't get me wrong: I love the convenience of flying, I just hate what it did to the harbor—in those days, everyone was aware of the waterfront."

Indeed, there were few more aware of the waterfront than Captain Lyman, whose knowledge of its history and lore was—*is*—legendary. Pre-contact, Honolulu was a remote fishing village called Kou, probably named for a local chief. It was apparently not a very nice place. The *ali'i* avoided its heat and dust, preferring the shady palms and good surf of Waikīkī. Since the Hawaiians didn't need a harbor for their shallow-draft canoes, Kou didn't get much attention until Captain William Brown of the H.M.S. *Butterworth* became the first European to navigate the narrow entry in 1794. Brown is credited with naming the place "Fair Haven," which translates back into Hawaiian roughly as *Honolulu*. The discovery of a protected deep-water anchorage in the mid-Pacific made Honolulu the new darling of international commerce. The trade became so economically, politically and strategically important that in 1803, Kamehameha I moved his residence to Honolulu, setting up at Pākākā Point—near where Aloha Tower is today—to keep his eye on business. He didn't stay long—the noise and filth of the growing town drove him out by 1812—but the savvy ruler saw that he could turn a profit by levying fees and charging for piloting services, which in the early1800s meant towing the ships in by outrigger canoe.

Within a couple of decades, a tiny island backwater became the "Crossroads of the Pacific," first as a vital nexus in the fur trade involving the Pacific Northwest, China and New England. Hawai'i's only export commodity—salt—happened also to be useful in curing the hides. In the early 1800s, Honolulu became the center of a short-lived but profitable sandalwood trade which collapsed in the early 1820s when the resource was exhausted. Fortunately for the growing city, whaling arrived to fill the vacuum in 1820, sparking rapid commercial growth that continued well into the middle of the 19th century; major harbor improvements, including dredging and wharf construction, took full advantage of the boom. When the bottom fell out of whaling in the 1860s, sugar took up the slack. The improved harbor supported the development of Hawai'i's agriculture and tourism industries, and the harbor grew with them.

Captain Lyman peppered the history with interesting factoids: Alakea Street, which runs through downtown to the harbor, was paved with coral dredged out of the harbor—hence its name, Alakea, or "white road." He pointed out the location of the harbor's first "improvement," a derelict hull sunk at the foot of Nu'uanu Avenue in 1825 as a makeshift wharf. On the spot where Pier 1 now stands, ox teams once dragged the incoming vessels into port.

It's not America's biggest or the busiest port. Compared with mighty dreadnoughts like Oakland and Long Beach, Honolulu Harbor might be described as "cute." Its piers can't handle the biggest container ships out there. Even so, it's the centerpiece of one of the world's most efficient port systems, the hub of the state's "hub-and-spoke" harbor network. It's the only harbor in the state deep enough to accommodate the container ships that keep us all fed, clothed and housed. The short version of how it all works is this: One of the state's nine harbor pilots, like Captain Lyman, rides the pilot boat out a couple of miles offshore to meet inbound container ships. Tugs provide escort, pushing and pulling to help the ships negotiate the harbor's tight spots and nudge them up to the piers. Once moored, stevedores offload the containers with cranes and transfer them immediately to an armada of waiting trucks, which then zoom off to get the next shipment of iPods to the Apple Store. The smaller Neighbor Island harbors can't handle the big container ships, so the freight is loaded on barges in Honolulu and tugged to the spokes: Kawaihae and Hilo on the Big Island, Nāwiliwili and Port Allen on Kaua'i, Kahului on Maui, Kaumalapau on Lāna'i and Kaunakakai on Moloka'i.

The barges are then back-loaded with export commodities—pineapple, poi bags, scrap metal, live cattle and the latest craze: bottled water from the Big Island bound for Japan. The tugs haul the barges back to Honolulu, where the export freight is loaded onto the container ships headed for the West Coast and Asia. Depending on the size of a container ship and the nature of its cargo, it'll be in port for about a day.

There's nothing unusual about how the harbor works; it's pretty much the same deal in any container port around the world, large or small. What is unique, though, is our near-total reliance on the harbor as a lifeline, and the split-second timing its operation demands. Last year 3,500 ships called; that's a lot of moving and shaking, and it happens round-the-clock. Because Honolulu Harbor has precious little warehouse space, everything goes straight from the docks to the stores, what Randy Grune calls the "just-in-time" service market. Grune should know: He's the CEO of Hawai'i Stevedores, the company responsible for offloading the foreign freighters at Pier 1, the city's sole wharf dedicated to foreign cargo handling. "When a ship is delayed — engine problems, bad weather—it shows on the shelves of the grocery store within a day or two."

Or, as Captain Lyman explained it, "When cargo's late, people start chewing their fingernails. The delivery time is so critical that as a ship rounds Diamond Head, her engineer starts unplugging the reefer [refrigeration] containers. As soon as she's alongside, *bam!* That fresh stuff is on its way to market. And this is while 90 percent of the population is asleep."

A brief longshoremen's work stoppage in 1994 sent locals scrambling to stock up on the essentials: toilet paper and rice. Back in January of this year, heavy weather delayed a delivery to Lāna'i by two days: When the ship finally docked, the whole island was out of milk and eggs. And it isn't just our fresh produce and consumer goods that depend on such precision timing.

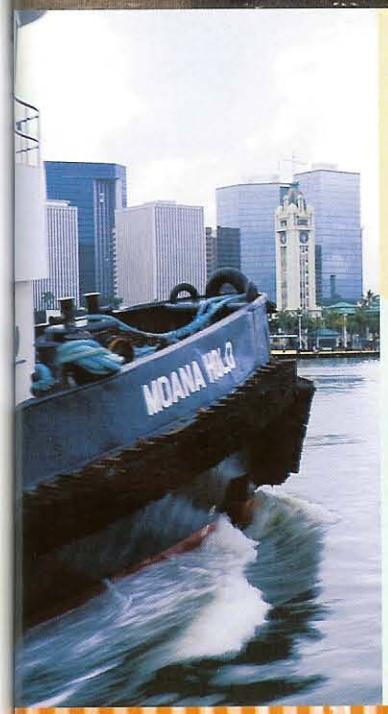
"We have less than a week's supply of gas and oil," says Captain Steven Baker, another of Honolulu's pilots. "If an oil barge gets held up, the power utilities are ready to start rolling blackouts." We've been lucky: There haven't been any serious hiccups in the system in recent years. "But heaven forbid a ship gets stuck on the rocks, hung up in the channel, sinks in the basin, or a hurricane knocks out the cranes on Sand Island ... nothing would move in the state," says Randy Grune. "We're so dependent, and people don't realize it because stuff just shows up on the shelves."

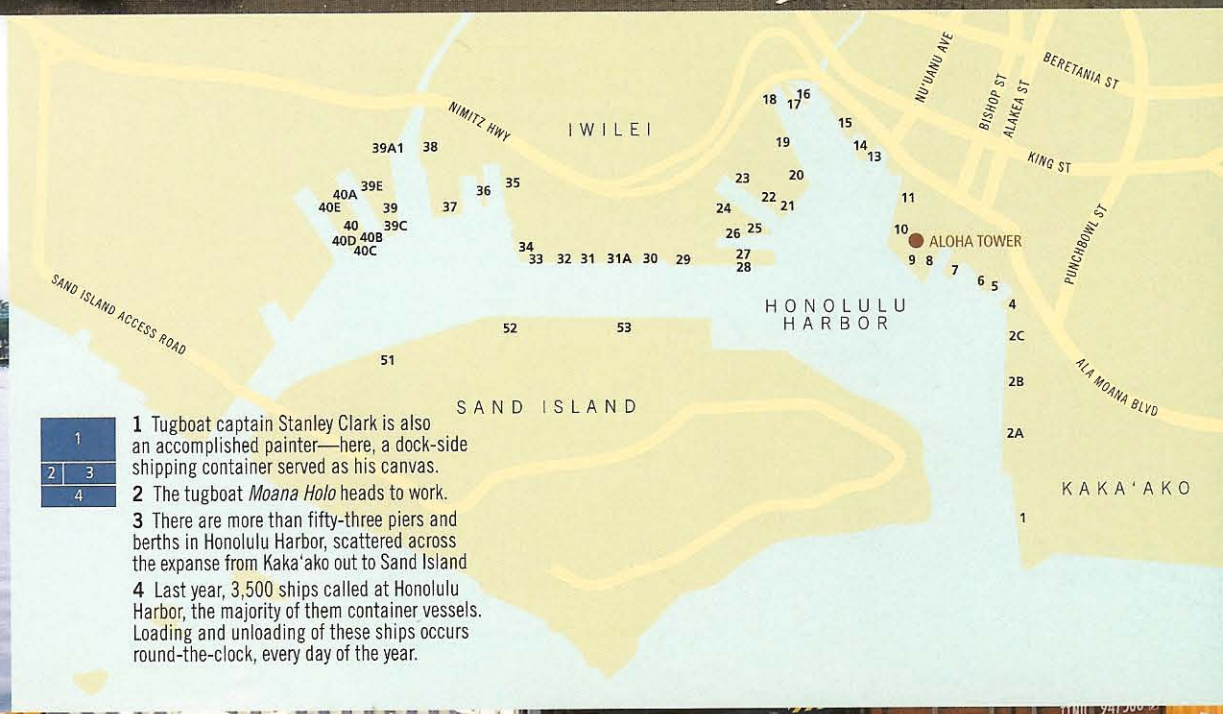
Living so close to the edge requires commitment, talent and sheer chutzpah: three qualities you find in the people keeping that stuff on the shelves. Whether it's the stevedores swinging around forty-ton containers with cranes or zooming around the piers in thirty-five-ton trucks called "tophandlers," or the pilots jumping off the speedboat in high seas to board a freighter, or tugboats pulling barges to port in a storm, it's dangerous, challenging work. It demands consummate skill and nerves of iron not only to stay safe and prevent damage, but also to keep the goods flowing for the state.

"This work is an art—and a science and a skill," Captain Lyman said. Though the maritime world, like everything else, has gone digital, getting a 90,000-ton ship to do what you want is more than just a matter of pushing buttons. "Sure, there's the science: put your rudder over this much here, give a full-ahead and such and such will happen. But it doesn't always work out that way. You need a feel for the ship and the conditions. And, you have to be prepared for engine failure, tugboat failure, steering, thruster, anchor failures."

All of which have and continue to happen. But so far so good; there's never been a situation the captains couldn't handle. "We plan for every contingency," says Captain Baker, "because if we don't make that turn around Buoy 7, we're going to plow into Gordon Biersch. Some of our ports, like Nāwiliwili, aren't that forgiving. We've pushed the envelope over there beyond anything we'd have tried fifteen years ago. We never thought we'd be taking cruise ships into that port, but we are. We wouldn't do it if we didn't feel it was safe. The bottom line is: you want to retire in obscurity. There's only one way a pilot gets famous, and you don't want to be famous."

But when things get dicey, as they occasionally will when you're handling tons of metal on the open sea, it's all about *cojones*. "The tug captains..." said Lyman, with an admiring shake of his head, "those guys are amazing: heading into Kahului in the middle of the





1 Tugboat captain Stanley Clark is also an accomplished painter—here, a dock-side shipping container served as his canvas.

2 The tugboat *Moana Holo* heads to work.

3 There are more than fifty-three piers and berths in Honolulu Harbor, scattered across the expanse from Kaka'ako out to Sand Island

4 Last year, 3,500 ships called at Honolulu Harbor, the majority of them container vessels. Loading and unloading of these ships occurs round-the-clock, every day of the year.

night against heavy wind and a ten-foot swell running, pulling two barges through a narrow entrance—that is when it truly becomes an art."

Tug operators like the tenacious Captain Stanley Park of Young Brothers/Hawai'i Tug & Barge are just the sort of artists Lyman meant. I was lucky enough to tag along aboard the *Mikioi*, HTB's new state-of-the art tug. It's so cutting edge, it's one of only a few tugs in the world with beefy, prototype 4,750-horsepower twin engines designed by Caterpillar. Up in the pilothouse, Captain Park controls the engines with a pair of joysticks; the tug responds to a feather touch and handles like a sports car. We're on our way out to assist a tug that's lost an engine while towing a barge to Pier 39. Once Captain Park's cleared it with Aloha Tower, from which all harbor traffic is monitored, we nose up to the stern. Captain Park pulls up fast and stops nearly on a dime, a few feet short of the barge. His crew tosses a thigh-thick hawser around a cleat, and Captain Park takes in the slack with a winch operated from the helm. The cargo—cattle from Kaua'i—watch the proceedings with the vague interest common to bovines and adolescents.

Captain Park executes all this with the flawless precision of someone who's done it a thousand times; probably he has, if not more. He's been working on tugs for twenty-five years, fourteen of them as a captain. As he chats with me about music (prefers the Stones to the Beatles), books (liked *The DaVinci Code*) and his recent tour of Europe (was impressed by Versailles), he effortlessly keeps the bowline taut and the tug at a precise distance from the barge. When the lead tug turns to bring the barge alongside the pier, Captain Park pulls to assist. Then, working in tandem, they gently see-saw it up to the wharf, nosing it fore and aft with the tugs' bows. It seems a little like parallel parking an iceberg. This part of the job's easy enough, pushing barges around and stacking them against the piers like a game of Tetris. But there are days, he says, when the stakes are higher, the conditions rougher, and the unexpected happens.

Once he was escorting a new ship, the *Global Pegasus*, into the inner harbor. "We're coming down real nice, four or five knots—that's flying—and we couldn't stop the ship. Didn't have engines!" he laughs. "*Alla* time,

no engines. So they drop anchors. No sooner the pilot gave the order, the anchor came straight down and hit my bow! The ship stopped just short of the Sand Island bridge. Just in time! Happens all the time, engines go out, stuff like that. Beautiful new ship, no one would have thought. You *gotta* be ready."

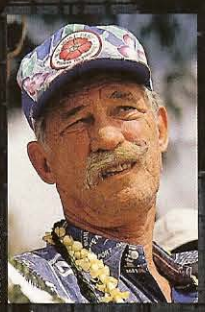
Other times, it's the pilots who push the edge. "Some pilots are gonna go for it no matter what," says Park. "They're all confidence—they don't play the rules; they play the winds. If no can, you tell 'em early: 'no can.' You try your best to see what you can do, but you don't just chicken out and expect to get paid. A pilot puts you on the spot, you bettah be ready." When he talks about what the job is like in rough weather or high seas, you can hear echoes of the scrappy Mākaha surf punk he used to be: "It sucks, brah. But if you get intimidated by the danger, you can't do the job. You can't hold back. That's when stuff happens."

"It's pretty scary to go alongside these huge vessels in the middle of the night," Captain Baker says. "Some of them have things hanging over the sides, waiting to crush the boat, the ship is heaving and rolling. It takes a lot of nerve for the tug captains and pilot boat operators; They've spent their whole lives *avoiding* large ships, and here we're asking them to chase them down and run into them. Some guys never get used to it, but we're lucky to have great people running our equipment."

As talented and courageous as they are, tragedies still happen. When I interviewed Captains Lyman and Baker for this article last January, they told me of a pilot lost off the Oregon coast two days earlier. He'd fallen when making the jump from the pilot boat to a ship off the notoriously treacherous Columbia River Bar. He hit the water between the boats, got dragged under the ship and was never seen again. Two weeks after I toured the harbor with Captain Lyman, he was killed the same way: falling from a ladder during the transfer to a ship off Nāwiliwili Harbor on Kaua'i. Hawai'i lost one of its finest and most colorful watermen on that day. But if any comfort can be taken from it, it's that Lyman died in the service of Hawai'i, doing what he loved. "It's an arduous, challenging job, an awesome responsibility," he'd said, chuckling through the upturned curls of his trademark mustache, "But it's also fun. At 16, I knew I wanted to be a harbor pilot. Now, after thirty-one years, I still look forward to going to work." Looking out over the harbor, he'd said to no one in particular: "I consider myself a very, very, very lucky man." **HH**

In Memorium: 1944-2006

When Captain David Lyman lost his life on January 29, 2006, Hawai'i lost more than a harbor pilot. True, he was one of the best: After more than thirty years on the job, Lyman was legendary for his ability to pilot any ship in any weather, and had served as president of the Hawai'i Pilots Association. But he was also a human repository of seafaring history, serving on the board of the Hawai'i Maritime Museum and playing a major role in the revival of Hawaiian voyaging traditions—the photo at left was taken in 2000, during ceremonies marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of *Hōkūle'a's* maiden voyage to Tahiti. David Lyman was a crewmember on that initial journey, which not only proved that two-way contact between ancient Hawai'i and Tahiti was possible, but also sparked an ongoing, Pacific-wide revival of traditional voyaging arts.



Monte Costa

We would like to dedicate this issue of *Hana Hou!* magazine to Captain Lyman, as well as offer our condolences to his family and the many people whose lives he touched throughout his sixty-two years.

A memorial scholarship fund has been established in his name—contributions can be made out to the *Captain David Lyman Maritime Scholarship Fund* and mailed in care of Lyle Holden, P.O. Box 4673, Honolulu, HI 96812.

—Stu Dawrs


Matson