

Captain Andrew Lusher
11/3/1945 - 20/06/2016
Member No.173
League Committeeman 2010



Deck Cadet Andy Lusher 1963

Andrew Lusher was a Sydney Harbour pilot and a key negotiator for the rights of pilots when the Maritime Services Board went through turbulent times in the 1980s. As a Senior Pilot he was highly regarded for the ease and swiftness of his work. On one occasion, however, which made the newspapers, he was pilot in charge of a 38,000-tonne cargo vessel when its bow thruster failed causing it to knock into a P&O crane resulting in its collapse "like a praying mantis".

Andrew John Lusher was the first-born son of Captain Philip Lusher, also a Senior Pilot, and Barbara Lusher (nee Taylor). He became a day pupil at Scots College and without any career Ambitions, followed in his father's footsteps.

He left home and at 15 joined HMS Worcester naval college in Plymouth, England, a draconian school for a young boy far from home. He rebelled at the discipline and received the cane most days.

At the age of 16 he hitchhiked from southern England to Aberdeen, Scotland. Not having the money to return he took a job delivering milk of which he drank enough to stave off hunger. Street sweeping in Plymouth was another source of income, which he rather enjoyed but not the one bath a week on offer at his lodgings. He managed to negotiate a daily bath but never on Saturday. That was the landlady's bath night.

After completing his cadetship with the British shipping company, Federal Line, he passed his Second Mates Certificate in Southampton before serving on several tramp ships around the Pacific Islands before returning to Australia and joining the Howard Smith Shipping Company, gaining sea time to sit his First Mates and then his Masters Certificate. He once again followed in his father's footsteps by becoming the youngest Sydney pilot to be appointed to date.

He successfully applied to join the MSB as a trainee pilot in 1979 and became known for his swift completion of pilotages. He always said that the longer a pilotage took, the more time he had to make mistakes.

Early in his piloting career, Lusher was elected as one of the delegates to advance the pilots' cause. During the 1980s the Maritime Services Board went through turbulent times with a deteriorating relationship between pilots and management. Negotiations culminated in privatisation of the pilotage service in 1992, with the three-year contract awarded to a Queensland operator. The pilots had also tendered for the contract, but stood little chance with MSB management. Three years later the pilot service again tendered and was successful.

During these years the demands were relentless and took a personal toll, with Lusher admitting it was a major factor in the breakdown of his second marriage.

In 1995 the pilots, assisted by the Merchant Service Guild, formed the Sydney Sea Pilots and Lusher was voted in as one of the first directors and was in charge of industrial relations. As such, it was his job to negotiate the award with the crew, all MUA members, a difficult task. Lusher, however, remained on friendly terms with all, including the hardest negotiators of the MUA and management of the MSB, which had by then morphed into the Sydney Port Authority.

Throughout this period, Lusher, as a Senior Pilot was also assisting in the training of new pilots, many of whom were in awe when starting their careers at the relative ease and swiftness of Lusher's piloting. Many wondered if they would ever emulate his skills.

This swiftness came under the spotlight in April 1997 when the Toba, a large cargo ship collided with the newly renovated P&O Ports' container crane in White Bay. The Toba's bow thruster failed, and when the ship's engines were put astern to stop the ship it gently kissed the crane's front legs, causing it to collapse like a praying mantis.

The harbour master at the time told Lusher: "I cannot take your pilot licence away from you as I cannot prove that you were speeding." But Lusher, on that occasion, was proceeding slowly. It was because of the Port Authority's insistence that the vessel only needed one tug, against the pilots' advice, and failure of the bow thruster, that the accident occurred. Since the incident such vessels have always had two tugs.

Lusher retired just before his 60th birthday after 25 years of service to the Port of Sydney. He continued to be a leading figure at the pilots' and tugmasters' biannual dinners, an event initiated by his father 55 years previously.

Lusher gave his spare time to the Gordon Rugby Club as well as coaching and managing Chatswood rugby junior teams beginning with the under-sevens and continuing through to the Gordon Colts, of which he was later made a director.

When news of his passing became known all ships and tugs on Sydney Harbour and Port Botany lowered their flags to half-mast.

Andrew Lusher was married three times. He had three children, Sally, Benjamin and Emily with his second wife, Jill. His third marriage to Jennifer absorbed an even larger family culminating in 13 grandchildren.

Sydney Morning Herald 13th July 2016