



U.S. COAST GUARD INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Matter Under Investigation: Main Space Engine Room Fire aboard the Passenger Vessel SANDY GROUND (O.N. 1299657), which occurred in the Upper Bay of New York Harbor on December 22, 2022.

Interview Of: Joseph M. Ajar, Captain of the SANDY GROUND

Date/Time: December 22, 2022 / 2020

Location: St. George Ferry Terminal, Staten Island, NY

Interviewed By: CWO [REDACTED]

Others Present: CDR [REDACTED], Mr. Ralph Savercool

Mr. Joseph Ajar, of [REDACTED] was the Captain onboard the SANDY GROUND at the time of the main space engine room fire. Mr. Ajar stated that at approximately 1640, the vessel had departed the Whitehall Ferry Terminal located in Manhattan, NY. Mr. Ajar related that after going on a break, he was called back to the Pilothouse, approximately between 1645 and 1650, after the Chief Marine Engineer had notified the Pilothouse about a fuel leak on the #2 main diesel engine. Shortly afterwards, the Chief Marine Engineer made another notification to the Captain to shut down the main diesel engines due to the fuel leak and flames and that tug assistance was needed to maneuver the vessel. Mr. Ajar related that the Chief Marine Engineer had activated the NOVEC 1230 fire suppression system after the engine room was evacuated.

Mr. Ajar related that the vessel had anchored using both the Staten Island End and the New York End anchors, then proceeded to coordinate the evacuation and disembarkation of passengers off the SANDY GROUND. During the interview, it was stated that the NYC Ferry RIVER SPRINTER, the NYC Ferry GREAT EAGLE, and the NY Waterway Ferry, the FRANKLIN D ROOSEVELT, had assisted in the evacuation of 816 passengers. The RIVER SPRINTER was the first vessel and took onboard 138 passengers, the FRANKLIN D ROOSEVELT was the second vessel and took onboard 558 passengers, and the GREAT EAGLE was the third vessel and took onboard 120 passengers. Mr. Ajar related that the SANDY GROUND started to drag anchor towards the final phase of the evacuation of passengers and that the decision was made to keep the remaining 50 passengers onboard until the vessel was moored. Tugs maneuvered the vessel back to the St. George Ferry Terminal where the remainder of passengers had disembarked.

Mr. Ajar was cooperative during the interview and answered all questions asked. He agreed to answer further questions at another time if it became necessary.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] CWO, USCG
December 24, 2022