

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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ENGINE ROOM FIRE ABOARD THE  
STATEN ISLAND FERRY *SANDY GROUND*  
NEAR STATEN ISLAND, NEW YORK  
ON DECEMBER 22, 2022

Accident No.: DCA23FM010

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Interview of: RAMON FIGUEROA, Chief Engineer  
Staten Island Ferry *Sandy Ground*

Staten Island, NY

Thursday,  
February 9, 2023

APPEARANCES:

BRIAN YOUNG, Marine Accident Investigator  
National Transportation Safety Board

██████████ ██████████ Chief Warrant Officer  
U.S. Coast Guard

BARRY TORREY, Director of Operations  
Staten Island Ferry

DANIEL FITZGERALD, Esq.  
Freehill, Hogan & Mahar, LLP  
On behalf of New York City DOT/Staten Island Ferry

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I N T E R V I E W

(11:03 a.m.)

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2  
3 CWO [REDACTED] Good morning, this is Chief Warrant Officer  
4 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] that's spelled [REDACTED] and  
5 we are here at the Staten Island Ferry St. George Terminal located  
6 in Staten Island, New York, the time on deck is 11:03 and we will  
7 begin with introductions.

8 MR. TORREY: Barry Torrey, Director of Operations for the  
9 Staten Island Ferry. Last name is T-o-r-r-e-y.

10 MR. FITZGERALD: Good morning, Dan Fitzgerald here with the  
11 law firm of Freehill, Hogan & Mahar on behalf of New York City  
12 DOT/Staten Island Ferry, party in interest. My last name is  
13 spelled F-i-t-z-g-e-r-a-l-d.

14 MR. FIGUEROA: Good morning. Ramon Figueroa, chief engineer,  
15 Staten Island Ferry. Last name F-i-g-u-e-r-o-a. Ramon,  
16 R-a-m-o-n.

17 MR. YOUNG: Good morning, this is Brian Young with the  
18 National Transportation Safety Board. Y-o-u-n-g.

19 CWO [REDACTED] Very good, thank you all. Before we begin,  
20 Chief, just for the record, you do agree with us recording this  
21 interview?

22 MR. FIGUEROA: Yes.

23 CWO [REDACTED] All right.

24 INTERVIEW OF RAMON FIGUEROA

25 BY CWO [REDACTED]

1 Q. So we would just like to begin, if you can just describe and  
2 tell us about your personal maritime experience.

3 A. I've been sailing since roughly around January 2008,  
4 graduated SUI maritime. I worked with Seadrill Americas for  
5 roughly 10 years, I worked there mostly as a first engineer,  
6 working my way up to first. I went to McAllister for  
7 approximately a year as an engineer over there. I jumped back to  
8 Seadrill for a year before I started working shoreside, and then  
9 eventually came to Staten Island Ferry in 2019, I believe.

10 Q. Okay. And at that time were you hired on as a chief  
11 engineer?

12 A. No, I was hired on as an oiler.

13 Q. As an oiler, okay.

14 A. So I spent a year as an oiler, roughly, 6 months as a marine,  
15 and then the rest of my time here has been a chief engineer.

16 Q. I see. So you've been able to progress through the different  
17 levels of --

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. -- the engineering? Okay. And have you had work experience  
20 on the ferry, the *Sandy Ground* ferry?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. Okay. And then how about the *Michael Ollis*?

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. Both, both vessels.

1 Q. Okay. Could you describe some of the training that you  
2 received in preparation for assuming your position on the *Sandy*  
3 *Ground*?

4 A. Sure. We did a 1-day walk-through and 3 days on the vessel  
5 going back and forth. My schedule is two to-be-assigned days and  
6 two boat days. So on Fridays, when I wasn't assigned to a vessel,  
7 I would go over there an extra day to just help out as needed and  
8 pick up more info on the boat, as much as possible.

9 Q. I see. Was that the same training you received on the *Ollis*,  
10 as well, in --

11 A. It was in conjunction.

12 Q. In conjunction?

13 A. Yeah.

14 Q. Okay. As far as the similarities, would you say that the  
15 training was the same that you received for both those vessels?

16 A. I believe we did just the one vessel, we're signed off on  
17 just the one vessel.

18 Q. I see.

19 A. As them both being the same.

20 Q. Were you part of any training for other engineers or other  
21 ferry personnel?

22 A. No.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. Not specifically.

25 Q. In regards to the design, construction, you know, of the

1 vessels, have you noticed any differences between the two, *Ollis*  
2 vice (ph.) the *Sandy Ground* vessel?

3 A. Nothing major that I can point out.

4 Q. All right. So would you say that the training that you  
5 received was adequate and sufficient for you to do your duties --

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. -- as a chief engineer? Okay. Could you please describe  
8 your responsibilities and duties as a chief engineer onboard the  
9 vessel?

10 A. As we assume the watch, we take all our fluid readings,  
11 assign the marine and oilers to their specific jobs, which is  
12 generally the same every day. Depending on the familiarity of the  
13 person, typically the oilers, I'll usually assign one oiler to do  
14 purifier cleanings or handle the levels of the tanks.

15 Q. And Chief, when you -- when you say levels of the tanks,  
16 could you be --

17 A. The fuel levels in the day tanks.

18 Q. I see.

19 A. To monitor them closer.

20 Q. I see. As far as the training that you received, did the  
21 training include the fuel oil tanks and that system?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. Okay. Was there any part of the training that went over  
24 monitoring and fuel levels, monitoring levels?

25 A. Yes. Yes.

1 Q. Okay. And you had mentioned you would assign one marine  
2 oiler for -- to operate the FOB?

3 A. Typically, yes.

4 Q. Okay. Is that marine oiler the same individual also  
5 monitoring fuel, the tank levels?

6 A. Typically, we all -- on my watch, I like to have everyone  
7 monitor it.

8 Q. I see.

9 A. And then we'll just point -- tell the one person that's  
10 touching the valves or handling it hey, can you adjust whatever  
11 tank is out of adjustment.

12 Q. Okay. What is the process for that? Like overall, between  
13 monitoring and then having to level off tanks, what does that  
14 process look like for the oilers?

15 A. I'm not sure, can you --

16 Q. Yes. So just like, for instance, if they do need to --

17 A. Readjust it?

18 Q. -- operate valves or adjust it or maybe get levels within  
19 whatever, you know, level you need, what is -- what is that  
20 process? So I guess what valves are they touching and --

21 A. Okay, so usually they're returning. Typically, we'll leave  
22 the purifier returns to the tanks or supplies to the tanks, excuse  
23 me, wide open and then the returns, we'll leave one tank wide open  
24 and control the other tank that seems to be taking returns more.

25 Q. Okay. And these are to the service tanks, right?



1 A. To the day tanks.

2 Q. To the day tanks.

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. Okay. From what you've seen and your experience onboard the  
5 *Sandy Ground* and even the *Ollis*, are there certain, you know,  
6 tanks that tend to be more -- having to be adjusted more or level  
7 out more than the other?

8 A. Usually when I'm onboard, it's usually the -- the port tank,  
9 the tank actually closer to the control room, next to the  
10 purifier, it's usually the one that we have that we're adjusting  
11 only because it's closer and usually takes the returns more.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. It doesn't always, it's not always like that, but it's  
14 typically like that.

15 Q. Okay. And just to verify again, Chief, the oilers would  
16 operate the return valves to the day tanks?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. Okay. How about the supply valves to the engines, from the  
19 day tanks?

20 A. No.

21 Q. No?

22 A. No, we don't do that.

23 Q. Okay. Would you say those are left open?

24 A. Those are left untouched, yeah.

25 Q. I see. Is there, from what you know, any difference in that

1 process for fuel monitoring and leveling between the *Sandy Ground*  
2 or the *Ollis*?

3 A. No, they're pretty much mirror images of each other.

4 Q. I see. So --

5 A. Or clones.

6 Q. So you conduct the same procedures if you're on either?

7 A. Yeah, it's the same.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. I treat them both the same.

10 Q. All right. As far as the fuel monitoring themselves, have  
11 you noticed any issues with the tank alarms at all or, you know,  
12 the TLI?

13 A. No, I haven't noticed anything, of adjustment or anything  
14 like that.

15 Q. Okay. From what you've seen, are there typical alarms that  
16 you would normally get as far as the fuel tank levels?

17 A. No, I usually like to keep them around 2,100, 2100 gallons,  
18 just to keep any high alarms out.

19 Q. I see. Have you actually witnessed high level alarms?

20 A. Probably once early on in training.

21 Q. And low level alarms?

22 A. Low level alarms, yes, once.

23 Q. Okay. How accurate would you say the tank level indicators  
24 are?

25 A. I think they're pretty fine, within 50 to a hundred gallons,

1 I would think.

2 Q. Okay. So from your experience, you haven't had any like, you  
3 know, real far-off inaccuracies?

4 A. No, we usually try to keep it pretty tight.

5 Q. Okay. From your work shifts that you're on and the marine  
6 oilers, marine engineers that are in your shifts, have you noticed  
7 any inconsistencies with knowledge and training and what they know  
8 as far as their position?

9 A. Not really. They're all pretty much level. There may be a  
10 few guys who are -- who we have to watch out a little bit more,  
11 but that's typical in this industry, I would think.

12 Q. Okay. From your observation, would you say that the oilers  
13 or marine engineers are aware that, you know, they can communicate  
14 if they have any questions about, you know, a certain system or  
15 how to do --

16 A. With me, yes.

17 Q. Oh, okay. And then as far as the -- the fuel oil purifier,  
18 have you noticed anything different between the vessels on how  
19 maintenance is done or --

20 A. No, nothing.

21 Q. Okay. And I just wanted to talk a little bit more about  
22 training, about the preparation, again, that you had.

23 A. Um-hum.

24 Q. Were you given any documentation or material to prepare you,  
25 as far as your training?

1 A. Yeah, we had a whole write-up, I believe it was like five or  
2 six pages.

3 Q. I see. And that was your own copy that you were given?

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. As far as your overall time, would you say you have more  
6 experience on the *Sandy Ground* or the *Ollis*?

7 A. I couldn't recall, but I'm pretty sure I spent more time on  
8 the *Ollis*, but I can't tell you right off the bat.

9 Q. Would you happen to know what may have caused the fire on the  
10 *Sandy Ground*?

11 A. No.

12 CWO [REDACTED] Okay. At this time I'd like to pass it over  
13 to Mr. Young, if you have any questions.

14 MR. YOUNG: Thanks.

15 BY MR. YOUNG:

16 Q. Good morning, Chief.

17 A. Good morning.

18 Q. Thank you for your time and helping us out. Just a few  
19 questions following up on what the Coast Guard is talking about.  
20 What is your typical rotation work, are you assigned to a vessel  
21 for a week or a few days or is it random?

22 A. So with me, I'm on the 7C, so my first two days are  
23 Thursday/Friday, those are to-be-assigned days. So if somebody's  
24 out, I take their spot. Like today, specifically, one of the  
25 chiefs has his union day, so I work for him on Thursday. Tomorrow

1 I'll work for somebody else on a different boat, different crew,  
2 and then I work 7C Saturday and Sunday. Usually it's either like  
3 somewhere around 2:00 in the afternoon to 2:00 in the morning or  
4 3:00 in the afternoon to 3:00 in the morning Saturday/Sunday. And  
5 that's usually a more set crew.

6 Q. And that would be the same four engine crew members that you  
7 work with?

8 A. Yes, typically.

9 Q. When you do work with a team of the four, the four of you, do  
10 you -- how do you establish who would be kind of monitoring the  
11 fuel system?

12 A. Usually I try to get the more senior guy, but there are some  
13 times I try to tap the junior guy to take the lead on it and just  
14 we'll watch him a little bit more closely and make sure he  
15 understands the systems.

16 Q. Typically on merchant vessels the second engineer is  
17 responsible for the fuel system.

18 A. Right, right.

19 Q. I understand you don't have a -- carry a second engineer  
20 onboard, but --

21 A. Right.

22 Q. -- have you ever had one of the marine engineers kind of take  
23 care of the fuel or is it always --

24 A. It depends on the watch. Sometimes I'm not as strict with  
25 it, sometimes if it needs to be adjusted, somebody else will

1 adjust it, I'll go out there and adjust it sometimes while I'm on  
2 the round and I just -- we make sure we tell each other hey, I  
3 touched the return valve on said tank. Or adjusted the fuel  
4 purifier, slowed it down or sped it up.

5 Q. Did you say slow it down or speed it up, so you're talking  
6 about the volume?

7 A. Well, talking about, right, volume, correct.

8 Q. When you talked a little bit about training, you said there  
9 was, I think, 4 days of training, some of it onboard the vessel.  
10 What did that include, was it actually tracing out systems and  
11 operating some of the machinery?

12 A. Yeah, the first day was walk-through, startup was -- I  
13 believe we started up and then didn't leave the dock, so it was  
14 mostly tracing, familiarization of all the systems on the boats  
15 and then the next 3 days were startup/shutdown, doing the rounds,  
16 as we're going back and forth for making trips in the harbor, we  
17 were walking around tracing out systems.

18 Q. And who was providing the training to you?

19 A. I believe it was either Michelle or -- Michelle Mergollo  
20 (ph.) or Rich Rizzo, along with the other --

21 Q. The other chiefs.

22 A. -- or the other chief engineers, yeah, the two training  
23 chiefs.

24 Q. And they were trained to train all the engineers, is that  
25 correct?

1 A. Yes, yes.

2 Q. Okay. And at the end of your training was there any sort of  
3 qualification or evaluation that had to be signed off on before  
4 you were qualified?

5 A. Yeah, we had the Form 17s, the training sheets to sign off  
6 on.

7 Q. And how would you prove that you were adequate or familiar  
8 with the equipment?

9 A. I mean, we pretty much went down the checklist of things that  
10 needed to be seen and witnessed.

11 Q. Okay. And so you performed some functions under the eyes of  
12 these training chief engineers and they signed you off?

13 A. During that 3-, 4-day period, yes.

14 Q. Do you remember if all of the chief engineers in the fleet  
15 were trained at this time or just some of them, do you recall?

16 A. I honestly don't know because we all did it as we could, as  
17 time allotted.

18 Q. Okay. We had talked previously with some other people in  
19 your organization, it looks like when the *Ollis* class came out,  
20 that they didn't have a return valve in the system and that was  
21 added on after the fact. Do you recall that?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. Before that valve was added, how were the levels maintained  
24 in the tanks?

25 A. There's the two valves off -- coming off the purifier and we

1 would control through there.

2 Q. Okay, so the discharge to the purifier --

3 A. Discharge the purifier, correct.

4 Q. When I was aboard the *Sandy Ground* I noticed that the tanks  
5 were labeled port and starboard. Is that the consistent naming  
6 throughout the fleet, with the other vessels?

7 A. Yes, I believe so.

8 Q. And how would you establish port and starboard when there  
9 really isn't a port and starboard, do you find that confusing?

10 A. When you first get here it's confusing, but once you  
11 establish New York and Staten Island, then it's -- you figure it  
12 out pretty fairly quickly.

13 Q. A little bit of hypothetical questions from a chief engineer  
14 to a chief engineer. Why do you think you run with two day tanks?  
15 Why don't you run with one?

16 A. In case of contamination hazards. It's the main reason, I  
17 would think.

18 Q. Is there sufficient capacity in one day tank to make it  
19 across the harbor?

20 A. Oh, there's plenty with those tanks, with a single tank. You  
21 could probably go all day.

22 Q. Has it ever been considered or talked about these running  
23 with the day tank full and continuously purifying it and allowing  
24 it to overflow to the storage tank? Have you ever heard of that  
25 on other vessels that you've worked on?



1 A. That's normally the normal operating procedure elsewhere.

2 Q. Is that something that you, if you thought it was a good  
3 idea, you could bring it to the attention of somebody in the  
4 organization?

5 A. I believe so, we could.

6 Q. And how would you do that, is there some sort of a safety  
7 management system that allows you to provide feedback?

8 A. Yeah, we'd be able to put a form in for that, if we wanted  
9 to.

10 Q. Do you find, as a chief engineer, that your oilers are not so  
11 much chasing their tail, but that they are spending a lot of time  
12 monitoring and adjusting fuel during your watch?

13 A. Typically not during my watch. Especially if we have more  
14 senior guys, it's -- they're not chasing it around, they know the  
15 set, they're accustomed to the vessels.

16 Q. So based on your experience and the way the engines are  
17 running and burn fuel and returning it, you're kind of having  
18 established a set to the valves --

19 A. Right, right, right.

20 Q. I noticed in some of the drawings of the previous class of  
21 vessels such as the *Barberi* and the *Molinari*, that the fuel return  
22 system has a relief valve built into it.

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. Do you have any idea of why that may be in those two systems?

25 A. That would be for user error, for any over-pressurization of

1 the system, to relieve that if, for some reason, somebody closed  
2 both valves, return valves.

3 Q. It's probably hard to tell because the relief valve is in the  
4 system, but are you aware of any incidents where that may have  
5 been closed?

6 A. On the other two classes?

7 Q. Yeah.

8 A. Maybe once or twice, maybe it was somebody was beginning to  
9 close it, but it's been rectified right away.

10 Q. And how was that rectified?

11 A. Just had to go back and open up the return valves.

12 Q. But the relief valve did its job and --

13 A. From what I'm aware of, yes.

14 Q. Okay. Did you have any input into the design or the ideas or  
15 any input towards the new vessel construction?

16 A. No.

17 Q. I also noticed, looking at the diagrams, that the *Ollis*-class  
18 vessels have their tanks catty-corner across the engine room. Is  
19 that different than all the other previous classes?

20 A. Yes, all the other classes, they're in line with each other  
21 on the aft-end of the engine room.

22 Q. Has the catty-corner across the engine room caused any  
23 confusion with the people, the oilers that --

24 A. I think --

25 Q. -- are working?

1 A. -- beginning in like the first couple days during training it  
2 does because you're going forward/aft and you're looking at it  
3 forward and aft and it's also starboard/port. So there's a  
4 possibility of it, yes.

5 Q. Okay. Nobody has or has anyone given you feedback or has  
6 been concerned that has created any confusion?

7 A. No, not specifically, no.

8 Q. If both day tanks are providing fuel to a common header with  
9 the isolation drive open, they would be supplying -- two tanks  
10 would be supplying fuel to four engines, three generators, and two  
11 boilers, whatever is on line. If the tanks were left overnight  
12 and after everything was secure, would they equalize?

13 A. They should. Theoretically, yes.

14 Q. Do you think operationally, when you're running, that the  
15 tanks would equalize with, say, four engines running and one  
16 generator and one boiler?

17 A. I haven't seen them equalize, no. If we haven't touched  
18 anything.

19 Q. And do you have any idea what percentage of the fuel is  
20 actually being returned as compared to what's getting burned?

21 A. No, not specifically, no.

22 Q. If there were any changes to the training plan or procedures  
23 or operating manual, how would you be notified about that?

24 A. We'd get a notification in the SMS manual. In the book, it  
25 highlights the changes to the procedure. And also it comes in an

1 e-mail.

2 Q. So you receive an e-mail about any updates. And would you  
3 say, across the fleet, with all the different classes of vessels,  
4 that you see a pretty consistent method of controlling the fuel  
5 levels in the tanks or is it different based on either design or  
6 people?

7 A. It's pretty consistent.

8 MR. YOUNG: Thank you very much, I appreciate your time.  
9 Thanks for helping us out.

10 MR. FIGUEROA: Okay, thank you.

11 CWO [REDACTED] Great. Thank you, Mr. Young. I don't have  
12 any further questions. I'd like to open it up to the room.

13 (No response.)

14 CWO [REDACTED] All right. And then I just wanted to see if  
15 there was any other remark or anything else you would like to  
16 mention to us or discuss.

17 MR. FIGUEROA: No, I'm good.

18 CWO [REDACTED] Okay. That concludes our interview. The time  
19 on deck is 11:27.

20 (Whereupon, at 11:27 a.m., the interview concluded.)  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF:           ENGINE ROOM FIRE ABOARD THE  
                                  STATEN ISLAND FERRY *SANDY GROUND* NEAR  
                                  STATEN ISLAND, NEW YORK  
                                  ON DECEMBER 22, 2022  
                                  Interview of Ramon Figueroa

ACCIDENT NO.:               DCA23FM010

PLACE:                        Staten Island, NY

DATE:                         February 9, 2023

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,  
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been transcribed  
to the best of my skill and ability.

A large black rectangular redaction box covers the signature area. To the right of the box, the number '21' is printed vertically.

—  
David A. Martini  
Transcriber  
—

Interview Errata  
 Sandy Ground DCA23FM010  
 Interview of: RAMON FIGUEROA  
 Position: CHIEF ENGINEER

PAGE NUMBER	LINE NUMBER	CURRENT WORDING	CORRECTED WORDING
5	4	SUI MARITIME	SUNY MARITIME
8	9	JUST POINT	JUST APPOINT
8	10	handling it hey	handling it they

If, to the best of your knowledge, no corrections are needed kindly circle the statement "no corrections needed" and initial in the space provided.

NO CORRECTIONS NEEDED. \_\_\_\_\_  
 Initials

Ramón A. Figueroa  
 Printed Name of Person providing the above information

  
 Signature of Person providing the above information

3.24.23  
 Date