

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

\* \* \* \* \*

Investigation of:

\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*

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

Accident No.: DCA23FM010

\* \* \* \* \*

Interview of: YAZAN ALKHAWAGA, Marine Oiler  
Staten Island Ferry

St. George Ferry Terminal  
Staten Island, New York

Thursday,  
January 26, 2023

APPEARANCES:

BRIAN YOUNG, Senior Marine Accident Investigator  
National Transportation Safety Board

CWO [REDACTED] Accident Investigator  
United States Coast Guard

BARRY TORREY, Director of Ferry Operations  
Staten Island Ferry

ROBERT BANDEN, Warranty Engineer  
Eastern Shipbuilding Group (ESG)

DANIEL J. FITZGERALD, Attorney  
Freehill Hogan & Mahar, LLP  
(On behalf of Staten Island Ferry and New York City  
Department of Transportation)

I N D E X

ITEM

PAGE

Interview of Yazan Alkhawaga:

By CWO [REDACTED]

4

By Mr. Young

16

I N T E R V I E W

(11:35 a.m.)

1  
2  
3 CWO [REDACTED] Good morning. This is Chief Warrant Officer  
4 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] That's spelled [REDACTED]  
5 And we are here at the St. George Terminal located in Staten  
6 Island, New York. Today's date is January 26. Time on deck is  
7 11:35. We are here to conduct a structured interview and we will  
8 begin with introductions.

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

13 MR. BANDEN: Robert Banden, Eastern Shipbuilding, warranty  
14 engineer. Banden, B-a-n-d-e-n.

15 MR. ALKHAWAGA: Marine oiler, Yazan Alkhawaga, Y-a-z-a-n,  
16 A-l-k-h-a-w-a-g-a. Marine oiler.

17 MR. TORREY: And I'm Barry Torrey, T-o-r-r-e-y, director of  
18 operations for Staten Island Ferry.

19 MR. YOUNG: And I'm Brian Young with the National  
20 Transportation Safety Board, Y-o-u-n-g.

21 CWO [REDACTED] All right. Very good. Thank you, all.

## INTERVIEW OF YAZAN ALKHAWAGA

22  
23 BY CWO [REDACTED]

24 Q. So, as I said, we're here to conduct an interview about your  
25 position, duties and responsibilities on board here at the Staten

1 Island Ferry as a marine oiler. Let's begin with you describing  
2 your personal maritime experience.

3 A. Okay. I worked for the Circle Line on World Yacht and water  
4 taxi for over like 5 years in New York Harbor. We -- I used to  
5 work in sailboats as engineer for 5 years, and I used to do  
6 maintenance in the wintertime at Circle Line boats and water taxi.

7 Q. I see. Where -- and that was -- and where was that located?  
8 Like where were you --

9 A. It was located at 42nd Street, 12th Ave. in New York.

10 Q. I see. When were you hired here at the Staten Island Ferry?

11 A. I got hired 2021, February; I believe it was 16 or 14.

12 Q. I see.

13 A. Actually, I don't remember the date correctly, but it was in  
14 February.

15 Q. And you were hired as a marine oiler at that time?

16 A. I was, yeah, hired as a marine oiler.

17 Q. Okay. Have you worked on board the *Sandy Ground*?

18 A. Yes, I do.

19 Q. Okay. And have you worked on all the other ferries as well?

20 A. Yes, I do.

21 Q. Okay. What kind of training -- or if you can describe, what  
22 was your training that you were given prior to being assigned on  
23 board the *Sandy Ground*?

24 A. We was training about like safety, like fire drills, steering  
25 drills, how to set up the fuel system, how to start the engines,

1 how to take ballast on, how to take ballast off, adding oil,  
2 putting purifiers online, cleaning them, like line up the sea  
3 chest, maintenance. Like and things, you know, like -- all type  
4 of training.

5 Q. I see. Was this all provided on board the ferry or was this  
6 like a combination of classroom and --

7 A. No, no, no. It was on board.

8 Q. On board?

9 A. Yeah.

10 Q. And how long was the training?

11 A. The training was a week. Two weeks. Sorry. Two weeks.

12 Q. Two weeks? Was there any material provided to you for  
13 training such as a like --

14 A. Yeah. We got a folder that explaining every single system in  
15 the boat, like fire system, like lube oil system. Like big like  
16 binder, like probably like 50 page, I guess.

17 Q. I see. And were you provided your own personal copy?

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. I see. How many trips would you say you've done on board the  
20 *Sandy Ground*?

21 A. We been in the boat for around like 12 hours, 12 hours and --  
22 30 minutes to Whitehall, 30 minutes back. It's -- can't tell.  
23 Like on like 10 trips.

24 Q. That you've had so far working --

25 A. Eleven trips.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. Yeah.

3 Q. When you completed the training, right -- so this is the  
4 initial training before you started working on the *Sandy Ground*.

5 A. On the boat, um-hum.

6 Q. When you completed that training did you feel confident that  
7 that training was adequate for you to perform your duties as a  
8 marine oiler on board the ferry?

9 A. Yes, sir.

10 Q. Did you notice any differences in training between the *Sandy*  
11 *Ground* and the, for example, the *Ollis, Michael H. Ollis* vessel?

12 A. No.

13 Q. Could you go over your duties and responsibilities as a  
14 marine oiler? So what does a typical day look like for you?

15 A. We assist the marine engineer doing maintenance on board and  
16 operation of the main engine, ship service generator. We doing  
17 our round, if we see any normal -- like abnormal sound from a pump  
18 or any leak, any like abnormal noise, any smell, any smoke. We  
19 clean the purifier, we set it back online back. We do fueling.  
20 We fill up the boat with water. We grease all the bearings. We  
21 like check all the flow with the -- say, like a lube oil in the  
22 engines and the ship service generators and the propulsion unit,  
23 combining gear. And, say, like pumping ballast on, taking ballast  
24 off. Starting up, shutting down, securing the systems, lining up  
25 the system back, doing drills.

1 Q. Okay. For the fuel system, is there anything from the  
2 beginning of the watch that you do as far as the whole fuel  
3 management system?

4 A. You mean like when we got in the watch or like --

5 Q. Um-hum. Like just starting the --

6 A. We start up?

7 Q. Yeah.

8 A. Well, when we start up, like me and my partner, let's say,  
9 like we do in the beginning of the watch, like one guy just  
10 operating the fuel, and we keep it like that with a conversation.  
11 Like if I did something and the guy was on his round, like when he  
12 got back, I like, I did this. And I let the marine engineer and  
13 the chief engineer like why I did exactly. Like let's say I  
14 closed a valve, let's say, to returns to adjust the fuel level or  
15 I closed this or I did -- we keep conversation between us, like  
16 communication. Like I did this, you should know like why I did.  
17 When you got back and I went out to do something, you know why I  
18 did. So it doesn't like -- we don't mess it up.

19 Q. So you're communicating with all the other --

20 A. Exactly.

21 Q. -- engineers and --

22 A. Yeah.

23 Q. I see. In regards to the training for the fuel transfer  
24 system, what was included in that training when you were trained  
25 on how to, you know, operate the fuel manifold or line up the



1 valves? You know, what was the process for -- look like for that  
2 when you went through training?

3 A. How to line it up, how we take -- like how -- when we do  
4 fueling, what valve we shall secure, what valve we shall not  
5 touch, what shall I -- like those things.

6 Q. I see. Was there a evaluation process for you? So did you  
7 have to actually demonstrate your knowledge of the system?

8 A. Actually, like it's -- let's say like it's -- it's very like  
9 simple system. Like it's not complicated to adjust the fuel.  
10 Like there's a fill valve over and a fill valve returns, return  
11 like the storage. Just we -- like if you been in ship before and  
12 you like look at it, you know what you're doing.

13 Q. I see. So as far as the configuration on board the ship,  
14 what do you normally use for your nomenclature or identification  
15 of each side of the vessel? So like do you signify it by port and  
16 starboard or New York, Staten Island?

17 A. We use New York, Staten Island, Brooklyn, Jersey side.

18 Q. I see. Is any of those labeling or configuration  
19 nomenclature confusing to you as a marine oiler in your  
20 orientation of the --

21 A. No, sir.

22 Q. No?

23 A. No.

24 Q. And you had mentioned fuel operation and so forth. Could you  
25 explain your procedures and your process for fuel monitoring and

1 fuel leveling?

2 A. How -- like how I do it as a person, I keep the return valves  
3 open and I adjust the fill. Like one tank, it goes up high, I  
4 close only, like I said, return. And I keep watching the level,  
5 how many gallons in this tank, how many gallons and like how we  
6 taking the fuel oil, like seeing this one is (indiscernible) and I  
7 open it like one notch and I keep an eye on it.

8 Q. And you said this was the fill valve that you adjust?

9 A. The fill.

10 Q. And what -- fill valve to?

11 A. Let's say like port or starboard, the port is going up high  
12 and the starboard's going low, I close like a couple turns in the  
13 valve, so I let like the fuel goes to the starboard side and this  
14 valve should be fully open. Like one side should be fully open  
15 and we're adjusting the other side till we got it equal. Then I  
16 like I open it back and we keep an eye on it.

17 Q. And could you just elaborate more on what fill valves this  
18 is? I know there's, you know, there's different -- you know,  
19 service tanks, storage tanks --

20 A. The day, the service tank.

21 Q. The service tanks. Okay.

22 A. Yeah, the storage tanks, like we don't touch. And like I  
23 said, like we do fueling, closing the service tank, we open the  
24 storage fuel valves, and those valves remain closed, those open  
25 till we finish fueling. We'll close the storage tank, we open the

1 service tank, put back everything online.

2 Q. And how do you monitor the levels and know, you know, how  
3 they're leveled and -- what do you normally use for that?

4 A. I will look at the screen. The screen show like specific  
5 like how many gallons because there's a little switch inside. And  
6 see how many gallons. Say, this one is showing like 2500 and the  
7 other one is 1800, I closing the one like 2500 a little bit. And  
8 I keep watching it, it's driving down. The other one is like  
9 equaling this one, open that valve back.

10 Q. Do you find that those level indicators are accurate when  
11 you're looking at your levels?

12 A. Yeah.

13 Q. And as far as the process or procedures you're doing on board  
14 the *Sandy Ground*, is that the same on the other vessel, the *Ollis*?

15 A. Yeah.

16 Q. And from your experience, would you say it's similar to other  
17 ships and other crews doing similar procedures as well?

18 A. Yeah.

19 Q. And just to verify as far as who's actually performing, you  
20 know, the leveling and the monitoring, is it just one person or do  
21 you have two people doing it?

22 A. Like from the beginning of the watch, like just when we got  
23 started, well, I'm going to deal with the fuel, you just watching  
24 it. I'm going to do my round, keep an eye on it. If something  
25 happen within doing my round, like he goes adjust it, and like

1 when I get back from my round, he just let me know, I -- let's say  
2 that I closing the port like three turns. I know he closing the  
3 port three turns. So if the port go low, I open back the three  
4 turns or like a turn and a half to get it back equalize.

5 Q. So if someone had done anything with the valves, you're  
6 saying that you would communicate. So whoever does --

7 A. Yeah, we tell each other.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. And if he wasn't there, like I'll let the marine engineer  
10 know or tell the chief I did this. And when the guy got back,  
11 like, oh, he does that in the tank.

12 Q. Is there any logs or any information being recorded while  
13 you're doing the -- checking the levels or doing any of the  
14 valves? Is that --

15 A. You mean like we're logging in book --

16 Q. Yes. Are you --

17 A. -- we're closing that valve, we open that valve? Oh, no.

18 Q. No?

19 A. No.

20 Q. Okay. And how about just levels, fuel levels or soundings,  
21 are you --

22 A. Yeah. We take fuel level, we take the sounding in the  
23 beginning of each watch.

24 Q. Okay. What is the normal valve operation for underway? So  
25 how would you line up the valves when you start for the day or

1 line up the machinery, how is that normally configured?

2 A. For the fueling system?

3 Q. Yes.

4 A. Like I said, like we keep the returns open, fully open, both  
5 tanks, and we adjust the filling. Like starboard or port side,  
6 whatever like tank is getting higher, we adjusting the valve on  
7 it.

8 Q. From your experience, have you seen the return valves  
9 operated in order to level --

10 A. Yes, the -- yeah. Some guys using it, but like I don't  
11 prefer doing like with the returns valves.

12 Q. And then as far as the space and the lighting and your  
13 ability to work around the fuel manifold, fuel oil purifier, would  
14 you say that it's adequate for you to --

15 A. Yeah.

16 Q. -- to perform your duties?

17 A. Yeah.

18 Q. Do you know what will happen if the running engines, right,  
19 so your main engines or generators that are online, do you know  
20 what'll happen if both fuel oil day tanks, their supply valves  
21 were closed?

22 A. Supply valves to the engine?

23 Q. Yes.

24 A. The engine will shut it down, will shut down.

25 Q. I see. How about if both return valves were closed?

1 A. If the return valves closed, like there is no way the fuel to  
2 go back to anywhere. It's going to stuck in the line. It's going  
3 to be pressurized. It cannot like -- either like the hose is  
4 going to bust off or we going to have a fuel leak somewhere in the  
5 like weakest point.

6 Q. I see. Do you know what may have caused the fire on the  
7 *Sandy Ground*?

8 A. I have no idea.

9 Q. And would you say that for the most part training is the same  
10 and consistent as far as like the other vessels as well, the other  
11 ferries?

12 A. Yes, sir.

13 Q. Yes? And then as far as alarms for the fuel tanks, have you  
14 noticed any issues with fuel tank alarms or --

15 A. No.

16 Q. No? So --

17 A. Not at all.

18 Q. So when you get like a low --

19 A. You got alarm for a low level. If it goes up high, you got  
20 alarm for high level.

21 Q. I see. Do you know those parameters, like what they're set  
22 at, the low and high, for --

23 A. Actually, no. I don't know. I don't know what the set point  
24 is on it.

25 Q. But if you got a --

1 A. But I believe it's -- high is like 3 feet and change. But we  
2 never got a low.

3 Q. So you haven't -- you've never seen a low --

4 A. No. No.

5 Q. -- tank? Okay. But you've seen a high tank alarm?

6 A. Yeah.

7 Q. And when you got the alarm --

8 A. We doing it like -- if they have like a next day fueling?

9 Q. Um-hum.

10 A. We bump the tank a little bit up because they're taking time  
11 in the fueling, say like hour, hour and a half generator is  
12 running. Or sometimes the engine's running like get ready for the  
13 trip or shifting slips, we should keep them up. But most of the  
14 time like we didn't do that.

15 Q. I see. Then could you also explain how the fuel oil purifier  
16 is incorporated into the whole fuel transfer system?

17 A. Yeah. There's a suction line coming from the storage tank to  
18 the purifier and going from the purifier to each day tank.

19 Q. I see. And is that fuel oil purifier operation online  
20 throughout the time that you're operating with the engines online  
21 or is it secured?

22 A. No, we run the purifier once we start the engines and like we  
23 slow it down or we speed it up. Like we open the suction more or  
24 we close it more to like slow the flow or speed it up.

25 Q. And this is the flow, the output from the purifier?

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. Yes. Okay.

3 CWO ██████████ Okay. So at this time I'd like to, you know,  
4 open up questions to the room.

5 BY MR. YOUNG:

6 Q. Good morning. This is Brian Young with the NTSB. Just a few  
7 follow-up questions. You said you did -- had made some trips on  
8 the *Sandy Ground*. Could you estimate -- I couldn't hear -- how  
9 many trips you may have done on the *Sandy Ground*?

10 A. It's around like between like, I said, 10 to 11 trips.

11 Q. Okay. And how about the *Ollis*?

12 A. The *Ollis*, I -- you mean the training?

13 Q. No, do you ever work as an oiler aboard the *Ollis*?

14 A. I'm working the *Ollis* right now and I work it for the past  
15 couple of months.

16 Q. Okay. And have you --

17 MR. TORREY: Let me interrupt one thing. I think you guys  
18 are asking how many trips total on the *Sandy Ground* and I think  
19 he's answering how many trips training. I just want to clarify.

20 They're asking how many trips you've done, you think, on the  
21 *Sandy Ground* total?

22 MR. ALKHAWAGA: Oh, total? Oh, it's -- I can't count them.  
23 It's over 100.

24 MR. YOUNG: Okay.

25 MR. ALKHAWAGA: More than hundreds. I'm sorry.



1 MR. TORREY: Sorry. I just wanted to make sure that was  
2 clear. He said 10 to 11 trips during training.

3 MR. ALKHAWAGA: I'm sorry. I thought he asked about the  
4 training. I'm sorry.

5 CWO [REDACTED] Good. Thank you for clarifying that. Yeah,  
6 so just -- so for the record, the 10 to 12 trips on board the  
7 *Sandy Ground* is the trips that you --

8 MR. ALKHAWAGA: Is the training.

9 CWO [REDACTED] -- for the training.

10 MR. ALKHAWAGA: That's just 1 day, not in total training, not  
11 in 2 weeks. I'm talking a day. Like first day, we do those like  
12 amount, second day, third day, till we finish the training.

13 CWO [REDACTED] I see. However, for your actual time on  
14 board, to include work time, is numerous and you just don't have  
15 the exact number to provide us?

16 MR. ALKHAWAGA: Talk about trips in those -- this class,  
17 it's -- I've been working that class for a long time. Over like  
18 400 trips.

19 CWO [REDACTED] Okay.

20 BY MR. YOUNG:

21 Q. Okay. Thank you for clearing that up. And have you done  
22 trips on some of the other class vessels such as the *Barberi* and  
23 the *Spirit of America*? Have you worked on those vessels?

24 A. Yes, sir.

25 Q. And we are asking a lot of questions about the fuel system.

1 And on the other class vessels, do you maintain the levels in the  
2 day tanks in a similar fashion by controlling the output of the  
3 purifier?

4 A. Yes, sir.

5 Q. And do the other class vessels also have two day tanks?

6 A. Yes, sir.

7 Q. And when it's time to come on watch, how is it determined who  
8 is going to be responsible for the fuel for that watch or shift?  
9 Is it based on seniority or is it just assignment or is it  
10 something that --

11 A. If we working the same one, like we do -- we take turns. We  
12 do take turns. But like sometime we filling up as overtime or  
13 there's like, say, like a senior guy and he would like to do it,  
14 he volunteered to do it, he's doing it. But most of time like we  
15 take turns.

16 Q. Okay. Okay. And during a typical watch or a rotation, say,  
17 in a 12-hour shift, do you find that you do have to make several  
18 adjustments to the fuel oil purifier discharge or is it kind of  
19 set once and it's set throughout the day?

20 A. We set it up like the first trip and -- yeah, we set it up  
21 the first trip and that's it for the rest of the night.

22 Q. And to be clear, any adjustments you would be making to  
23 control the levels typically would be the fuel oil discharge  
24 flowing or discharging from the purifier back into the day tanks,  
25 correct?

1 A. Yes, sir. Yeah, we do that. And sometime like usual like  
2 probably maybe like happen like once every like four trips, like  
3 you closing a little bit or you open it a little bit.

4 Q. So typically minor adjustments?

5 A. Yeah.

6 Q. Do you ever have to close those discharge valves completely  
7 on either tank from the purifier?

8 A. Sometime, yeah, yeah, we do.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. If the level like comes up too much up high, yeah, we close  
11 it like fully shut.

12 Q. Okay. And then all the fuel would go to the opposite tank?

13 A. Yeah. It goes to the other tank.

14 Q. Okay. And is there ever any issue for the purifier to be  
15 able to pump into one tank only?

16 A. No. Not at all.

17 Q. You had mentioned when you were asking questions to the Coast  
18 Guard, you said you don't like to use the return valve for  
19 controlling the levels. Why is that?

20 A. Because like if -- I feel as like not very comfortable using  
21 it because it's like the return valves like -- if you look at the  
22 engine itself, there is no valves coming off the engine from the  
23 manufacturer, which is be like it's not supposed to be secure.

24 Q. In fact, on the *Sandy Ground* there are check valves coming  
25 off the engine and then there is a ball valve, but they're

1 actually locked open.

2 A. Exactly.

3 Q. What does that tell you?

4 A. It's tied up in the bottom with a -- I'm sorry. It's tied up  
5 to the fuel return valves to the day tank.

6 Q. And why do you think the return valves on the engine skids  
7 are locked in the open position?

8 A. Because of like -- you never know like if the -- if you, like  
9 let's say that we throttle the valve a little bit and there's a  
10 weak point because the pressure goes up high from the return back  
11 to the day tank, and there's weak point in the hose itself or the  
12 connection or maybe like a little drip and you didn't see it, and  
13 it's going to make like a big spill in the engine room.

14 Q. Okay. Makes sense. And then has there ever been a time that  
15 you're working on any of these of vessels that you are required or  
16 had to operate the return valve because maybe the purifier wasn't  
17 running or something to control the levels?

18 A. I don't remember.

19 Q. Okay. And would it be fair to say whenever the engines are  
20 running that the fuel oil purifier is operational?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. Every time?

23 A. Just to maintain of the level.

24 Q. Okay. And you clean the purifier every day?

25 A. Yes, sir.

1 Q. Is it typically happen that it's caked up with fuel or are  
2 they pretty clean?

3 A. It's like half and half. Like sometime like the oil can be  
4 filthy and some like be clean.

5 Q. But they're not stuck together every day with --

6 A. No, no.

7 Q. -- fuel?

8 A. No.

9 MR. YOUNG: All right. I thank you for your time in  
10 answering the questions. Appreciate your help.

11 CWO [REDACTED] All right. Is there any other questions,  
12 anyone else in the room?

13 MR. FITZGERALD: I'm all set here.

14 CWO [REDACTED] Okay. So before we conclude, I just wanted to  
15 ask that would you agree to be contacted at a later time if I had  
16 any follow-up questions or --

17 MR. ALKHAWAGA: Yes, sir. No problem.

18 CWO [REDACTED] Okay. All right. And just for any final  
19 remarks, do you have anything that you may want to add or share in  
20 regards to the interview?

21 MR. ALKHAWAGA: No, sir.

22 CWO [REDACTED] All right. All right, so that concludes our  
23 interview. Time on deck is 12:03.

24 (Whereupon, at 12:03 p.m., the interview was concluded.)

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 Yazan Alkhawaga

ACCIDENT NO.:               DCA23FM010

PLACE:                        Staten Island, New York

DATE:                         January 26, 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.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Kay M   
Transcriber

Interview Errata  
 Sandy Ground DCA23FM010  
 Interview of: YAZAN ALKHANAGO  
 Position: MARINE OILER

PAGE NUMBER	LINE NUMBER	CURRENT WORDING	CORRECTED WORDING
7	5	um-hum	yes
7	17	abnormal	upnormal
7	18	abnormal	upnormal
7	19	we set it back online back	we set it back online
8	15	conversation	communication
8	13	why I did exactly	what I did exactly
10	17	elaborate	operat
11	8	driving down	go down

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

YAZAN B. ALKHANAGO  
 Printed Name of Person providing the above information

  
 Signature of Person providing the above information

03-27-2023  
 Date