

FDNY Members Mitigate Another Andrew J. Barberi Ferry Crash

by Battalion Chief John A. Calderone

May 8, 2010, started out as a typical Saturday morning, with units performing committee work and preparing to attend multi-unit drills (MUD). That calm was shattered shortly after 0900 hours when the ferry, *Andrew J. Barberi*--the same ferry that was involved in the fatal accident on October 15, 2003--slammed into its slip at speed at the St. George Ferry Terminal on Staten Island.

Typically, as Staten Island ferries approach their terminals, passengers gather at the front end in preparation for a fast departure once the boat docks. This trip was no different. With 252 passengers onboard, along with a crew of 17 and two police officers, most were congregated at the front end, with many outside on deck. As the boat approached Slip 5 at the ferry terminal, deck hands realized the approach was too fast and that a collision was imminent. They yelled for the passengers to get back inside, away from the front. The boat hit the dock with such force that the steel loading bridge, which passengers use to disembark, was knocked off its foundation and moved several feet inland. The deck hands moving passengers back inside probably prevented more serious injuries and possibly prevented passengers from being catapulted forward into the terminal or being thrown overboard.

The first calls for help came via police radio from one of the officers onboard, reporting that the boat had hit the dock hard and there were numerous injuries. This was followed within minutes by additional calls. At 0925 hours, Staten Island Box 0014 was transmitted for the Staten Island Ferry Terminal. The information in these additional calls ranged from confirmation of the original police officer's report to indicating that there were no injuries.

The initial assignment consisted of Engines 155, 153 and 152, Ladders 78, 77 and SOC Support Ladder 79, Rescue 5, TSU-2, Squad 1, Marine Companies 9 and 6, Division 8, Battalion 21 and the Safety and Rescue Battalions. Because of earlier response activity, Battalion 22 was in proximity of the ferry terminal, advised the dispatcher and subsequently was assigned as the second Battalion on the initial alarm.

The first-due engine company, Engine 155, and Battalion Chief John Calderone, Battalion 22, arrived simultaneously at the lower level of the ferry terminal. Ferry personnel met Lieutenant Joseph Morro, Engine 155, outside the terminal and advised them that there were no injuries. The members of Engine 155 and

Ladder 78, along with Chief Calderone, made their way to the slip where the collision had occurred. The Battalion Aide, FF Scott Krute, established and maintained the Command Post. On arrival at the involved slip, it was discovered that there was no access to the ferry due to the damaged loading bridge. The ferry's main deck was several feet lower than the slip.

A ferry official approached Chief Calderone and again advised there were no injuries. Engine 155 and Ladder 78 members assisted ferry personnel in placing an emergency gangway to provide access. While this was being done, Chief Calderone, Lieutenant Morro, Lieutenant Damian Van Cleaf, Ladder 78, and EMS then-Lieutenant Vincent Walla, jumped to the lower ferry deck and made their way inside the ferry to conduct a survey. It was immediately obvious that there were numerous injuries onboard. There were at least 10 people on the main deck requiring stabilization and immobilization, based on their injuries. At 0934 hours, Chief Calderone advised his Aide to transmit the *All Hands* and have the balance of the first-alarm assignment come aboard with CFR equipment and backboards. All passengers were held onboard until sufficient Fire Department personnel had boarded via the emergency gangway and then an orderly evacuation of passengers was undertaken.

Chief Richard Flood, Battalion 21, arrived within minutes of the initial assessment and was directed to assume command above the main deck. He quickly assessed the upper decks and stairways and reported a similar number of injuries. Chief Calderone ordered a second alarm at 0941 hours and requested all second-alarm units to report in with CFR equipment and backboards. The second alarm was transmitted instead of a 10-60 (major emergency response), based primarily on Chief Calderone's personal size-up. With no structural damage to the boat and no catastrophic or traumatic injuries (in contrast to the fatal 2003 incident), there was no need for technical rescue.

Deputy Chief William Tanzosh, Division 8, arrived and assumed command, designating operational Sectors. Chief Tanzosh, in consultation with EMS officers--Lieutenant Walla and Captain Baskin--established a triage area on land, adjacent to Slip 5, and assigned Battalion Chief Robert Wing, Battalion 40, as the Triage Officer.

Initially, all first- and second-alarm units, along with limited



(Left) Damage to the steel loading bridge of the *Andrew J. Barberi* ferry is evident. The damaged loading bridge hampered Firefighter access to the ferry. (Right) FDNY personnel twice were told by ferry officials that there were no injuries. However, 37 victims received medical care and 33 people were transported to area hospitals.

photo by Anthony DePrimo, Staten Island Advance

photo by Bill Lyons, Staten Island Advance



(Left) FDNY members move a victim away from the rubble. (Center) A tear in the side of the *Andrew J. Barberi* hull is revealed. (Right) Many FDNY units were committed to immobilizing patients and placing them on backboards. A victim is removed via stretcher to a waiting ambulance.

EMS resources, were assigned to stabilize patients. A total of 19 patients were immobilized and placed on backboards. These actions were accomplished rapidly because of the number of units committed to this task.

In addition to the 19 serious injuries, there were another 18 walking wounded, with injuries ranging from cuts and scrapes to bumps and bruises. All of these people had to be triaged and treated. In all, 37 victims received medical care and 33 were transported to area hospitals. Since the injuries were concentrated in specific locations on the boat, most communications between company Officers and Sector Chiefs were face to face, leaving the handie-talkie network available for command use.

As soon as the serious injuries were stabilized, the truck companies were reassigned to conduct secondary searches of all areas of the boat, including crew areas, bathrooms and stairways. While these actions were taking place, the two marine companies were conducting searches in the water around the ferry terminal.

Rescue 5, under the command of Captain James Murray, conducted a survey of below-deck areas, including the engine room. During this survey, Rescue 5 discovered a tear on each side of the hull, several feet in length, well above the waterline. This occurred when the boat hit the loading bridge and was not visible to units operating in the terminal or on the main deck of the ferry.

Multiple ambulances were required to transport the many immobilized victims. In an effort to expedite the removal of the 18 less seriously injured victims, Chief Tanzosh, in consultation with EMS personnel, decided to use a transit bus. After triage and initial treatment, these victims were escorted to the bus. EMS personnel were placed onboard the bus to monitor the victims and all were transported to the hospital.

Lessons reinforced

- Dispatch of additional units on the initial alarm, including Chief Officers and special units, facilitated quick establishment of the Incident Command System, along with providing for simultaneously undertaking medical treatment and searches, both on the boat and in the surrounding water.
- Initial dispatch information provided conflicting information regarding injuries. Units arriving on-scene also were told by ferry personnel that there were no injuries. Conflicting information will be received at times and “knowledgeable people” will want to provide units with information regardless of its validity. Responding units should always be prepared for the worst case scenario. This operation again showed that members cannot take anyone’s word as fact. It is necessary for operating forces to physically check reported conditions before providing a preliminary report.

- Non-routine incidents often pose unusual or difficult conditions that units must access and deal with. Such incidents may require the Incident Commander (IC) to perform a personal, “up close” assessment early in the operation to determine existing conditions. If that decision is made, it is still necessary to establish a physical Command Post to which incoming units will report and be assigned. In this case, a regularly assigned, experienced Aide, in constant handie-talkie contact with the Chief, performed this function until the arrival of the Deputy Chief.
- Rapid transmission of the second alarm provided sufficient trained CFR personnel to rapidly assess and immobilize all of the seriously injured passengers, preventing aggravation of their injuries. As the role of the fire service changes, members must change as well. When requiring additional assistance, Incident Commanders should not hesitate to transmit additional alarms in non-fire situations. This boat was carrying a small passenger load. There were only 252 passengers onboard for this trip. Consider the potential of a similar incident involving a fully loaded boat. The capacity of this class ferry is more than 5000 passengers, more than are carried by most ocean-going cruise ships.
- When confronted with numerous injuries, it is easy to become focused on providing assistance. As soon as possible after the situation is stabilized, it is necessary to conduct complete searches of all areas. While all searches proved negative, the two tears in the hull were discovered during the secondary search below deck.
- Use of a transit bus to transport less seriously injured victims in one move was faster and negated the need for numerous additional ambulances.
- Early assignment of SOC Support Ladder 79 to the incident provided multiple additional backboards on-scene early in the operation.
- The normal procedure of an engine company packaging a patient on a backboard is a one-for-one exchange with the transporting ambulance so that the engine can remain on-line for other CFR responses. The ambulance then retrieves a backboard from the hospital after delivering the patient. Due to the logistics of this incident, this procedure was impractical and left multiple fire units without backboards. Thanks to foresight and pre-planning, local EMS officers solved this problem relatively quickly, allowing all fire units to return to CFR response status within hours. At multiple-casualty incidents, this is another aspect that must be considered and addressed by the IC.

About the Author...

Battalion Chief John A. Calderone has served the FDNY since 1973. He is assigned to Battalion 22. He holds a degree in Fire Protection from New York City Community College and has written extensively on the subject of fire apparatus. He is a frequent contributor to WNYF.



photos by Mary DiBiase Blatich

Members are urged to review “Staten Island Ferry Accident Prompts Large-Scale FDNY Response,” by Deputy Chief Richard J. Howe, in the 1st/2004 issue of *WNYF*.