

WITNESS STATEMENT

Criminal Procedure Rules, r27.2; Criminal Justice Act 1967, s.9; Magistrates' Courts Act 1980, s.5b

Statement of: DESFORGES, OLIVER

Age if under 18: OVER 18 (if over 18 insert 'over 18')

Occupation: FIRE OFFICER

This statement (consisting of 8 page(s) each signed by me) is true to the best of my knowledge and belief and I make it knowing that, if it is tendered in evidence, I shall be liable to prosecution if I have wilfully stated in it anything which I know to be false, or do not believe to be true.

Signature: O DESFORGES

Date: 08/12/2017

Tick if witness evidence is visually recorded ☐ (supply witness details on rear)

I am a Fire Fighter based at Soho Fire Station. I make this statement to assist in the investigation into the Grenfell Fire on the 14th June 2017 and to speak about my role in the incident.

On Monday the 27th November 2017 I was interviewed at Paddington Fire Station by DC PREOU and DC ROZARIO. Notes were taken to produce this statement. Also present was Joe MCMAHAN of the FBU.

In this statement I shall mention the following people that I interacted with on the day from the initial call to attend until the point I left the incident.

FF Richard MITCHELL who I paired up with at the incident and was on one of the pumps that came from Soho Station. WM Stuart BEALE who was detailed to complete other tasks when we arrived on scene and FF Adam JOHNSON and FF Terry ROOTS who were paired up as another crew. Also FF John SAUNDERS, FF Theresa ORCHARD and FF Andrew PEARCY who were also from Soho fire station and arrived on either pump A241 that I was on, or the second pump A242 from our station.

The places I shall mention will be the Bridge head that moved on a couple of occasions and various lobby floors that I attended to save casualties and flats that I went into to fire fight and search for casualties.

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I have worked within the London Fire Brigade for some six years and am currently attached to Red watch at Soho fire station where my rank is as a Fire Fighter. I have never been posted to a fire safety department at any stage.

On the night of Tuesday the 13th June 2017 I commenced my shift at 20.00 hours and was at Soho fire station in the mess area of the station. At some time after 01.00 hrs on Thursday 14th June 2017 we received a mobilisation call to attend a twenty pump fire at Grenfell Tower. The actual call came in at around 00.55hrs. I have never been to Grenfell Tower before or even had any Section 7 (2) familiarisation visits to the location but have been to other high rise buildings at other locations. Basically they would be to check the layout and smoke alarms, stairwells and exit points and dry risers etc in these buildings.

I am also unaware of any pre prepared plans for fighting fires specifically at Grenfell Tower but am aware of plans when dealing with these types of fire. In a standard high rise fire there would be one seat of fire and the buildings are constructed to contain fire spread through compartmentation. If compartmentation fails the newly effected compartment would now be treated as the fire compartment aswell. However in the case of Grenfell Tower the seats of fire were as much as 18 floors apart, with multiple flats on each floor involved. So although you have a framework to work within, a dynamic risk assessment approach outside of procedure is necessary to be as effective as possible.

The red watch immediately boarded the two pumps at the station, as the Ariel appliance was already out on another shout they were directed to attend on route. I got onto Alpha 241 and sat in the back. Also on my appliance were WM Stuart BEALE, FF Adam JOHNSON and possibly FF Theresa ORCHARD and FF Lawrence STAVELY. I think the other pump had the following people on board. CM Andrew PEARCY, FF Terry ROOTS, FF John SAUNDERS and FF Richard MITCHELL.

On boarding the appliance initially the MDT was not working so we confirmed the call out by either radio or phone and then left immediately. One of the crew on board knew London well so we found our way to the RVP with no issues although I do not know the route we took as I was in the back of the pump. It became evident it was a large scale incident taking place.

On arrival we parked in a position that we could not actually see the fire from near to the Leisure centre but we were in a road nearby but with no view of the fire. I do not remember the arrival time or the actual name of the road we parked in. The pump was later moved to directly in front of the tower by someone whilst I was in the building as it was needed at that location. We were asked to get rigged into our BA

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sets by the officer in charge on our appliance and then walked round the corner towards the fire. This was the first sighting I had of the fire and my first thoughts were that it was scaffolding that had caught fire. From looking at the building again I could see that the nature of the fire was not a normal one. The building was on fire in many of the flats and smoke and flames were coming from the windows that had given way or been ventilated. We walked to what we thought was the scene of operations and it seemed more like a six to ten pump fire than a twenty pump fire as we were the earlier pumps attending.

I do not remember what was happening on all sides of the building when we arrived but did see mainly one side was on fire which was the time facing the leisure centre. A lot of the flats looked fully engulfed in fire but I cannot say which floors specifically or if the other sides were on fire to this degree. I am competent in dealing with incidents in high rise flats as we have many on our ground and regularly have training in how to deal with fires in these types of buildings when compartmentation fails. We do drills at our station all the time and use our on site training tower as a high rise. As I'm going for promotion I have been doing a lot of reading and revision on this area recently so last received training within a few weeks of the Grenfell incident, at most a month before. I have also been to a number of high rise fires on our ground in the past.

We approached the building and at this stage there was no cordon as it had not been set up yet as it was the early stages of the incident. We could smell smoke as we approached and hear screams coming from within the building and see debris falling from the exterior of the building. We all went into the lobby area and up the stairs and to the mezzanine where we met our other pump crews. I don't know if any fire alarms were sounding as I had other things on my mind at the time and don't know if there were alarms or sprinklers in the stairwells.

Our officer in charge (WM BEALE) at this point was detailed to do other tasks leaving just us as the BA wearers at the Bridge head. We waited at this location to be committed to Fire Survival Guidance Calls (FSGC). As we waited I could see other crews were bringing out casualties already, at least four or five and more later whilst we were completing our FSGC.

I was paired up as a crew with FF MITCHELL and a second crew was made up of FF ROOTS and FF JOHNSON.

My crew was briefed to go to the third floor to a family who said they could not get out of their flat due to the smoke. We had planned to use the hose we had with us to fight the fire when we gained entry to the

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flats but were unable to use it as all the outlets were already in use by other fire fighters. Once briefed we went under air, which means we started using the face masks and air in our BA tanks as we were unaware of the conditions we were about to face going up to the third floor. Various fire fighters had thermal imaging cameras on but we had none on ourselves and do not wear body cameras so were unable to record any of the incident but other fire fighters cameras can be downloaded to obtain footage although I am unsure where this would be done.

We made our way up to the third floor to the door number we were given although I do not remember the door numbers. The smoke wasn't too bad at this stage but as soon as we made entry by opening the flat door it was clear it was a lot denser smoke in the flat which I can only assume was due to wind and other factors as the floor the flat was on was below the initial source of the fire. We explained to the residents that we were there to get them out to safety and they needed to come with us which they then did. I never spoke to any other members of the public throughout the incident.

My colleague FF MITCHELL carried out a disabled woman from the address whilst I helped three younger children and a male adult to get out. We closed the door and left the flat. At this point we were still under air. We led them all to the lobby area to get them away from the worst of the smoke. We lead them to the stairwell after first taking off our face masks to save air as we now realised just how bad the fire was and this would conserve our air which we would need. On the stairwell we met another fire crew, I think from Chelsea who then helped us get the family down the stairs to the bridge head where the air was safe to breath.

Once in the bridge head others then helped them to get outside of the building, I assume to the LAS to get help due to the smoke inhalation.

Once our first FSGC was complete we returned to the bridge head to inform them so they could tick this address off as clear. We were then tasked to go to the twenty first or twenty fourth floor although I cannot remember which exactly as there were people trapped on that floor. We began to climb up the stairwell and as we did we initially never used our masks to conserve air. We soon realised that on standard SDBA we would never be able to reach the twenty first floor as we had used some air already.

We knew we had enough to carry out some rescues still so went up as many floors as we could without our masks on until the smoke became too thick and we were forced to wear them again. This was about the fifth floor. We had been carrying a length of hose in the hopes of plugging in on one of the floors to

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fight the fire but realised other fire fighters had already plugged in so we had no outlets to use. We decided to tuck our hose out of the way the best we could as casualties were coming down the stairs.

The smoke was by now becoming thicker and visibility was next to nothing. We tried to count the floor numbers all the time keeping an eye on our air gauges. We also tried to call the bridge head but due to large amounts of traffic on the airwaves we could not get through to advise them we would be unable to reach the twenty first floor or above. We made the decision to carry on up as far as we could on the air we had, to try and save lives and get any casualties we may have found. It was difficult to get up the stairwell as other crews were trying to come down and the stairwell was fairly tight. Due to this we decided to find a floor with no fire fighters on to search and make ourselves useful.

After checking a few of the lobby areas on various floors we found other crews putting in water jets. We eventually reached a floor, although again I am unsure of the floor level that had no fire fighters on it. We spoke to a fire crew on the stairwell and asked if the floor had been searched. They informed us that the conditions were too bad on that floor and that it had not been searched. I think it may have been the thirteenth or fourteenth floor, but after speaking to another crew since the incident believe it was probably between the tenth and fourteenth floors. FF MITCHELL who was at this time in a crouched position attempted to open the lobby fire door but due to the heat and conditions fell to the floor. I can honestly say I've never seen conditions like this in my time in the brigade. The fire door on this lobby had worked very well as the condition in the stairwell although very hot and smoky was much better than in the lobby after we opened that door where the smoke was much thicker and the pressure and heat was something I had never experienced in my entire career.

We decided we needed to search the floor so whilst FF MITCHELL held the fire door open I crawled on my belly into the lobby area and immediately found what I thought was a small human at first but then realised it was in fact a dog or a cat. I passed it to FF MITCHELL who in turn passed it to another crew going down the stairwell. The smoke in this area was thick black rolling smoke and visibility was near to nothing still.

I followed the left-hand wall conducting a search leaving FF MITCHELL at the door. Although this is not policy as fire fighters are meant to stay together I decided I did not want the door to close behind me and be unable to get out so thought this was a safer option in the circumstances. I moved at speed as the heat was very intense and whilst doing so I found a casualty who was unconscious although I do not know as

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he may have been deceased. I could not tell if it was a male or female due to the smoke but as I dragged them to the door way to FF MITCHELL I could then see it was a black male and he in my opinion weighed about seventeen stone.

I reached the stairwell door with him, by luck another crew was going down the stairs empty handed so we gave them the large casualty we had just found to take down the stairs so we could continue to search. I went back into the lobby area and again followed the left-hand wall and then reached a door to one of the flats that was closed. I then found a second casualty who this time was a female and again appeared unconscious or deceased. On dragging her to the stairwell, her weight felt about twelve to thirteen stone.

As I reached FF MITCHELL he was speaking to another crew in the stairwell about how best to get the casualty down. I left the female with him and went back in as by now I thought it might be an entire family in the lobby area as I had found the male and female. Whilst searching my low-pressure alarm began to sound which meant I had little air left in my BA set. I carried on around the same wall line until I reached a closed door to one of the flats and thought it would not be a good idea to make entry with no air and if the people had left it would likely be them in the lobby area. I continued on until I got to what I thought was the lift but found no further casualties so returned to FF MITCHELL at the stairwell.

The other crew being spoken to by FF MITCHELL were already dealing with a casualty so it was decided that myself Richard and one other fire fighter would get the casualty down that I had brought to him. Richard still had some air and he decided to make a quick search of the floor we were on. He went in and followed the right hand wall whilst I waited with the casualty, this time as I was very low on air. He soon returned with no additional casualties.

We began to make our way down the stairwell with our casualty, but this proved difficult as other crews were coming past us with smaller casualties than ours and the crew ahead of us with the larger casualties we found, was also struggling to get the male down the stairs. We eventually reached the bridge head area into safe air and put down our casualties and removed our masks. Other crews then moved the casualties to the LAS area outside the building for treatment. The bridge head had also now moved to a different floor by this time which I think was due to the conditions within the building. We explained everything we had done and the reasons for not reporting earlier, due to the radio communication issues.

We then exited the building at this time although I cannot advise on timings we did the various activities we did. We made our way back to our fire pump and drank some much needed water and to swapped our

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BA tanks. We wanted to be re-committed to the tower as we still wanted to go back in again to save further lives. We completed our A test which is standard practice and then changed our tanks of air and headed back towards the building. When we arrived at the front of the building there had been a holding area set up for BA wearers and a queue was in place so the same fire fighters were not recommitted to quickly and they could then get a rest. Next to the holding area was a large LAS casualty area and this was all near to the leisure centre.

As we waited I could see a constant stream of BA crews being committed as by now there were a lot of pumps that had arrived at the incident. As we waited we became frustrated as we wanted to help and get back into the building again to continue rescuing residents. We went to another BA area and managed to get ourselves towards the front of the queue again. We were then asked to go back into the building, this time with the Metropolitan Police TSG using their shields to prevent us being hit by falling debris.

On entering we found the bridge head had now changed locations and a fair amount of time had passed since we left the building on the first occasion. We were briefed by a person I cannot remember the name of to go to the fourth and fifth floors in a systematic sweep to force or make entry to the flats to check for casualties and put out the fires. I think we actually searched another floor or so in the end by the time we were finished. Other fire fighters had already been to these floors and forced entry to some of the flats and some of the residents had already self evacuated or possibly been rescued. We went to the fourth floor and picked up a jet that was already plugged into the dry riser and fully charged and searched the floor in the systematic manner.

Myself and FF MITCHELL followed the right hand wall around the H shaped lobby area on this floor and went into each flat until we had cleared all the flats. The water pressure was very poor and although I was aware people on the outside of the building were trying to rectify this issue there was a limited amount of water coming out of the jet which made it hard to make an impact on flats that were 100% on fire on the fourth floor. We then followed this search procedure on the fifth floor and above but found no additional casualties on these floors.

We went back to entry control and advised them that our task had been completed. We then left the building via the stairwell which I believe was the only means to get out of the building. We were both completely exhausted by this time and went back to our fire pump again for some water and rest. After a

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short time we again went back to the BA holding area to try and go back in for a third time but were told we would not be recommitted as we had already been committed twice and used two BA sets.

As I still wanted to help I went to pump A241 to relieve the pump operator so they could get some rest. The pump was supplying water to A245 the aerial ladder. I could see the water pressure was really low at this point. The crew of A245 were trying to save a casualty that could be seen in a window by improvising using a hose reel from a new fire engine which have more powerful hoses than the older pumps. They had lashed it to a ceiling hook so they could get the angle they needed to try and get to the casualty. I was monitoring the supply on the pump to make sure we did not over run the supply as this would cause the water to cease otherwise. Once he had been rescued the pump did what it could with the water and pressure it had to try and fight the fire.

Whilst doing this a new fire pump, I think from Surrey arrived and took over from us. We were told to then go back to Paddington for a debrief and to write our notes which I then did. We left the incident somewhere between 01.00 hrs and 04.00 hrs. As we left the building and the incident, the fire was still going on with fire fighters still going in so I am unaware of any decision making regarding ceasing firefighting or other such decisions throughout my time in the building or at the incident.

In relation to the fire, due to the unorthodox way in which it spread and lack of outlets as they were all in use and also the lack of water pressure which would normally be at 10 bar at the rising main, but seemed much lower at about 2 bar at the outlet. On this occasion it was very hard to fight back or make an impact on the fire. I assume the dry riser was working as it was being used by other fire fighters but the pressure was low. Normally the riser would run from the ground to the top of the building and have outlets on various floors for fire fighters to connect into to fight the fire. The riser is connected to an outlet which in turn is connected to a pump that taps into a fire hydrant to supply the water from the mains. I don't know about the smoke management system or the fire lifts as we used the stairs to go up and down the building. The stairwell was also restricting as it was very narrow. The fire doors were working although many were cracked open to allow hoses into the lobby areas on these floors.

In relation to the stay put policy, normally people would stay within their flats as the compartmentation should hold until fire fighters come and put out the fire. It would be unsafe for them to come out due to smoke inhalation and also cause problems for the fire fighters to be able to physically get to them if to many people are on the stairwells. I don't know if this policy is national or not. Some buildings have

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different policies to others. Any decisions regarding changing these policies on the day are made above my pay grade and I do not know who made them at this incident but they may be recorded in a key decision log.

The notes I made at Paddington Fire Station I exhibit as OJD/1 which I handed over to DC Ferdinand ROZARIO.

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