

**WITNESS STATEMENT**

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

Statement of: HANLON, ALAN

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

Occupation: FIRE OFFICER

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This statement (consisting of 6 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: A HANLON

Date: 06/02/2018

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

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This statement is about the night I attended a fire at Grenfell Tower in Kensington and Chelsea, London on Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> June 2017.

In this statement I will be referring to the following people; Pat GOLBOURNE, Watch Manager Paul GODBER, Crew Manager Damien MAGEE, Firefighter Richard BENAICHA and Firefighter John ALDRIDGE.

I will also mention Grenfell Tower which is located in North Kensington which is an area not covered by Whitechapel Fire Station. I made notes back at Paddington Fire Station after leaving the incident and I will refer to them throughout my statement.

I am a serving Firefighter with the London Fire Brigade (LFB) and I have been serving in this position for the past twenty-four (24) years. My training level is competent. I am assigned to Whitechapel fire station where I am currently on the Red Watch.

I began my career in 1994 at Southwark Training Centre for twenty (20) weeks before being posted to Shoreditch Fire Station where I remained for twenty-one (21) years however due to the cuts in the budget we lost a pump so I was then posted to Eltham Fire Station for a temporary period of three (3) months. I was then posted to Whitechapel Fire Station where I have remained since. Whilst at training school the initial part and first week was all about first aid. From then it was all about Fire Fighting and the use of all the equipment. I learnt the use of ladders, hoses and BA (Breathing apparatus). We used the towers at Southwark to replicate incidents as well as using basement areas. Whilst I was involved in a number of practical drills I also received a number of classroom based lectures.

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On Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> June 2017 at 2000 hours I began my night shift at Whitechapel Fire Station. Upon coming on shift I checked and tested my BA (Breathing apparatus) set which is what is routinely done. The inventories on the Fire Engines are checked making sure that all the relevant equipment is on there. The TIC (Thermal Imaging Cameras) are also checked along with the IEC (Immediate emergency care) which is our first aid box. It contains things such as collars, bandages and oxygen.

Part of my role at Whitechapel is being the 'mess manager' so once I have carried out my tasks I go to the kitchen and cook the food for the rest of the watch so on the night in question I would have cooked dinner. Usually we would have a lecture before being able to go to sleep at midnight and at the time of the shout I do remember being in bed.

At around 0130 hours we got a call to a 40 pump Fire. Our call sign was F331 which is Whitechapel's pump ladder. Other than the location of Grenfell Tower I did not know much else about the incident. My crew consisted of Watch Manager Paul GODBER, Crew Manager Damien MAGEE, Firefighter Richard BENAICHA who was driving on the night and Firefighter John ALDRIDGE. We all got on the Fire Engine and made our way to Grenfell Tower which took around fifteen (15) minutes due to there being no traffic. We took the route via Marylebone Road before going onto the Edgware Road and I was able to see Grenfell Tower in the distance as we drove over The Westway. The tower appeared to be about fifty (50) per cent alight. Half the building wasn't alight but at the top of the tower the fire wound its way around. I would describe it as a line of fire. In all my experience as a Firefighter I have never seen anything like that before. It's common for fires to punch out of windows but to see a whole block on fire is something that shouldn't happen. At the time I remember thinking to myself "How has that happened!". I was not familiar with Grenfell Tower itself and at first I wasn't sure if it was a derelict building or not but having listened to the radio at the time it became clear that there were a number of residents inside.

I do know the area well as I am also a Black Cab Driver on my days off from the Fire Brigade. The main route into the tower which is Latimer Road was actually closed so Firefighter BENAICHA had to do a U-turn and try and get to the tower via the side streets however we could only get so far due to heavy traffic. At about 0200 hours we arrived but I cannot remember where we parked but once we had parked up we got off of the Fire Engine and we put on our breathing apparatus as we knew that we were going to be needed it straight away and going back and forth to the Engine was pointless. I also gathered some breaking in gear to take to the tower. We then ran to the tower which took around ninety (90) seconds to

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two (2) minutes. We were approximately five hundred (500) meters away from the tower maybe slightly more.

Upon approaching the Tower there was a lot of people around including Lots of Firefighters scattered everywhere. I did see a number of fire fighters from Bethnal Green and Shoreditch Fire stations as Whitechapel Fire Station is a neighboring station to them therefore I know a few of the Firefighters. You could also see residents at the windows of flats shining flash lights from their phones and waving sheets to get the attention of us. I would describe it as organised chaos as initially I didn't know where to go or what to do. We saw a congregation of BA (Breathing apparatus) wearers so as a crew we joined the que which was located Underneath a walkway which was situated opposite the tower. Being under the walk way we were protected from the falling debris however two (2) Firefighters at a time we were having to run from the walkway to the entrance of the tower. I would say that the distance was around thirty (30) meters. I remember having to look up and judge when to run towards the tower to avoid any debris falling on me. There was large clumps of metal and panels falling continuously and some of the objects were even still on fire.

Once I got inside the Tower I remember a Bridgehead had already been set up on the third floor however I was standing in the lobby area for some time before being deployed to an intermittent floor where we waited for a further period of time before being deployed as a crew of two (2) up to the Bridgehead which was still on the third floor. I was partnered with Firefighter Richard BENAICHA. The intermittent floor had a balcony which overlooked the ground floor lobby and it was here that a ticket had been issued to us by a senior officer. The ticket had a flat number which I cannot remember but also a floor number which I remember being the 15<sup>th</sup>. The senior officer stated that there were residents inside the flats marked on the tickets. I cannot remember the name of the senior officer.

Whilst waiting on the intermittent floor I remember everything seemed to pause as there were concerns over a Firefighter that could not be located. The senior officer whose name I do not know would not allow any Firefighters to enter the staircase until the Firefighter could be located. Unbeknown to the senior officer a Firefighter did come out of the staircase without his tunic on and looked a bit worse for wear. I assumed that this was probably the Firefighter that could not be located so along with other Firefighters I told the senior officer but whilst this may have been the case this was still not confirmed until around five (5) minutes later when the senior officer received notification on the radio that the missing Firefighter was outside the tower safe and well.

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Things then continued and before I knew it I was entering the staircase and making my way up one (1) floor to the third floor and into the Bridgehead where I saw lots of writing all over the walls which indicated which Firefighters were in which flats. There was also a lot shouting going on and again I would describe the environment as mayhem. It was at this point that the tickets given to us were then taken from us by another senior officer who stated that we would not be using them as all decisions were being made via the radio and the BA (Breathing Apparatus) boards which indicated where each crew were. Whilst I didn't see the boards I believe that there were also FIB's (Floor Information Boards) in use. There was clearly a slight breakdown in communication between the lobby area and the Bridgehead. Whilst waiting at the Bridgehead and just prior to being deployed we were alerted that everyone needed to get out as the Bridgehead was to be moved down to the lobby area. It became apparent to me that the fire had spread below the bridgehead and the area was becoming more and more filled with smoke. I was made aware of this by another Firefighter however I cannot remember who it was. I cannot remember exactly but this process took forever in my mind. I would say that it did prevent us from being deployed up into the tower for about an hour.

Upon getting back down to the lobby area all BA (Breathing apparatus) wearers were instructed to leave the building. This included myself. I believe this was so that the new Bridgehead could be set up. I left the tower however it was by a different door to the one I entered. I exited near to a children's playground area and I congregated with all the other BA (Breathing Apparatus) wearers in a safe area which is located twenty (20) to thirty (30) meters away from the tower. Again we waited for further instruction and after waiting a short while someone requested ten (10) BA wearers so Firefighter Richard BENAICHA and I went and by this point the police had arrived and were carrying riot shields which were used to escort two Firefighters in at a time. One (1) Firefighter at the front with a police officer in the middle and the other Firefighter at the back. Once inside the tower Firefighter BENAICHA and I were at the front of a queue of BA (Breathing apparatus) wearers. From here we were called to the entry control point which was also in the lobby but on this occasion a crew of three (3) was requested so Firefighter BENAICHA and I were joined by a Firefighter from Brixton whose name I cannot remember. Upon getting to the entry control point Pat GOLBOURNE who is a senior officer was present but the Firefighter from Brixton suddenly disappeared and that was the last I saw of him. Pat GOLBOURNE who is a senior officer gave us a brief which was to go to the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> floors and fire fight. Above those floors were other Firefighters so we were expected to protect their exits by conducting the task set by Pat GOLBOURNE.

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We made our way up the stairs to the 4<sup>th</sup> floor noticing hose all over the staircase. We entered the 4<sup>th</sup> floor lobby area which was smokey however there was no fire apparent. Visibility was also not too bad at this point. I made the decision to then leave the 4<sup>th</sup> floor and go back into the stairwell and up to the 5<sup>th</sup> floor where it was heavily smoke logged. I cannot remember searching any flats on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor. There was clearly a fire going on, on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor as there was two (2) maybe three (3) hoses going into the 5<sup>th</sup> floor lobby. There was a burst length of hose as I was hit with water a few times as it came gushing out. You could not see where it was coming from because of the amount of water. I was alerted to a fire in a flat located around to the right as you enter the lobby. We followed the right hand wall and after passing the first flat which was locked we noticed that the fire was coming from the second flat. With the use of a branch we were able to fire fight but at times we would put the hose and branch down and check the other flats ensuring that if there were any other flats on fire we would be able to also fight them however whilst we were able to check certain flats others were locked and we just couldn't get inside. Whilst conducting searches inside flats we did not come across any residents. By this time there was also a lot of debris inside. The branch we were using was massive and is one that would ordinarily be used for fighting fires from the outside of a building. It was very hard to manoeuvre however as it had been lined up to take into the building so we had no choice but to use it.

After a while my partner Firefighter BENAICHA then told me that his air was running low so I informed him that we would conduct the fire fighting for a further couple of minutes before we would make our way back down. His warning whistle did eventually go off so we came out of the 5<sup>th</sup> floor, onto the staircase and then made our way back down to the lobby area passing two (2) Firefighters on the staircase conducting hose management.

Upon getting down to the entry control point in the lobby area located directly at the bottom of the stairwell I briefed the entry control officer and informed him of the task we had completed. Firefighter BENAICHA and I then made our way down to the other lobby area which is located further down the stairs. My partner was struggling and was overcome with the heat so he rested and managed to drink some water. I felt fine and did take off my BA (Breathing Apparatus). I then went back to the entry control point and back into the stairwell where without BA (Breathing Apparatus) I assisted those Firefighters I had seen moments earlier on the way down. The stairwell was smokey but the conditions weren't too bad so I was able to work without the use of BA. I stayed on the stairwell from this point for around three (3) hours where I worked between the third and the tenth floor assisting with the hose management and this was to also allow the BA (Breathing Apparatus) wearers to save their air as it would

Signature: A HANLON  
2018

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have been too much work for them to do. It was important they saved their air. I was continually working between the entry control point and the tenth floor informing the senior officer at the entry control point which hoses were being plugged into which outlets. I believe I done the best I could have. I went to every floor I could get to, to see where we were plugged in. The staircase was only about four (4) feet maybe five (5) feet in width which was a problem in terms of access because it is not wide at all and there was only one (1) staircase in the building and with hose on the staircase along with Firefighters and casualties moving up and down it proved extremely difficult and there wasn't much room to operate. The floor numbers had been marked with china graph however I was aware of the floors as I was regularly counting. The first six (6) floors I would say were marked clearly with floor numbers. There was a lot of activity on the staircase. I did see a number of Firefighters escorting casualties and residents out and on the ninth floor there was a large black person who was clearly dead. I have since found out that the person was actually a female. She was faced down on the stairs but due to her size we could not move her in the conditions so we had to work around her. I also saw a white male wearing goggles being escorted out of the tower but this was a lot later on in the incident at around 0400 hours. He appeared fine and breathing without any injuries. I also over heard a young boy of about ages five (5) maybe six (6) state that his brother was upstairs in the tower and was dead.

The stairwell did seem to be holding clean air well however every time a Firefighter would leave a floor and enter the stairwell smoke would naturally enter the staircase which meant that every now and then I would have to run down to get clean air before coming back up and working. Grenfell Tower seemed to have one (1) fire door between the staircase and each of the floors where the newer blocks have a two (2) door system preventing smoke from entering stairwells so when you go through the first door the idea is that it closes before you go through the next one again stopping smoke breaking onto staircases. Even though hoses were preventing doors from being closed fully I do believe that the self-closing doors were working. I remember a generator being brought into the stairwell so that we could pump water as we did lose water on a number of occasions.

I cannot remember exactly what time it was but it was roughly 0700 hours maybe 0730 hours and having worked continually for a considerable amount of time the staircase did eventually get unbearable with heat and smoke so we had to get out. I noticed by this point that the tower was about ninety (9) per cent alight. It was only the first four (4) or five (5) floors which were untouched on the outside.

Once out of the tower I made my way over to the area where the paramedics were and it was at this point I remembered that I had found a smart phone on the staircase. The phone was continually buzzing in my

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2018

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pocket and I could see the text messages appearing on the front of the phone and they consisted of things like "Are you ok?" I am now aware that the phone did belong to the large female who was deceased on the stairs. I believe she was an artist and her name appeared on the news a couple of days after the fire which was the same name on the phone. I handed the phone to a male Police Officer and informed him that I had found it on the staircase between the fifth and the ninth floor. By this time, it was around 1000 hours and I was able to sit down and rest before going back to find my BA (Breathing Apparatus) set. At around 1200 hours myself and the rest of the Whitechapel crew were dismissed from the incident but were to go to Paddington Fire Station to complete our statements. We made our way to Paddington Fire Station and completed our statements which took another couple of hours. From Paddington Fire Station we made our way back to Whitechapel Fire Station where we were able to go home. I have not been back to Grenfell Tower since the incident.

Prior to the fire at Grenfell Tower I cannot say exactly when the last time I had any training I on high rise fires. We as a crew would however have done some training exercises whether it was lectures or practical drills. I have been involved in a number of high rise fires over the years and I would say that hose management is usually the biggest problem as there is usually hose everywhere and it can be very hard to manage. The fires are usually contained in a flat and although there was the incident at Lakanel House a few years ago which I was not involved in.

The communications set on My BA (Breathing apparatus) set failed on the night so in the end I turned it off as it was no good. I had no means of contacting anyone however through wireless connection the officers at the entry control point were able to see how much air I had left in my BA (Breathing Apparatus) set. The communications facility on the sets are not very good in general and in high rise incident's they are pretty much no good at all especially when there is a lot of radio traffic.

The dry riser was charged with water on my arrival as the hose I was using had water coming out. I don't remember hearing any fire alarms or being aware of any fire safety measures. The space inside the tower was very limited. The appliance will plug into the inlet on the ground floor and it will charge water to the top floor via a pipe and on each floor the hose will be able to gain water via an outlet. I know that on the night of the fire this facility was working as there was water everywhere however I did also hear through other Firefighters that throughout the night the debris was cutting the hose between the fire engine and the outlet to the tower which obviously had an effect of the water supply.

I am aware that on the night the stay put policy was in place and it is my understanding that if there is a fire in a block that it should be contained inside the flat of the actual fire and the residents are told to stay

Signature: A HANLON  
2018

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in their flats whilst we deal the fire and the flat should contain the fire for about an hour. If the building is designed properly then the fire should not spread preventing residents leaving flats and getting caught up and overcome by smoke. I am not aware of any officer who was changing that policy on the night however there does come a point that you have just got to get out and it was obvious that we were not going to control that fire. I am sure at the control centres decisions will be recorded and logged but at my level I don't have any involvement in that and this applies for the general command and decision making. I get instructed what to do by my officer in charge who goes to a command unit to receive instructions before passing them down to us Firefighters. I am also unaware if the chain of command did change throughout the incident.

In relation to the FSG (Fire Survival Guidance) I am aware that a resident calling will speak to a controller and will stay on the phone to that controller who will try and keep them calm but also give them advice. Whilst on the phone to the resident the controller will also be updating the command units and from here Firefighters are informed of which flats to go to.

I would say that on the night we as the Fire brigade needed more EDBA (Extended Breathing Duration Apparatus) which is a two cylinder set which gives Firefighters double the air.

The only aerial platform I saw used on the night was the one that came in from Surrey which came in from the other side of the building to where I was. Due to a children's playground and the covered walk way there was nowhere really that it could be parked. The area surrounding the tower had no open spaces which prevented the aerial platform getting close to the tower. If the aerial platform cannot be used, then there is no other alternative other than firefighting by going to up into the staircase which is what was done on the night.

Since the incident I have been offered support and counselling from the Fire Brigade but I have declined this at this stage.

I would describe the whole incident as unprecedented and I cannot think of any Firefighter that would have been to a fire like that in their careers.

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Page 9 of 9

Signature: A HANLON  
2018

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