

WITNESS STATEMENT

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

Statement of: SIME, ALAN

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

Occupation: FIRE OFFICER

This statement (consisting of 10 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: ALAN SIME

Date: 06/02/2018

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

On 18th November 2017 between approximately 1130 Hrs and 1404 Hrs I was interviewed by DC Tony BEACH and PC Angelo DELL'AVVOVATO at Kensington Fire Station. An audio recording was made during the interview. The content of this statement is the summary of the interview.

This statement refers to my experiences and role at the Grenfell Tower, London W11 fire on Wednesday 14th JUNE 2017.

After achieving a diploma in public services, I joined the London Fire Brigade in 2001 [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I have now been a fireman now for sixteen years. I started at Southwark before moving to Chelsea Red Watch, station code G34. My family has strong links with the fire brigade, my dad is a fireman as well as my cousin

I will be mentioning the following people within my statement. Temporary watch manager O'Keeffe was my governor for about two years. He is currently not at my station, he is based at Kensington. On the night of the Grenfell Tower fire there were four of us on the FRU, including myself. I was partnered with firefighter (FF) Ernest OKOH. I have known FF OKOH for about two years when he moved to our station from Clerkenwell. The other two firefighters were Tom REDINGTON, who I have known for twelve years and Nikki UPTON, who I have known for seven years.

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The fire rescue unit (FRU) is an alternative engine equipped to deal with calls such as car crashes. There is an additional four-week training course in the use of the equipment and its practical application through a series of car crash and stability scenarios. The FRU role is regularly alternated between that and the pump ladder which keeps the skills of both roles up. Fire engines are also referred to as machines by firefighters.

The FRU crew use extended duration breathing apparatus (EDBA). EDBA allows you to go for longer and further into a fire. Short duration breathing apparatus (SDBA) has one cylinder which normally lasts thirty minutes. EDBA has two cylinders, a double set lasts approximately forty five minutes but will vary depending on workload. The smoke does not affect you when wearing BA. You can get a build-up of condensation which you need to wipe away. Wearing it also restricts your view. Clothing for the FRU is the same which is referred to as fire gear. This consists of trousers rolled down over brown leather boots and a fire tunic. Additional clothing can depend on what you're going to so we wait till we get information about the call. For example, if it is a car crash it would require a high visibility jacket, anything to anything to do with a fire we would put a smoke hood on. The tendency to feel the effects of the heat comes from the external temperature and the suits inability to vent body heat. Allowing this would compromise the suits ability to keep heat out. My head gear is a helmet that offers protection. However, the trade-off is it is quite big and cumbersome as well as heavy. Radio communications (Comms) is via a personal issue hand held radio, however once you are wearing full breathing apparatus (BA) you can't use it due to your face being covered. Specific BA radio comms are supplied to one firefighter per pair. During the Grenfell Tower incident FF OKOH had BA comms. He did not relay anything to me so I believed there was nothing significant relating to our task. We are continuously trained which includes high rise training at least once a month, however within the training programme we will do specific elements relating to high rise training within a scenario. For example, tackling a fire on a fourth floor with a ladder entry via a third floor window. Therefore, we can train for high rise situations in excess of four times a month on occasions. Within high rise training I understand that we create a bridgehead two floors below the fire floor. The bridgehead requires taking up first aid kits, BA control boards, enough hose and reel necessary to allow you to go as far as required into a flat plus an extra length of hose. Hoses are usually plugged into the wet or dry riser of the building and then tested. From the bridgehead we work upwards floor to floor to fight the fire. There is an additional backup group of two firefighters who set in on the floor below the fire to support you. You have the main hose and

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supply so if there are any issues with water supply their hose should be the first to go. I have been trained on multiple floor fire scenarios but not to the extent of the fire situation at Grenfell Tower. It was a freak disaster. Looking back now I don't know what we could have done differently or how you could deal with or control it. It will be a case study we will need to learn from once the enquiry is complete. Radio communications during the incident could have been better. I have seen the stay put policy work, ninety-nine out of one hundred times if you stay in a room it would work. I have been to lots of high rises where the fire stays contained within a flat.

I have never been to the Grenfell Tower before and have no knowledge of this particular tower. On Wednesday 14th JUNE 2017 we got call at Chelsea at about on twenty-five to two in the morning. I came down to see the pump ladder was already out, I was on the FRU, call sign G346. The tip sheet gave us the details of the call as a fire at Grenfell Tower. I got rigged in my fire gear, got on the machine and we headed towards the Grenfell Tower approaching from the south. It is not on my ground but I am a taxi driver so knew roughly where it was. On route I could hear the radio. From the back I couldn't hear exactly what was said but there was lots of radio traffic about fire survival and making pumps twenty, which is increasing the number of resources to the call. At this time, I didn't know the scale of the fire, I thought it might be two or three flats on fire.

We missed turning on the Westway for Grenfell tower. At the first roundabout we should have done a right and then left instead of straight on. At the first roundabout I saw the fire for the first time, it was massive. Seeing it blew my mind, it made the adrenaline start to rush. In sixteen years I have never seen anything like that at all. The whole building was literally on fire. From where we were on the Westway I could see from the tenth floor up on two sides. I knew it had started on the fourth or fifth floor.

We continued up the Westway round the roundabout, back down Westway and through the side roads to get there. We got there early and parked the FRU as close as we could on Sirdar Road but this was still three to four hundred metres away. Roads were grid locked with cars and about fifteen to twenty fire engines. Normally we would see the officer in charge and ask what was needed but it was manic with lots of people. Within the organised chaos firefighters were grabbing kit and running towards the detailing area. Fellow fire fighters who had already been to the fire and come back said just to bring your BA sets and hose branches. All of us on the FRU put on our BA sets on and ran towards Grenfell Tower. It was

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quite a way.

Once we got to Grenfell Tower it seemed like where there were no additional surrounding buildings stopping the wind as it swirled round, caught the fire and taken it around the tower with it. I don't know what side I was facing. At this point I didn't know if it was on fire inside or just cladding on the outside. There were about thirty members of public standing around gasping, some were in shock. People had come out of surrounding houses, some were in hysterics saying they knew someone inside. My mind was a blur at first. I was just focused on getting in. We stood in a holding area known as Sector One waiting to be detailed. Sector One was located at the base of Grenfell Tower in the carpark and the sheltered bit underneath that offered some overhead protection.

Close to the building was Paddington's hydraulic platform (HP) or turn table and ladder (TL) which was up spraying water. It was too close as debris was falling on the ladder and the firefighter on it so they had to bring it down. A HP is a large machine; it has no additional breaking in gear just an extendable ladder with platform that can reach up seven to eight floors. There is not much difference between a HP and TL apart from the ends, a HP has a platform on the end of a ladder while a TL just has a ladder. While we were waiting in the holding area of Sector One Soho's HP arrived and started to set up on the grass. Ideally it should have been on flat ground but that was the only the available option, they had to try. There were only two of them so I dropped my BA set and went to help instead of sitting there waiting. I helped them with the general set up by rolling out and snaking hose, located hydrants and connected them up. When it was ready the crew manager asked if I wanted to go up. I put on a harness over my fire gear and got in the cage and clipped on as per safety protocol to prevent you falling out.

The crew manager was on the platform operating it while I was on the hose. We went as high as it could go, I am not sure exactly how high as the HP was not from my station so I don't know its exact capabilities as they can vary.

Initially the hose worked however the water pressure was poor, only a little was going on the tower before it would die. The platform was brought down to test the hose. We went back up, water came out and then died again. It was repeatedly brought down to double check and test everything and then sent it back up again to find that there was still no pressure. The HP crew suspected there was a supply issue with so

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many machines coming off the main supply but they still continued troubleshooting. I am not HP trained so unsure exactly what checks they were going through. The water pressure remained intermittent and therefore ineffective. The crew manager finally confirmed there was simply no supply. The fire was quite high by now, from the fourth floor up everything was on fire. It was bright orange in every window. The flames were creeping round to the right slowly. Our side was fully on fire; I believe it was this side that initially caught fire. From the other side they were getting calls to people in windows. We looked to see if there was anyone in the windows, I did not see any survivors. At this stage I was thinking with everything on fire inside as well as outside what was holding it up.

Debris was coming off the building and all of it was on fire. A lot was floating down so indicated it was not heavy, however some coming off at speed so was quite heavy. With all that was coming off the building I did not want to get that close to see exactly what it was, I was concerned it would fall on us. The HP was located about fifteen to twenty metres from the tower. Proximity can vary and depends on how close you can get without putting yourself or the equipment in danger. If conditions permit and required to, you can get close enough to get people off ledges. I was wondering whether we should stay as we were quite close to the tower and quite high up. Being up there without water you are in harm's way. It's a very precarious position to be in with debris falling. You are not in a position to move, at least on the floor you could step out of the way to prevent being hit. The HP did not move position, there was nowhere else to relocate it to. We had been going up and down for about an hour. As it was not achieving anything effective the decision was made to drop it completely. Debris covering the floor was on fire so we got a hose from round the side of the HP supplying us to put water on the fallen debris to damp it down and put it out.

The dry riser inlet is located on the outside of the building that we problem plug into our machine with hoses. This was a problem as the debris fell it was hitting and bursting the hoses. Once you get a nick in the hose it loses pressure, we were already struggling with over use. They were hard to change due to falling debris danger. The hoses needed a protective cover or the inlet point needs to be moved twenty meters away from the building so that the pipe is buried and protected. Later on I came out a different exit so I am unsure if the damaged hoses were ever replaced.

There were calls for EDBA wearers so I explained to the HP crew I had to go. FF OKOH was waiting on

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the grass in sector one while I was on the HP. We got to the outside carpark and shuffled along underneath the carpark cover from to protect us from falling debris. We were told to dash into the building to avoid the debris. We went through a ground floor broken window to get in to the lobby which was about six by eight metres. In this holding area there were about thirty to forty fire fighters. At this point I saw about eight to ten people coming out of the tower. Some were walking, while some were being carried by firefighters in SDBA, who would then hand them over to non BA fire fighters who would then take them to the waiting ambulances. It was very tight they were saying "watch your back" as people came through. Most of the people were of an ethnic minority a couple of black men and women and a couple of children. They were between twenty and forty years old, they were walking. I saw people being ushered by firefighters suffering from smoke inhalation. I did not see any serious injuries or jumpers. A young boy came out with his mum while being carried by his dad. He said "my brothers in there, my brothers in there, but don't worry he's dead". I was thinking don't worry no he's not it won't be that bad. I did not know how bad it was until I had been up. His mum and dad were suffering from smoke inhalation and were being taken to the paramedics. We waited there for about ten to fifteen minutes.

There were shouts of EDBA to come through. I was detailed with FF OKOH. We were given the slip by temporary watch manager O'KEEFE, sending us up to a fire survival call on the tenth floor, flat seventy-three. We started rigging and went to the BA board to hand in our tallies. The procedure is to state your name, amount of pressure and time to work, all which is repeated back to you. The automatic distress signal unit (ADSU) is activated.

We were just about to go in when we were told there would be no survival calls over fifth floor. Instead we were detailed to the fifth floor to fight the fire. I don't know why the decision was made to change us to the fifth floor. I did not question it, there must have been a reason. I wanted to go but had seen the building from the outside, it could have been a building stability or water issue. Our procedure is that we never go above a fire. If the fire was on the sixth floor for example you would fight it on the fourth and fifth, but if we had to go above the fire, that's what we had to do.

We went up to fifth floor I was in front. The stairs were tiny for a twenty-four storey building they were like normal house stairs. In my opinion they were not wide enough for a building of that size. they were just too small and very tight. Due to the smoke, from the fourth floor up we couldn't see anything.

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Lighting passed the fourth floor was pointless due to smoke. Stairwell lights were on for the first to third floors which helped at the start. We knew we were on the fifth floor as we were counting the floors as we went up.

There were five hoses from the start leading up to various floors, we only had one staircase. The walk up was hard going, you had to watch your footing where people had taken them up the stairs. We didn't take any hoses up they were lying on the floor outside the flat. Normally we would throw a line out the window and bring them up the outside, At Grenfell that was not possible due to the external fire. We passed two crews of two going down. We passed the first crew on the second floor and the second crew on the fourth floor. Due to poor visibility I was unaware who they were we just let them pass.

We arrived on the stairwell of the fifth floor. We went through the fire door into the lobby, it was slightly open due to the hose feed. The hose was already placed right near the door and connected by a crew firefighting before us. We couldn't see anything at all. I didn't know the layout so did a right hand wall search as detailed to do. During a wall search you stay in permanent contact with a wall round to the right then check the middle of the room. FF OKOH went first. The first flat door we came to was a metre in, the flat was ablaze so we could not go in. The door was open I couldn't see the actual door of the flat as after half a metre it was smoke upwards and dark due to being early hours of the morning.

We crawled forward on our bellies. We put water through the front door, FF OKOH was at the front and about a metre in the flat, he had the branch of the hose and I was supporting him holding it. We put as much water as we could, we were throwing water on it, but it didn't seem like it was doing anything. We would move in a little bit only for it to flare up. It was relentless, we couldn't knock the fire back like a normal fire even with excess water being used. I've never had it that bad before, it was so hot. Normally you would gradually be able to get into the building by crawling in, get forward then step up but this time we had to stay down. We remained on our bellies the whole time. The visibility was about a foot in front of my face, you could not see your hands. Everything was dark but you could see the glow of the fire everywhere. Added to this was the tunnel vision from my head gear. I could not hear my hand held radio over my BA. We had a thermal imaging camera we put it up and it showed glowing everywhere. Due to the conditions I don't know the layout of the of the flat or the landing. I went through a fire door, first right another door after a metre, I was there and came down.

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There was lots of water on the floor I kept checking our exit concerned about a possible building collapse or blocked exit. I can control a fire but if the building collapses we have no way out. It was just a metre from the stairwell so I would check our exit and come back while FF OKOH remained putting water on the fire. We stayed for about twenty minutes it was so hot. I did this three times to make sure it was clear. There were lots of loud bangs. Firefighters were coming in working to left putting doors in. Aerosols were also exploding in the heat. The heat affected me but it was harder not being able to see. FF OKOH had it worse being at the front on the branch.

On the third or fourth exit check I saw two firefighters suffering with extreme heat exhaustion, stumbling carrying a female, I believed she was unconscious. They almost fell over, I asked if they needed a hand and then told them we would help. I called FF OKOH and told him this was now our main priority he agreed. We didn't do any checks on her as we needed to get her out quickly. I carried her by her right lower leg. FF OKOH had her left leg we were at the front carrying her down. She was face up. It took about two minutes going down. Fire fighters going down have right of way over those coming up as usually they have casualties with them. I was thinking we must get her down as quickly as possible, she needed help. We took her to the bridgehead where there was a first aid post and handed her to the non BA fire fighters who took her straight to the medical centre. After that we went back to the BA boards to grab our tallies. That was the last I saw or heard of her. In total we were about twenty to twenty-five minutes from going in and coming out.

We were instructed to go outside to the grass area where we told to take on refreshments, mainly water to rehydrate. We got into relaxed dress gloves, helmet and tunic off to get our temperatures down. The grass area was the same point that I had originally entered the building from. There were approximately fifty to sixty firefighters in small groups plotted about, the majority looked heat exhausted. People were still being brought out suffering from smoke inhalation. After about and half an hour to an hour my FRU team were approached and asked if they wanted to go back in. If you didn't want to go in the second time you didn't have to. Procedure is you can go in twice but because of the ferocity and possibly because what firefighters had seen they were asking. It was completely your decision. We all agreed to go back in so went to the sports centre to replace our cylinders. Three hundred bar of air will last forty minutes, mine was at one hundred and fifty to one hundred and sixty bar after we had been in. We changed them and

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checked our sets to ensure we were ready to go. This took about ten minutes. I changed both of my cylinders as they are connected. We moved to another holding area located round the back near the play park. Fire fighters were in SDBA sitting waiting to go in, there was a five to ten-minute wait outside. We had to go in with a police officer with a riot shield due to falling debris. We were individually assigned a police officer to stay with by holding on when running into the building next to the wall. Debris was falling and floating, some crashing and banging down. There were lots of sharp bits on the floor, windows frames, cladding and glass, some was burnt out and some was alight. A crew were putting it out. In total ten firefighters would complete a shuttle run. The police were bringing people back on the return run. The muster point was one hundred metres away. I was escorted over about fifty metres.

Once inside the second entrance we went in towards the lifts and to the BA board. The lifts were not being used, there was about a foot of water and loads of chairs. Firefighters were sitting on chairs in about a foot of water waiting to be detailed. There was a bit of light but it was gloomy. All of us were wearing EBDA, some were fresh wearers who hadn't been in. In total approximately ten of us were waiting. A white helmet, a watch manager would come and say something like "I need two" meaning he wanted two firefighters. We waited about ten to fifteen minutes by the lifts when the white helmet said "I need a team of four to go to the eleventh floor to fight fire." I went with FF OKOH and two others who I don't know. I completed a buddy kit check with FF OKOH. Our briefing was "Go to the eleventh floor there's a hose on the stairwell, fight the fire". In addition, we were informed that there may be no water so we needed to be careful. They also told us about a man on the tenth floor landing we were instructed to step over the body to preserve it. Normally it would be more detailed briefing but it was organised chaos and they were doing the best they could in the circumstances. Before we went we were told it was optional. If we didn't want to go didn't have to as it was outside of protocol due to going above the fire. Normally you don't go above the fire floor because if you can't get out the likelihood is you could get stuck but it was what we had to do. I had experienced situations out of protocol before. The Marsden fire was a bad fire when this happened. You can go outside of protocol but still feel safe which is what I felt. I just kept checking my exits. We went to the BA board put our tallies in again and activated our ADSUs. After the third to fourth floor there was no visibility. We had only been to the fifth before, we counted the floors as we went up, shouting out the floor numbers. Numbering was poor, they were either not there or really small and not well lit. The numbers should have been big and at waist height. The stairs were not hot just smoke filled and it was not going anywhere. Visibility was two- foot maximum you could not see anything, the fire

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doors to the floors were kept open by the hoses feeding off the staircase. There was lots of hose going up to various floors, water was everywhere trickling down the stairs. There was lots of firefighter traffic going up and down. Going up to the eleventh floor the lights were working. I did not hear any alarms. The stairs were covered by thirty percent of hose. There was less hose as we went higher as they branched off to floors. By the eleventh floor there were two to three hoses. I was thinking if it was going to be as bad as the fifth where we could only get a metre in with the hose how bad is it going to be on the eleventh. I was not concerned about going to the eleventh, I just wanted to go. I knew the stairwell was safe, that's never really going to be on fire. If I got up there and did not believe I could do anything I would come down, so I was never really put in any real danger. We located the body on the tenth floor landing, it turned out to be a large woman. We stepped over on way to eleventh.

When we got up to the eleventh floor, the lobby entrance on the stairwell was as far as we got. The Temporary Watch Manager (TWM) with us was in front, I was second. He found the hose on the stairwell landing on the eleventh floor. He tested the hose but there was no water pressure up there. The hose was opened and shut repeatedly as well as twisting it to check it but I knew there was no pressure from the oversupply issue with the HP earlier. I am unsure where it was connected to. I did not enter the main lobby as we had no extinguishing media. All checks were done on the small landing outside in the stairwell. The Fire door was still intact dark in colour, there was no fire damage. We radioed this information down. The TWM decided we were not going any further and to go back down. This was explained to all who agreed, we did not go any further. From my position on the stairwell landing outside of the fire door I did not see fire on the eleventh floor lobby. We kit check first before assessing a fire as this is what is going to save your life. As we were not going onto the actual floor I did not look any further.

My personal view I was disappointed that we had come up and hadn't done anything I wanted to try something different. Could we have done anything else? Maybe we could have just done search and rescue but we had been detailed to fight the fire. The TWM was in charge so I had to go with it. No one was in danger so I have to respect that otherwise I would have challenged it. No one else said anything. Equally I did not know how far the fire had got or if any rooms were alight on the floor. We basically walked up and then turned back down. From the eleventh floor it took three to four minutes to get back down in the pitch black of the smoke and bad lighting. We came down and told the BA board about the

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pressure, there were no incidents on the way down. I did not hear any fire alarms during my time in Grenfell Tower.

We went round the rear to the grass area to relax after being escorted by police. I found the rest of the FRU crew who also said they had experienced no pressure when they had gone up. We now had two wears so couldn't go in again. We were told to be on standby as they had enough people and would detail us if required. This was a different holding area to sector one. We did not see any more casualties being brought out from here.

We waited on the grass in groups based around our reliefs. Up to eighty to ninety other firefighters walked back in. We asked if there were any other jobs to do but told to relax as we had been in twice. The FRU was sent back to Paddington, we walked back but were blocked in by fire engines and cars. We waited half an hour to an hour waiting for these to be moved. We checked our machine for missing equipment, what had been taken by other crews and what been used and had a tally up. We left at approximately ten in the morning. We drove to Paddington and saw a welfare lady and had a chat. After that we went to a room where a station Manager wrote down what we had done, saw and went. He handed out paper to everyone to make notes. We were there for about half an hour. There were three to four machines there and about twenty people. We got back to Chelsea fire station at around one thirty in the afternoon and then went home. I had started at eight pm the previous night.

During my first time in the lobby I would describe the family coming out with the boy who stated his brother was dead as a Muslim family. Mum and dad had dark skin, Middle Eastern or Arabic appearance. The mum was in her late twenties or early thirties; dad was in his late thirties. Mum and Dad had clothes on and were suffering from smoke inhalation. Not many people were wearing shoes. I was focused on the boy not the parents. He was distressed and shocked he had seen more than he should have. The boy was five or six and was in his pyjamas.

I would describe the woman that we assisted carrying down from the fifth floor as a black female about twenty years old, slim build with longish braids in a ponytail. I think she was wearing a grey track suit and had nothing on her feet. She was unresponsive.

During the audio interview I drew a map showing the layout surrounding Grenfell Tower, my entry points

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into Grenfell Tower the locations of the two HPs at the start of the incident. I have exhibited this as Exhibit AJS/1, One (1) Map of Grenfell Tower. This has been referenced with police serial number MPSZ13134297

After the fire at Grenfell Tower I was provided with a proforma which consisted of a series relating to actions at the incident. I Used this form and to assist in making contemporaneous notes. I had time to consider answering these and to the best of my knowledge the answers provided are true. I have exhibited this as Exhibit AJS/2, One (1) set of contemporaneous notes. This has been referenced with police serial number MPSZ13134305.

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