

WITNESS STATEMENT

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

Statement of: ALLISTON, ANDREW

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

Occupation: FIRE OFFICER

This statement (consisting of 7 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: ANDREW ALLISTON

Date: 15/02/2018

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

I am the above named person and my details are known to police. The content of this statement constitutes a summary of an interview conducted by DC Peta JAMES and PC Joanne STONE at Mitcham Fire Station on Friday the 5th January 2018 between 1101 and 1247 hours. This statement does not purport to be complete and for completeness and accuracy it must be read in conjunction with the interview transcript.

In addition to this statement I made a set of notes that I completed after the incident which I exhibit as ANA/1 . I made these notes contemporaneously after the incident and did not refer to any of our logs or records in the making of those notes. To that end I am unable to give accurate times to the matters that I refer.

My name is Andrew ALLISTON and I am a Firefighter. I am currently based at Wimbledon Fire Station and am competent and not classed as in development. On the night of the fire at Grenfell Tower I was on a night shift that started at 2000 hours and was due to finish at 0930 hours the next morning. My role was Firefighter on the back of the pump ladder.

I joined the London Fire Brigade in October 2007 and was initially stationed at Battersea Fire Station. I was there for around 8 years before moving to Wimbledon, where I have been ever since. Along with completing my initial Firefighter training I also completed a Fire Rescue Unit (FRU) course whilst I was

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at Battersea Fire Station, which was a 4 week course at Southwark. I am also trained in swift water rescue, I am a power boat handler, a driver and am trained to use both Standard Duration Breathing Apparatus (SDBA) and Extended Duration Breathing Apparatus (EDBA). AN SDBA set has one cylinder of air and EDBA has two.

I have taken part in various high rise training courses, the most recent of which was towards the end of last year - 2017. We normally will have lectures and will use the tower in our yard to try and recreate fires. The tower that we have at Wimbledon is different to most high rises because there is not a normal stairwell - there is a Jacobs ladder instead so it's not very realistic. Most of the training that we take part in is theoretical. The practical training is limited. Previously, I attended an incident in a high rise in Battersea where I had to firefight in 2010/2011. Before the incident on 14th June 2017 I had never been to, nor heard of, Grenfell Tower before.

Since the fire at Grenfell Tower we now have high rise bags that contain all the equipment that we need specifically for those types of buildings, for example equipment for wet and dry risers and made up hoses.

The night of the fire at Grenfell Tower was Wednesday the 14th June 2017. During the shift we had a call to an Automatic Fire Alarm on the Borough which we attended and then on the way back to our truck I heard over the radio that a Battersea crew had been deployed to a fire in North Kensington. That was the first time I was made aware of the incident at Grenfell Tower. We got back to the station and our Aerial Ladder Platform (ALP) got called to attend Grenfell at around 0130 hours. Our FRU then got called about 30 minutes later.

On the night I was allocated as duty person so I was my responsibility to acknowledge any calls or information messages that came in. The bells came down for us at around 0430 hours. I was resting when the call came in because I had anticipated that we may be called to the incident at Grenfell Tower. The message that came through on the teleprinter stated that we were required to attend a 40 pump fire as a 20 pump relief. We grabbed all our kit and I got into the back of the pump ladder, call sign H341. I was riding the ladder with Watch Manager Andy McKay, Firefighter Jonathan Earl, Firefighter Rodney Stuart and Firefighter Ian Jones.

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The sirens were sounding on the way so I couldn't hear much information about the call coming through on the radio. We were trying to find the best route to get to the location so we were looking at an A-Z map and also using the sat nav on our phones to work out the quickest way to get there. I can't remember the exact route but I know we went over Putney Bridge and into Shepherds Bush. I'm not sure what other roads we took to get there because I don't know that area of London but I know that when we arrived we parked the truck on Elgin Crescent, as directed by a Police Officer. I think that was the closest we could park at the time. We arrived at about 0445 hours.

Once we'd arrived an officer from the London Fire Brigade came over to our appliance and told us to grab our sets, any spare cylinders and a Thermal Imaging Camera (TIC) if we had one, and to get to the Tower. We had to walk for about 15-20 minutes to get to there and as I was walking down I was making sure that I had everything with me that I needed. It wasn't until I actually got close that I looked up to see the Tower. It was well alight and there was lots of smoke everywhere - it looked pretty horrendous. I could see that two sides of the tower were alight. I looked like the whole side of the building was missing and just looked like a shell, without any windows. We went towards the leisure centre and once there we told to drop our sets and wait there for further instruction. I can't remember who it was that told us that but it was someone wearing a white helmet so it would have been an officer.

The crew stayed together at the leisure centre. We were approached by someone and asked if we were EDBA wearers, which we were, so we were told to grab a set and check it. There was a bucket of them so we grabbed one and carried out a Fire Ground A test, which is where you connect the cylinder onto the set, check its contents, make sure it's got enough air etc and then make an entry in a log book to confirm that it's all working.

While we were waiting to be called in it was getting pretty busy around the leisure centre. Lots of crews were turning up and crews that had already been into the Tower were coming back to rest and I saw a few people from my old crew at Battersea. It seemed pretty hectic at this point because there were just Firefighters everywhere. There wasn't the calmness that there usually is at a job that has been running for so many hours but obviously there still lots of fire and lots of smoke, so lots of work to be done.

We waited for quite a while after we got our sets on, probably around an hour or an hour and a half,

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before being called down to the holding area next to the tower. We made our way down towards the Tower, underneath a kind of ramp and past where a truck was parked and down towards the playground at the back. It was next to the play area that they had a big holding area where there were lots of Firefighters waiting to go in. They had a queuing system for going into the Tower but I don't know what it was. We waited there to be told what to do and while doing so I saw our FRU crew who hadn't yet been in. I took my set off because at nearly 30kg in weight its quite heavy. About 10 or 15 minutes later we got told that they needed an EDDBA crew so I volunteered to go, along with Crew Manager (CM) Adam Clarke, who was on the Wimbledon FRU that night.

We were taken through, along with my pump ladder crew, back the way we had walked and then to another holding area, where we waited to be taken into the Tower under the police riot shields. We had to go in under them as they were protecting our ingress and egress. We got into the Tower and into the ground floor where they had the Entry Control point and waited to be told what to do. The conditions on the ground floor weren't too bad. There was lots of water, it was almost up to above my boots, so just below my knee. There was a bit of heat but not too much and visibility was ok as there was emergency lighting on. There didn't seem to be too much smoke- the air wasn't clean but there was no need to wear any BA. There were lots of senior officers there and lots of other Firefighters wearing both SDBA and EDDBA.

After a short while I was asked, along with Crew Manager Clarke and 2 others from Paddington red watch who I don't know, to go up to the 11th floor to firefight. We didn't have any firefighting media at that point but we were told that there was a crew ahead of us with a 45mm jet protecting our egress. Firefighting media is anything from a fire extinguisher to a water back pack or a hose reel off the truck. I wouldn't normally go anywhere near a fire without any firefighting media but there wasn't any available to us at that specific point. We were therefore working outside of our normal policy and procedure. I'm sure if I had said to that officer that I wasn't prepared to go then I wouldn't have had to but it was personal choice and I was happy to go in, as I knew that there was a crew ahead of us with a jet.

We repeated our brief back to the officer who had committed us, who I believe now was Pat GOLDBOURNE, and gave in the tallies off our bodyguards to the Entry Control Officer. The tallies were then put into the Entry Control Board and it was confirmed that the telemetry signal was working. This is

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the signal that links the BA sets to the Entry Control Board.

We made our way, under air, up the stairwell. The stairwell was a single stairwell and there was no lighting. There was smoke in the air and there was equipment all over the stairs making it difficult to go up or down. Visibility was poor- I could see shadows or things that were reflective but it was like walking into a dark room, with objects everywhere. I could just about see where CM CLARKE was because we were very close to each other and we both had our lamps on. When you're wearing the BA sets your hearing is restricted because of the flash hoods and then the fire helmets on top. Your mouth is not visible to others because of where the mask sits. Your gloves are also restrictive. You lose a lot of your natural senses when you're in all the kit and it can be quite limiting. The set weighs nearly 30kg and the rest of the fire gear weighs around 10kg so that restricts you even more. I consider myself to be quite fit but wearing that kit and going up those stairs was exhausting and arduous. That was only the 2nd or 3rd time in 10 years that I've worn EDBA.

We got to around the 4th or 5th floor and I needed a breather so we paused for a minute. There were no floor numbers marked on any of the walls so we carried on and made our way up to what we thought was the 11th floor, where we made contact with the crew ahead of us. We could hear them above us so the CM from Paddington who I was with spoke to them. They handed over the 45mm jet that they had and from there we tried to gain entry into the flats from the stairwell. The landing area that we were on was tiny, maybe around 6-8 feet wide, which wasn't great for 4 guys all wearing EDBA sets on their backs. We tried as best we could to implement a door procedure, where you would have one Firefighter controlling the door and one with the firefighting media with the aim to try and improve the conditions behind that door. There was no visibility for me behind that door so all I could go on was how it felt, and it felt extremely hot.

We gained entry into the lobby through that door by cooling down the gases by using the water from the jet. I crawled in on my hands and knees about 5 feet into the lobby with the jet and I couldn't see anything so I asked one of the guys to pass me the TIC in order to try and see where I was and what was around me. I also needed to see where the heat was coming from because there had been no improvement in the heat level, despite us squirting water into that area. If anything, it was probably getting hotter and all I could feel was heat on my left hand side that was getting worse and worse. I stayed in that position as

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long as I could and then asked the other Firefighter that was with me to swap over. He tried to make progress but we just couldn't stand it so we shuffled back to the lobby area. At that time a 2nd 45mm jet had appeared from somewhere and was handed to me so we stayed in that position, in the stairwell, and used both jets to try and cool the area behind the lobby door.

We stayed there for what seemed like a really long time, although I'm not sure how long it was, until one of the guys that I was with bodyguard alarm sounded. If a bodyguard alarm goes off it normally means that the Firefighter has been motionless for 30 seconds. This could indicate that something is wrong so we all did a gauge check to see how much air we had left and then made the decision to withdraw and head back to Entry Control. If we had stayed on that floor I don't think we would have made any significant progress into that lobby because the heat was too intense.

We made our way down the stairs leaving one of the hoses on the landing in a safe place as best we could for any other Firefighters that might need it, and taking the other to the floor below. On the way down I saw the Wimbledon Pump Ladder crew who were going up and we told them where we had been, what we had done and where we had left the jet. We continued down the stairwell which was difficult because of all of the hose, and made our way into Entry Control. We retrieved our tallies from the Entry Control Board and told the Officer In Charge (OIC) what we had done. It wasn't me who debriefed the OIC but I believe it was one of the Crew Managers who did. We turned off our sets and then we were accompanied by the riot police out of the building.

We made our way back over to the leisure centre where we dropped our sets, de-robed as best we could and got some food and water. I was still with CM CLARKE and we waited for quite a while before being joined by my Watch Manager Andy McKAY and a couple of others from my crew. We didn't get told whether we would be going back in again so we were just getting refreshments and chatting and taking it all in. After a while we were told by another senior officer to go and find fresh EDBA cylinders and do the Fire Ground A test because we were more than likely going to be going back in, which we did. We got told to go downstairs in the leisure centre where there was another crew and told to wait there because we might be going in. We waited there for quite a long time before being joined by Firefighter Jonathan EARL from my crew. Once he was there we were told that we would not be needed again and that we could go. We walked back to the truck on Elgin Crescent with our BA sets and then left the location. We

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were told to go to Paddington Fire Station as there was a mass debrief there but we agreed that we were happy to go back to Wimbledon to do that and to write our notes. We got back to Wimbledon Fire Station at about 1630 hours.

After the incident I had reddening on my left arm and shoulder from the heat but I did not receive any medical treatment for it. I didn't have nor did I witness any near misses.

I am not aware of any issues with radio communications (comms) on the night as I didn't have a radio on my set. I know that comms weren't great, but I don't know if there were any specific issues.

In terms of the stay put policy, my understanding is that if the fire is not in your property then the advice is to stay put and we will come and get you. I'm not aware of the policy on the night of the fire at Grenfell Tower and whether it changed or not throughout the night.

In an ideal world there are lots of things that should have been in place to help Firefighters on that night, for example sprinklers, a second staircase, emergency lighting in the stairwell and clear numbers on the walls. Also premises information plates on the front of the building would have been useful.

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