

WITNESS STATEMENT

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

Statement of: VANGO, ANDREW

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

Occupation: FIRE OFFICER

This statement (consisting of 9 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 VANGO

Date: 18/02/2018

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 Luke BACON and PC Joanne STONE at Edmonton Fire Station on Tuesday the 5th December 2017 between 1022 and 1235 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, during the course of making this statement I have referred to a set of notes that I completed after the incident which I exhibit as ANV/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 Andy VANGO and I am a Firefighter. I have been a Firefighter for 15 years and I am based at Edmonton Fire Station. I am currently classed as competent and not in development. On the night of the fire at Grenfell Tower I was working a night shift and my role was Firefighter and BA (Breathing Apparatus) wearer on the back of the Fire Rescue Unit (FRU).

I became a Firefighter in 2003 and, after completing my 4 month firefighting course, started my career at Kensington Fire Station. I stayed at Kensington for 2 years and then moved to Edmonton, where I worked for a year before training to work on the FRU. Our FRU at Edmonton responds primarily to road traffic

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accidents and incidents where people are trapped. It also carries out line rescue, which is rescuing people from heights, and swift water rescue where there has been flooding.

After completing my FRU training I then became line (rope rescue) and water qualified and also completed my Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) qualification, becoming a specialist in LACE (Line Access Casualty Extraction), where we use different methods, i.e. cables, for rescuing people, and hot cutting. I went on to become Level 3 USAR which means I carry a pager on my days off. USAR was brought in around 15-16 years ago after 9/11 for buildings that have collapsed and rescuing people from that kind of thing. It was then developed and adapted for rescuing people in other jobs, i.e. train crashes and other major incidents.

My training is continual- I have yearly refreshers and assessments for the line and water rescue. With the LACE training and hot cutting we have 2 refreshers a year. In regards to high rise training, we have lectures and carry out 7(2)d visits to tower blocks on our station ground. A 7(2)d is a familiarisation visit to places on our ground that may be at risk. They assist Firefighters with the layout of the building, the location of the fire hydrants and help to identify any risks. I do not remember when my last high rise training took place.

Before the 14th June 2017 I had not been to Grenfell Tower before. I knew that it was on North Kensington's ground but had never been there.

The night of the fire at Grenfell Tower was Wednesday 14th June 2017. The bells came down early morning, around 3.30 hours. I was in bed resting when we got the shout. I ran downstairs and checked the call slip to see where the fire was. I saw that it was a 40 pumper - meaning that 40 appliances were needed and knew that it was a massive job. I had mixed emotions at that point and I felt quite excited. I wanted to make sure I had everything I needed so I made sure I had my PPE kit and my trousers - and got into the truck. I rode in the back with Firefighter Andy Wright. In the front was Crew Manager Tim CUTBILL and Firefighter Steve BOULTON.

I don't remember the route that we took to get to the Tower but I remember that it was a fairly quick, easy drive and there weren't many cars on the road. By the time we got there the sun was just starting to come

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up. I could see the Tower from a distance. I remember seeing the smoke and the flames and thinking 'Wow, this is a serious job'. The magnitude of the job was so huge and due to the severity of the incident I didn't think that they'd be sending anyone in to the fire. There was a lot of flames and a hell of a lot of smoke.

I can't remember where we parked when we arrived and I'm not sure if the appliance got moved at all while we were there. We got off the truck and we were told straight away to grab our Extended Duration Breathing Apparatus sets. As Firefighters we either wear Standard Duration Breathing Apparatus (SDBA) or Extended Duration Breathing Apparatus (EDBA). EDBA is a set that has higher capability of oxygen than SDBA. It will last for around 50 minutes depending on the activity being carried out by the Firefighter. It is a very useful tool, primarily for search and rescue. It is not normally used for firefighting but can be if necessary.

We walked towards the Tower and into a waiting area next to the riot police. I can't remember the distance that we walked but it was a reasonable way. I remember my adrenaline flowing as I walked towards the Tower. As I approached, I could see that the fire was going from the top to the bottom of the building. I couldn't see if the flames were wrapped around the Tower but I could see that it was flaming at the top down to about floor 6. Debris was coming down and there was soot everywhere. I think it was bits of insulation that were coming down but also bits of metal too and a lot of ash was floating in the air. Along the ground it looked like a bomb had gone off, there was stuff everywhere and it was wet. There was a pathway through where the police were taking us in but everywhere else was manic -there were bits of broken metal everywhere. My thoughts at that point were that we just needed to get in there and do what we need to do. The magnitude of it was huge- it was the craziest thing I've ever seen and I was quite taken aback by it all.

We waited with the riot police for the all clear. There was so much debris coming down that we had to wait to be escorted in under their shields. We got given the all clear and the 4 of us in my crew were marched into the Tower and told to wait in the lobby area where BA control was. It was really wet inside and everything was soaking. We received our first briefing which was as emergency crew for a Bethnal Green crew who has lost all communications (comms) with Entry Control. An emergency crew is normally sent in to search and locate if comms are lost, if there is a loss of air, no telemetry or if the

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Automatic Distress Signal Unit (ADSU) is sounded. The ADSU is connected to a small computer that Firefighters wear on their body and an alarm goes off if the crew member has not moved for a certain amount of time. The wearer is also able to set their own alarm off if they become unwell. This then sends a signal to the telemetry/Entry Control Officers board. Telemetry is the signal that's sent between the Entry Control board and the ADSU.

Throughout the incident I was aware that there was no comms at all. I didn't have a comms set on - normally there are only 2 sets on the FRU; one worn by the officer in charge and the other worn by the firefighting officer which wasn't me on that day - but I knew there was a problem. This meant that we were unable to communicate with the Entry Control Officer and were unable to feed any information back to them. We were also unable to communicate any problems with the teams through Channel 6, which is the way we normally talk to each other. The only means of communication in the Tower was through telemetry, which was limited. The Entry Control Officer was able to press a button on the Entry Control Board which would send a signal to the Firefighters ADSU telling them to withdraw but that's about it.

A short while after being given the brief to find the Bethnal Green crew, they came down the stairs into the lobby, so there was now no need for us to be sent up to find them and we were stood down as the emergency crew. Our next brief was search and rescue. We were not given any specific flat numbers but were told to go to the floor and then work our way up to 12 if we could. We were told that there was no procedures for this but that to get to the 11th floor, risk assess and do what we can to get people out and be safe. We had no firefighting media so it was purely search and rescue.

We made our way up the stairs and up to the 11th floor. As we were doing so we came across a bariatric casualty lying in an open doorway on, I think, the 10th floor with no signs of life. The casualty was very big and heavy. I thought it was a male at the time but know now that she was female. Because the door was open it was smoke logging the stairwell, which was our only route of protected ingress and egress, so we made the decision to try and move the body into the lobby of that floor. Up until that floor the stairwells visibility was good. Firefighters WRIGHT, BOULTON and I all tried to move the casualty into the lobby, by pushing and pulling, however it was too hot in the lobby. We managed to move her enough to close the door, protecting the stairwell from smoke logging and giving us more visibility, leaving her in

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the stairwell in a position that meant we could still move around.

We left the casualty and moved up to the next floor. I think it was the 11th floor but I can't be sure as everything was blacked out. I was at the front of our group and, after carrying out the door procedure as best as I could, led the others into the lobby. The lobby was pitch black and full of smoke and we couldn't see a thing. I believe that most of the flats on that floor were alight so the smoke was coming out the doors into the lobby. We had a Thermal Imaging Camera (TIC) but still we couldn't see anything. There was no ventilation at all, even when I was down on the floor I couldn't see anything. We felt our way round to the first door on the left and carried out our standard door procedure as best we could, all kneeling down and trying to establish which way the door opened. I have marked on a floor plan provided to me by police where we were when we went into the lobby. I exhibit this floor plan as ANV/2. We found the hinges on the door and determined that the door opened inward. We had an enforcer and I hit the door with it 5 or 6 times and tried to smash it down. Before I managed to break the door down Crew Manager CUTBILL signalled that it was too hot and then told us leave.

We made the decision to move up to the next floor so made our way up the stairs. As we were walking up Firefighter Andy WRIGHT came across another body on the stairs. We joined him and checked for signs of life however there were none and it was apparent that nothing could be done. The casualty was a black female I believe and she was quite big. I don't remember much else about her. I don't remember if we moved her or not but I know that she had a mobile phone on her that was ringing. I can't remember if it was in her hand or not but it was somewhere on her body.

After we left the casualty Andy's ADSU button had been pressed by the Entry Control Officer signalling him to withdraw. I think we had been inside for about half an hour by then. Andy said he wanted to carry on and he didn't know why he had been called out. Tim made the decision for us all to withdraw in order to drop Andy off. We would then carry on and do more. We walked all the way back down the stairs to the mezzanine level where the air was cleaner and dropped Andy off. We knew that he would be safe from there and could walk himself down.

The rest of us went back up the stairs. We went up about 5 or 6 floors before Tim decided to withdraw us. I don't remember how much air we had left at that point. We went back down the stairs to Entry Control

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and Tim debriefed the Officer in Charge. We left the Tower and went outside to the holding area. We all wanted to get back inside so we found new cylinders and changed our BA sets. We had a break for a few hours where we had some food and water and were then waiting around for ages to get back inside. There were 2 different waiting areas where lots of Firefighters were waiting to go in.

We got ourselves to forward mobilising on the west side of the building where the riot police were with their shields and were again escorted inside under the shields because of the falling debris. We went into the lobby and again waited around. There were so many Firefighters waiting around with no one really being put in the job.

After a while the Entry Control Officer asked for 2 volunteers to go in and put in a leaky feeder on one of the floors. A leaky feeder is a long hard wire that is laid in order to increase the telemetry ability and allows a greater signal along the route that it is laid. Steve and I both volunteered to do the job and we both just wanted to get back in and do something. We took the feeder and ran it from the Entry Control point, where it was plugged into the Entry Control Board, up to a higher floor. I can't remember which floor we went up to but I think it was as far up as any of the firefighters had gone. We kept the wire taught, keeping it as close as possible to an obstacle so that it wouldn't move around and be in the way. Once we had done this we were on our way back down and came across a hose where the branch had come off. Water was cascading down the stairwell which might have been the reason why the pressure was bad elsewhere so we tried to rectify it by fixing it. We found a branch, the part of the hose where water comes out of, and tried to put it on the end of the hose but there was too much pressure and we couldn't do it. We picked up the hose and tried to follow the length of the hose down to try and switch it off but there was so much hose everywhere all tangled up that we couldn't find the end. We made the decision to put it inside a flat where it wouldn't affect anybody and would be out of the way. I don't know why that hose was there.

After we had placed the hose in the flat, we came out and saw a branch on the floor. Steve and I picked it up and started to firefight in one of the flats on the floor we were on, which we did for around 10 minutes or so as we still had some air left. I have no idea what floor we were on. The alarms on Steve's ADSU's went off and we were withdrawn while we were firefighting. We stayed for a little but longer but Steve had twisted his ankle when we were going down the stairs before so we made our way back down.

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Another crew took over our hose.

We debriefed the Entry Control Officer and then left the Tower. We waited around in the holding area for quite a long time and then were relieved from the scene at around 1600 hours. As we were getting back on to our appliance I was approached by 2 ladies who asked me something about the 16th and 17th floors. I can't remember what they asked but I didn't know the answer to their question. I didn't speak to any other members of the public whilst I was at the Tower that day. After leaving Grenfell we went to Paddington Fire Station for a debrief and to write up some notes.

Three (3) days after the incident I went back to Grenfell Tower with the USR department in order to assist the Disaster Victim Identification Team (DVI). I was there for 2 days and on the first day I helped to build a protected walkway from the underpass which provided protected ingress and egress for anyone gaining access to and from the Tower. I also carried out building monitoring with the Kent USR department. This included looking for any changes within the building using plum lines and laser measuring tools to see if the structure of the building was changing. Within the Tower there were lots of sloped ceilings and floors from all the heat and water on the night of the fire so we were also checking to see if there was any further movement or if they were dropping.

I also assisted the DVI team recently with taking out the debris that they had swept up from the flats. There was between 200-300 bags in each room so I helped move them to the lift to be transported down and put in storage.

I have never seen or experienced anything like the fire at Grenfell Tower. The fire did not spread in a way that I would have expected it to. The magnitude of it all was horrendous. To go back and see the bodies on the top floor and the way they were positioned and to think about what they must have been telling the children is horrific. It's such a shame that they didn't get out. I didn't realise at the time but I know now that some of the flats were completely untouched and some totally burnt out. It's strange how the fire didn't hit some of the flats at all. In the flats that the fire did get in to, the heat must have been huge for it to have completely disintegrated everything, from the internal walls to the ceilings. Having spoken to firefighters that were in there with me on the night I know that the heat was at different levels on different floors at different times. Some floors were very, very hot and others not so much.

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This job was so unique and hopefully there will never be anything like this again. It was very interesting to see that whereas usually with the Coanda Effect, where fire will flip from floor to floor, that didn't happen at Grenfell and we know now how bad the building cladding was and how much more quickly it caused the speed to fire to spread from floor to floor and from top to bottom.

I am aware of the stay put policy that was in place on the night. The advice basically that is given out by Control as part of the Fire Survival Guidance is that if you're trapped because of fire, you should stay where you are and the Fire Brigade will come and get you out. I am not aware if there was any change in policy on the night of the fire at Grenfell as information like that isn't normally fed down to Firefighters. Personally I don't agree with the policy— it's a good thing if it's safe and there is the ability to get out but I think that if you can get out then you should, especially if they have the ability to get out at early stages.

I am not aware of any issues with the gas supply on the night however I did see blue flames coming out of some of the flat windows on the night of the fire. I can't remember where exactly I was when I saw them but I remember seeing them. I heard that they couldn't turn off the gas and that they had to dig up a road somewhere to turn it off but that was only hearsay rumours on the night. Nothing was communicated to me directly.

I know where the dry risers are at Grenfell Tower, having been back there with the USR, however I didn't plug into any on the night. On the floor where we did the firefighting the hose was plugged in to one already when we picked up the hose.

Proper comms would have been helpful so that we could have been able to communicate what we were doing.

I did not suffer any injuries on the night of the fire.

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