

WITNESS STATEMENT

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

Statement of: FROST, CHRISTOPHER

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

Occupation: FIRE OFFICER

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: CHRISTOPHER FROST

Date: 16/01/2018

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

This statement is given in relation to my actions during attendance at the fatal fire that occurred at Grenfell Tower in North Kensington on 14th June 2017. In making this statement I refer to a copy of notes that I made at Paddington Fire Station on 14th June 2017, shortly after the fire, and I refer to a copy of these notes as my Exhibit CMF/1.

My name is Christopher FROST and I am a Fire Fighter based at Soho Fire Station. Soho Fire Station is located at 128-132 Shaftesbury Avenue Soho London W1D 5ET.

I have a total of 19 years' service with the London Fire Brigade, joining in 1998. I am posted to Red Watch and have served my whole career on Red Watch at Soho. I have loved every minute of it. I have been an appliance driver for 15 years and an aerial ladder driver for around 11 years. I have undertaken basic training and have had on the job continuous training.

Soho is a very busy station and covers the heart of London, the touristy bit. You can easily have twenty calls in a day, or some days you have one or two. Being an aerial ladder driver I don't just cover Soho as a lot of stations don't have aerials so we can be deployed North, South, East and West.

The London Fire Brigade have a policy for dealing with fires in high rise buildings and in Soho we have lots of high rise buildings. We have a set policy in terms of crews deployed inside the buildings with

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regards to the equipment they would take, where we set up our bridgehead, order of what we are going to do, whether it is a dry riser or a wet riser building. I am trained in that policy. As an aerial operator and driver it is slightly different and from an aerial you are above the fire and spraying water down onto it.

On 13th June 2017 I was on a night shift at Soho Fire Station which started at 8pm. The shift would normally have finished at 9.30am on the 14th June. There were three appliances at the roll call that evening which were a pump, the pump ladder and the Aerial Ladder Platform (ALP). I am a Fire Fighter but on that shift I was acting up as the leading hand on the ALP. The driver of the ALP that night was Fire Fighter Jason KING.

On the roll call that night, apart from Jason and I, were Watch Manager BEALE, Crew Manager PEARCY, Fire Fighter ORCHARD Fire Fighter JOHNSON, Fire Fighter MITCHELL, Fire Fighter ROOTS Fire Fighter DESFORGES, Fire Fighter SAUNDERS and Fire Fighter STAVELEY. I can't recall who was assigned to the pump and who was assigned to the pump ladder.

We were ordered out to Chelsea's ground before this call but I can't recall what the shout was. Whilst at this incident we heard the Grenfell Tower call on the radio. On route back from the Chelsea call we heard on the radio "8 pumps appliances and 2 aerial appliances" and we were then deployed. This call meant that they had upgraded the call and they now need 8 fire appliances and 2 pump ladders.

We checked where it was on the map and my driver Jason said he thought he knew where it was. We were given a route in but we decided to go down a different route as we thought that the one given would be congested. I remember we ended up on a block paved sort of roadway, not the standard tarmac type road. As we arrived I saw the tower in front of us on fire on the right hand side. I have drawn a line on a map provided which shows the route we took on approaching the tower and where we pitched the vehicle. I produce this map as my exhibit CMF/2.

When we arrived we booked in by "Button Box" in the cab of the appliance. The button box is the Mobile Data Terminal (MDT) which sends instructions to the appliance. I do recall that we got very little if any, information from the MDT. I think we got to the area of the tower at around 1.30am.

I got out and went up towards the entrance of the tower. I noticed the closer I got that it was now well alight on the right hand side of the tower. I was met by a Watch Manager, I don't remember who it was,

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explained who I was and he told me to find the best place for our appliance.

As I looked at the tower I saw that the Paddington table ladder was already set up on the front left corner and was already spraying water onto the fire. I walked around the tower to look for the best position for the appliance. By the time I had walked around, only 2 or 3 minutes, the fire had spread up to the roof level. It looked like the outside of the building was on fire, not inside the flats. The fire was travelling and seemed to go across the building, back down and across. It seemed to catch on the north side and went up quickly.

I remember thinking "How is it burning?" "Why is it burning?" I had never been to a fire that had reacted in that way. I just didn't expect it. I was in disbelief. It was obviously being drawn up by the materials that were on the outside of the building. The best way I could describe it was it like somebody had sprayed a thick lighter fluid on the outside. I was eager to get our appliance up and working to assist.

As I was walking around the tower I saw around 15 - 20 people in a playground area all looking up and shouting up at the windows. They were asking me if there was anything I could do. I could see that there was no way I could get the appliance into this area due to the layout.

I have marked on a plan of the Grenfell Tower elevations roughly the height of the fire on our arrival and then how far it had spread after about 10 minutes when I returned to the appliance. I produce this plan as my exhibit CMF/3. It looked like an external fire at that stage. I wasn't thinking that all the flats were on fire just that the outside of the building was on fire.

I returned to our appliance and we then drove towards the right side of the tower. The only access I could see was onto a grassed area behind some trees. We wouldn't normally set an appliance up on grass, but it was dry and seemed to be the only place we could set up. I told Jason to drive onto the grass slowly to see if the wheels of the appliance would sink into mud. He drove onto the grass and it seemed solid and we didn't sink. I said that we would need another appliance to come up to act as a pump from the hydrant up to the aerial ladder.

We set up the ladder and set the jacks to make it stable. It became apparent, looking at the fire taking

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hold, that we would need more than the hose with the monitor trained on the fire. There was another firefighter in the vicinity, I don't know who he was, and I asked him to get into the cage with me with a second hose, whilst other firefighters were getting the feed appliance in place to pump the water. I remember it was Soho's pump ladder that was the appliance that was manoeuvred into place to act as our pump. We got rigged into our harnesses and started to go up.

It took about 10 minutes to get the ladder up and in place. The ALP has two speed settings. It has a slow setting for difficult, close manoeuvres and a fast setting for quicker deployments. Unfortunately I couldn't get the fast setting to work properly. I couldn't get it to come out of the slow mode which was quite frustrating as everything takes a long time. By this time the pump had turned up and had connected to the ladder at the bottom.

When the ladder was fully erected I tried the monitor but no water came out. The monitor is the piece of equipment that fits on the end of the hose that increases the flow of water coming out. As no water came out of the monitor my initial thought was that I had done something wrong so I checked everything again and it all seemed OK. Still no water came out though.

There were problems with communications on the night. The microphone in the cage of the ALP was not working. It should be an open mike so I can just talk and they can hear me at the bottom, but it wasn't working. I could receive messages but not send anything. Whilst I was up in the cage I remember there were lots of questions coming over the radio from the fire fighters below asking me why I wasn't putting water on the fire. I tried to shout down to them that the water wasn't coming out but I am not sure that they heard. I also tried using my hand held radio but there was a lot of radio traffic going on so this wasn't much use.

I took the decision to lower the ladder and come down as we weren't being effective. It took a few minutes to come down as I couldn't get it out of slow mode. When we got down we checked everything again just to reassure myself that I hadn't done anything wrong. I saw Crew Manager PEARCY and asked him to check that I was assembling and connecting everything correctly. He had the same issues that I had with no water coming out. Pieces of the building were also now coming off and falling very close to where we were.

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I later found out that we were operating the appliance correctly but the water pressure was low and that is why very little water came out. The pressure coming out of the hydrant was low and when it then has to travel up thirty two metres, which is the height of the ladder, the pressure was virtually non-existent.

You would normally need 1500 - 2000 litre a minute to use it effectively. I had less than 500 litres a minute of water pressure at the head. The pump needs to be drawing that from the hydrant into the pump appliance for it then to go to the aerial ladder. I remember thinking it may have been low because of over use.

It was a dry building. By that I mean it had dry risers which we had to pump water into. Firefighters were in the building opening branches on lots of floors which isn't normal. It could be that this was causing the low water pressure. It could be that everyone in that tower was running the taps. It could be that everyone was doing everything they could to make themselves safe.

With hindsight I think that maybe we should have gone and looked for another hydrant but there was no-one there to go and look for one. There were not many firefighters outside as there were so many BA crews needed. There was probably no more than ten at any one time, sometimes only three or four. All the others were deployed as BA inside the building. The main concern was to fight the fire from the inside. Fighting the fire from the outside was a lower priority. The building wasn't alight at ground level. We needed to get the jet up high to fight the fire and there just wasn't the pressure.

Jason and I stood there for a while looking at the building and commenting on how far the fire had spread. As we looked up at the flats I remember there was definitely movement of people in flats on all three sides that I saw but I can't be more specific. All the lights were on in the building and it was obvious that the power was still on.

Jason and I had Breathing Apparatus (BA) sets with us so we thought it might be beneficial to join the line of fire fighters waiting to go in. We put on our BA and then joined the line. We sat there for as long as 45 minutes to an hour waiting to go in. By then they wanted Extended Duration Breathing Apparatus (EBDA) sets and I wasn't trained in this piece of equipment.

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We decided to return to where my aerial ladder was and whilst we were away somebody had attached a hose to the cage and it was back up to its full extension. It was providing some water onto the fire but not a lot. We took off our BA sets and put them on the grass. I remember helping the firefighters who were operating the ALP. The fire had now spread from about a third of the right hand side to very near the top.

Whilst looking up at the building we could see somebody at a window maybe on the 9th or 10th floor. It was a male and he kept appearing then disappearing from the window. I can't recall anything more about him. There had been other people at windows prior to this but this man kept coming to the window then going again.

I had no idea about the layout of the building as I didn't go inside. I didn't know if the building had one or multiple staircases or if people would be able to make their own way down. I may have been to an Automatic Fire Alarm (AFA) activation there before but never to a fire.

The fire had started to descend from the top of the building down towards his flat down the middle section so I made a decision to concentrate the hose spray in the vicinity of this flat. To do this we needed to gain extra height with the jet and change the angle of the branch. We brought the cage down to the ground and removed the branch from the front of the cage and attached it to a ceiling hook which we had placed in the cage. The ceiling hook was at an angle so that the branch faced up more. We then positioned the ALP back up in front of the 9th Floor windows.

It wasn't as effective as we had hoped but at least it was putting some water around the area of the flat that we saw the man at. In the context of the fire brigade it was almost like using a high pressured garden hose to fight the fire.

In the area where the ladder was situated there wasn't a lot of other firefighters. My Watch Manager BEALE was in charge of our sector. Over the next few hours we just watched the tower burn. I was aghast at how bad it was. It was unbelievable. I have been in the job the best part of 20 years and I had been to fires in high rise blocks before and what should have happened with the fire wasn't what did happen. The fire should have been contained within the flat in which it started. I was in awe at the

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immenseness of it.

Jason and I initially thought that the building was wrapped in scaffolding and plastic sheeting and it was the plastic sheeting that was on fire, not the actual building. The building, when it burnt, started to fall apart, everything was falling off the front.

As it was burning everything was falling off the front of the building like the cladding and parts of windows. I saw the police going in and out of the building using their riot shields to shield the firefighters from the falling debris. There were police in our sector and they kept asking what they could do to help but there wasn't anything apart from trying to source a better water supply. I didn't have a lot of communication with other firefighters or officers. I was just dealing with the role I had been given.

I don't know what happened to the water supply to make the pressure so low. I remember telling an officer that we needed a better water supply.

At one stage the appliance nearly ran out of diesel (derv) as it had been running a long time and at a high rev to try to assist with the water pressure. I remember someone coming round and filling the appliance up. I also remember an officer asking me if a higher aerial ladder platform would help, and I said that it would and that it might get the water up another two or three floors. Somebody said that they were requesting a taller one to come from Surrey. I told them that they should be instructed to bring water with them. I wasn't dealing with the Management side of the operation so all I could do was to pass the information on.

Eventually a taller ladder did arrive from Surrey. I can't recall what time it was but it was now light. I couldn't see the man at the window on the 9th or 10th floor anymore. I don't know what happened to him. I don't know if he has been rescued or had left his flat.

When the Surrey ladder turned up the first thing I asked them was if they had brought water with them. They said they hadn't and I was naturally disappointed that the message hadn't been relayed to them. The Surrey ladder was pitched next to us. We gave them the hose and the role of directing the spray onto the building as they could direct it more easily. The Surrey ladder was newer than ours and therefore quicker

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to deploy but it still utilised the same hose and water pressure so was only able to go slightly higher than we were able to.

We started to make the machine up. This actually means that we were putting the machine down and away. It was very frustrating as it finally clicked into fast mode during the last 15 seconds of me using it. Eventually I got back on the ALP. I damaged the BA bracket when I was making the appliance up. I didn't realise it was hanging out and I crushed it a bit so I had to straighten that back up before I could close the locker.

Debris was still falling from the building probably 6 to 10 metres from the building line. My assessment was that the fire was now burning on the outside and had burnt through most of the upper 10 floors.

I think we might have been able to stop the spread of the fire but the fire was above the height that we were capable of getting to. I do remember there were calls on the radio that one fire fighter was injured during the incident but I didn't witness this.

As it burned through the night you could see that the fire had completely engulfed the flats. Once the windows failed you could see it had worked its way up the building by going in through those windows. It went from being a fire on the outside to a completely involved fire in those compartments. The fire roared out of those windows and was still burning well on the outside. It was so fierce that everything inside that compartment would burn and I am sure there was a gas supply to every flat. When the pipes ruptured or were burnt through in each flat you would get a different coloured flame. There was lots of talk earlier in the evening about trying to isolate the gas supply but I don't know what happened regarding this.

Eventually we packed up and were told to go to Paddington fire station. I remember we got there about 11.45 am and were directed to make notes about our actions at the scene of the fire.

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