

**WITNESS STATEMENT**

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

Statement of: LANG, CHRISTOPHER

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

Occupation: FIRE OFFICER

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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: C LANG

Date: 02/02/2018

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

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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 Lou JONES and PC Joanne STONE at Heston Fire Station on Monday the 4 December 2017 between 1120 and 1445 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 CDL/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 Christopher LANG and I am a Firefighter. I have been a Firefighter for 23 years and my pay number is [REDACTED] 2B. I am currently based at Heston 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 Fire Service in 1994 and was initially based at Willesden Fire Station as a Firefighter. I spent 7 years there and when it went quiet I moved to Southall. I spent 8 years at Southall and then moved to Heston in around 2009 as a Firefighter and then trained to work on the Fire Rescue Unit (FRU). An FRU carries specialist equipment that can be used for line (rope rescue) and water rescue and Urban Search and Rescue (USAR). The FRU course is a 4 week training course. Line and water rescue are both 1 week

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2018

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courses with yearly refreshers. USAR is a 2 week initial course and then multiple courses thereafter - the training is continual. 5 of us at Heston are USAR trained, of which I'm one.

I have taken part in high rise building training before but the last time was quite a few years ago, approximately 4 years. We carry out office based training, looking at case studies and we have local building assessments going through the 7(2)d procedure, where we go to the local building and discuss what we would do if there was a fire there. I had never been to Grenfell Tower before the night of the fire. Heston Fire Station is a Technical Rescue Station - we have a pump and a pump ladder and an FRU. The pump and pump ladder, which are the standard firefighting appliances, carry Standard Duration Breathing Apparatus (SDBA) and the FRU carries Extended Duration Breathing Apparatus (EDBA). SDBA has a single cylinder that lasts for about 30 mins, depending on what you're doing and your age and fitness level. EDBA has twin cylinders and gives you longer in the job. Policy states that you should only have one wear of EDBA because of the workload that you would endure and the extra weight. But that is an assessment you make yourself as to whether you can go again for a second wear.

The night of the fire at Grenfell Tower was WEDNESDAY 14<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2017. The bells came down at around 0205 hours. We were mobilised to the fire and I was riding the pump ladder G381 with Watch Manager CHRISTMAS, Firefighter PERCY and Firefighter WRIGHT. We had a Mobile Data Terminal (MDT) in the appliance which would have had further information about the call but I didn't look at it. Watch Manager CHRISTMAS would have done this as only she would have had access to it. On route I could hear all the radio traffic so know that it was something quite big. It took around 20 to 25 minutes to get to Grenfell Tower and as we approached I could see the fire in the distance between the houses. I could see that it was a substantial fire - it looked like a candle, fully alight. We navigated around the estates and parked as close as we could. I can't remember the name of the road but we parked at the rear of the Leisure Centre. Although there were lots of people around we didn't seem to have any issues parking.

After we'd parked, we grabbed our sets and a couple of other bits of equipment and made our way round to find Incident Command. It was absolute chaos with people running around everywhere. Just outside the Leisure Centre the London Ambulance Service (LAS) had casualties lined up along a green area that they were working on, trying to revive people. I have marked this area on a map provided to me by police. I exhibit this as CDL/2. By the time we came out of the building after our first wear this area had moved. The police had cordoned off some areas and there was a large group of people gathered but they let us through and we approached from the east side. I could see that the fire was fairly extensive - the building

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2018

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wasn't fully alight when we arrived but the fire went up the corner of the building from the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> floor. Each side of the building had two columns of fire going up it and was pretty much top to bottom. I've been in the Fire Service for 23 years and it is the biggest job I've ever seen. Through my experience I knew that this wasn't a firefighting task, it was search and rescue - we had to get as many people out as we could.

I could see that Kent's aerial ladder was in attendance trying to tackle the fire externally but it only went up to a certain height, which wasn't high enough.

We dumped our equipment and were waiting to be mobilised from the front of the leisure centre. The Governor, Watch Manager Helen CHRISTMAS, disappeared off to find out what our tasking would be. I was wearing SDBA but was told to find EDBA so we found a crew and took their sets, rehabbed them, which means we put new cylinders on, and checked them over.

The Bridgehead, where the Entry Control point is, was set up in the lobby on the ground floor of the tower. It needed to be in a location where there was fresh, safe air. Usually a Bridgehead is set up 2 floors below a fire. It needs to be as close to the fire as possible to limit ingress and egress. This was not possible at Grenfell Tower because of the extent of the fire so it remained on the ground floor the whole time that I was there.

The senior officer gathered everyone together for a briefing. I don't remember who the senior officer was but I think it could have been Assistant Commissioner Andy ROW, however I didn't know this at the time. He said that this was an unprecedented event and that all standard procedure wasn't going to be effective. He said to look after ourselves and each other and to do what we could. At that time, that brief was exactly what was needed. We tend to get loaded up on policy and procedure, which is needed sometimes but this was different. To be let off the leash and not to have the burden of policy was the best call that could have been made at that time.

After the briefing, our first task was to go to the 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> floor and try and locate a Bethnal Green crew who had lost communication (comms) and hadn't been heard of. We were told to find them and bring them back to BA Entry Control. We were told that once this was done, if time allowed with the breathing equipment, to carry out search and rescue on the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> floors and to also try and locate a casualty on the same floors who was apparently blocking the stairwell.

Because of the layout of the building, with the stairwell in the middle and flats all going round the edge with everything made of concrete, the Bethnal Green crew who we were tasked to locate had lost all comms and telemetry of their sets. This means that they couldn't be seen on the Entry Control boards.

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The Entry Control boards are set up at the Entry Control point in the Bridgehead and they relay information, via radio signal, about the air consumption of the sets of the crews. Every set communicates with that board and you can scroll through as an Entry Control officer and see everyone's use and consumption. Within the building there was no radio signal at all.

We wore EDBA straight away and made our way up to the 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> floor, up the stairs. The stairwell was about 3 metres by 3 metres in size. It was like any other emergency staircase - adequate for what it was and not particularly tight. From about the 6<sup>th</sup> floor up it was smoke logged with white smoke. It was incredibly humid with all the water and heat. As you went up it got worse and worse but the visibility was always there even though it was smoke logged. We had torches which helped. I could see that the walls were completely smoke damaged. There was water everywhere, from burst hoses, flooding down the stairs and everything was absolutely drenched. As we were going up we had to count the floors so we knew which floor we were on. There were 2 staircases per floor, with a small landing between them. Once we had reached the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> floor we lost comms completely so were unable to tell entry control what we were doing. We carried on up the stairwell and came across a large casualty who was completely blocking the stairwell around the 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> floor. I thought it was a male at the time however I couldn't be sure. The casualty was very large - bariatric - and was face down on the stairwell. He was wearing grey jogging bottoms and a sweat top and had dreadlocked hair. There was no sign of life at all. I took my gloves off and checked the casualties pulse on his neck - I had to turn his head to do so. I couldn't find a pulse so asked Firefighter KNAPMAN who I was with to check as well. I think it was Firefighter KNAPMAN although it was difficult to tell with all our kit on.

We made the decision to move the casualty into the lobby as it was blocking the stairwell and impeding operations. It was a real effort to move him. Myself and the other 3 firefighters that I was with moved him by dragging him down the stairs and into a small landing on, I think, the 10<sup>th</sup> floor. I carried the legs initially then tried different techniques once we were in the lobby. I straddled him, dragging him by the waist. It took around 10 minutes to move him and it was a very arduous job, even getting through the door to the lobby was hard. We had to do it though as he was causing an obstruction. We knew the lobby might be compromised at some point but we needed access and egress for other crews coming in so that was the decision at the time.

Once we had moved the casualty we met the missing Bethnal Green crew as they were coming down the stairs. We ascertained who they were and told them that we had been sent to look for them and that they

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2018

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needed to go back downstairs to Entry Control. They were happy to go down under their own air and there was no need for us to escort them.

After we left the Bethnal Green crew we carried on to the 11<sup>th</sup> floor to carry out search and rescue. As we entered the lobby I could see hose everywhere, all over the floor, most of which had burst. It was a big mess. We turned right past the bin room and went up to a flat door. I have marked up on the floor plan provided to me the order in which we searched the flats. This is exhibited as CDL/3. Firefighter KNAPMAN carried out a door check in order to make an assessment. There were flames percolating over the top of the door. As we opened the door, it completely disintegrated and Firefighter KNAPMAN was left with the door handle in his hand. As soon as I saw the flat inside I knew that there was no way that we could go in. It was completely alight and was like a furnace in there. I knew that nothing would survive being inside. If we had gone inside we would have taken an absolute beating and wouldn't have come out again. It was one of the hottest rooms I have ever been in - no one could withstand that. I turned to Crew Manager Marks, who had responsibility for the crew, and the decision was made to move to the next flat. I tapped Firefighter KNAPMAN on the shoulder and told him to move on.

We moved around the lobby past the bin chute, which we checked. I checked this area again afterwards on a couple of the floors and I believe that if people has gone into that area then they would have survived the fire. It was completely untouched. Even bin bags that were in there hadn't melted.

We moved on to the second flat and although a little better, the flat was still completely ablaze and there were so signs of survivable life. All the windows had been compromised and the fire was fully developed. I wasn't close enough to the windows to notice if there was any issue with the fitting. They were at this point just great big openings rather than windows. We called out but heard nothing. We moved again to a 3<sup>rd</sup> flat but the situation was the same and we came to the same conclusion - that there was no saveable life. We moved back to the lobby and I could see that out of the other 3 flats on the floor, 2 of them didn't have doors.

We didn't get a chance to check the final flat as by this point we were all getting low on air and 2 of us were on our low level warning whistles. This means that the alarm on our bodyguard systems, which are like small computers that we wear, were beeping signalling that we were low on pressure. You should be out and in fresh, safe air before your whistle goes off.

We went back down the stairs. I knew that as soon as we got to the 4<sup>th</sup> floor we'd be ok because the air there was safe and there was no smoke. We went to the Entry Control point and debriefed, telling them everything that we had done and what else needed to be done on that floor, then headed outside.

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2018

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We came out fairly beaten up and it was good to get my set off and have some water and fresh air. I rehabbed my set again and waited, resting with my back against a wall. I was probably there for around an hour and a half.

My Governor was tasked with finding out who had already been in and who was up for going in again. We were told that if we wanted to go in again then we could, but we didn't have to. I queued up at a holding area at the far side of the building, waiting to go in to the Tower again. I could see now that the fire had wrapped itself around the building. When we had arrived it wasn't around the north side of the Tower but now it was all the way round. I didn't notice it when I was inside the building but could now see the extent of the fire.

On our second entry we had to be ferried in by the riot police under their shields. There was lots of debris coming off the building and falling down to the ground. I think it was mainly insulation that was falling off, most of it alight. I think there were some aluminium sheets coming down too which were heavier but it was mostly insulation. I didn't see anything major myself falling off but I knew that substantial bits had fallen down.

Our second task once inside was search and rescue on floors 10 -12 and also to try and untangle some of the hose that was inside. The hose inside the building was everywhere - it was going up the staircase, vertically up the shaft of the stairwell; it was chaotic. Firefighters were trying to pick it up but it was all tangled up. We went up to the 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> floor and managed to get a couple of bits of the hose sorted out by untangling it but it was like trying to get a knot out of a bit of string. It was such an effort because the hose was absolutely solid because the water pressure was massive. Physically it was a really hard task. Once we'd sorted out the hose we picked one of them up and started to firefight in a flat on the 12<sup>th</sup> floor. We normally do this by having one person on the branch, where the water comes out and one person as back up. I was out in the lobby using a burst on the hose to fight the fire outside the flat, while the other firefighter was fighting the fire inside the flat. The pressure was so great that the burst was more than adequate to fight a fire. We tried to knock down as much fire as we could to make it easier for other crews. We were getting quite low on air by now - the hose management that we had done had really taken it out of us so we decided to have another search and call out on floor 12. I can't remember if we knocked on any doors or not - at least two on the floor had completely disintegrated - but it was very apparent that there was no saveable life. I didn't have any contact with any residents.

After we had finished on the 12<sup>th</sup> floor we withdrew. We went back down to Entry Control and then left the building. We rehabbed our sets again and were helping out other crews who were waiting to go in —

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briefing them about what it was like inside. We were waiting there, I think, until the afternoon — I've no idea what time it was, it may have been around 2pm. I had been there for 12 hours by that point I think. I didn't go back in again that day.

We travelled to Paddington where we were debriefed and wrote up our notes.

A few days after the fire I got recalled back to Grenfell Tower to assist the Disaster Victim Identification (DVI) teams, who were carrying out the retrieval of the bodies from the Tower. On my first day there I helped to build a secure structure at the main entrance so that people could get in and out safely. On my second day I assisted the DVI crew, monitoring them while they documented body removal. I also helped carry bodies down the stairs.

In my experience as a Firefighter usually a fire would start in a flat and may, if a window is open, go up the side of a building and lick into another above. Grenfell Tower should not have gone up like it did, on the outside of the building. The fire should have been contained in the flat and the lobby should have been a safe, protected area. The fire should not have gone from the outside in. I do not know what exactly was fuelling the fire but it would have been anything combustible.

I do not believe that the fire was extinguished at any point - it burnt itself out.

In terms of fire safety, there were no sprinklers, no fire alarms and no mechanical smoke extraction systems in place at Grenfell Tower that I was aware of. There was nothing in any of the individual flats that I went into. There was definitely a fire panel but it hadn't been silenced.

I am aware of the 'stay put' policy that is currently in place for high rise buildings. The guidelines state that residents should stay put and not leave their properties if they are in a tower block. If someone calls 999 and says they are trapped by fire or smoke the call handler will stay on the line and then a map will be made up of the location of the caller by the Command Unit. Firefighters will then be deployed.

In relation to the gas supply at the Tower, I saw a couple of flats where gas was alight but at that point it was not too much of an issue. There was no build-up of gas as all the windows were open. That may not have been the case everywhere but certainly the flats I saw.

I was not aware of any stability issues at the time. I thought about it afterwards, especially when I went back with the DVI team when I saw the state of the building and how the floors were bowed but at the time I knew it was a concrete building rather than a steel building so was unlikely to come down.

I know that a Thermal Imaging Camera was taken in off our machine however I didn't wear that one. I found another one that I picked up and put on. I had it on to search rooms but it wasn't of much use. I was not wearing a body camera.

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2018

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Throughout the incident, we did not have adequate comms - something that we needed. I also think that the use of EDBA wasn't quick enough. Or if it was implemented it wasn't hit hard enough. EDBA needs to be used on anything 10 floors up and SDBA on 10 down. I think only 16 stations in London have EDBA.

I did not receive any injuries or near misses during the incident, nor have I sought any medical assistance or first aid since.

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