

WITNESS STATEMENT

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

Statement of: NWAGWU, CONSTANTINE

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: CONSTANTINE NWAGWU

Date: 02/03/2018

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

This statement is about the night I attended a fire at Grenfell Tower in Kensington and Chelsea, London on Wednesday 14th June 2017.

In this statement I will be referring to the following people; Pat GOLBOURNE, Crew Manager Dominic FERNLEY, Fire Fighter Tom BUNDY, Fire fighter Martin HOOPER, Fire Fighter Thomas DOTCHIN, Firefighter Ben DOTCHIN, Fire Fighter Kyle McCLENNAN and Fire fighter Enio GONNLENE.

I will also mention Grenfell Tower which is located in North Kensington which is an area not covered by Croydon. I made notes back at Paddington Fire Station after leaving the incident and I will refer to them throughout my statement.

I am a serving Firefighter with London Fire Brigade (LFB) and I have been serving in this position since September 2002. My training level is competent. I am assigned to Croydon fire station where I am currently on the Red Watch. Prior to this I was at training school for a period of four (4) months which was interrupted by the strikes. I began my Training at Southwark Training Centre before moving to a 'satellite site' to complete the rest of my training. Whilst at training school I learnt the use of a ladder and how to pitch a ladder, how to climb a ladder safely before moving on to the use of BA (Breathing Apparatus) and how to search and move around under BA in various conditions such as darkness. This will include drills where we are able to demonstrate how to rescue people whilst using the correct equipment in challenging scenarios whilst completing the task quickly and safely.

Post training school I was posted to Woodside Fire Station on the Green Watch for a period of one year as a trainee. Woodside Fire Station is located about a mile away from Croydon Fire Station. Three (3)

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months after this I attended an FRU course (Fire Rescue Unit) before transferring to Croydon Fire Station on the Red Watch. The Fire Rescue Course was a six week intense course which focused on things like cutting people out of cars, deep penetration rescues with the use of EDBA (Extended Duration Breathing Apparatus). In the Fire Brigade there are two types Breathing Apparatus, SDBA (Standard Duration Breathing Apparatus) and EDBA (Extended Duration Breathing Apparatus). The SDBA is what Fire Fighters will use as standard operating procedure where the EDBA will provide longer working capacity at a job. The SDBA will provide around thirty (30) minutes working time whereas the EDBA will literally double the working time. This however does all depend on how hard the Firefighter is working. On Tuesday 13th June 2017 at the time of 2000 hours I came on duty for a night shift. Roll Call was conducted. Roll Call is where the Governor on the shift calls out the names of all the Firefighters on duty that night and checks that everyone is correctly dressed before informing the Firefighters which appliance they will be riding for that shift. In my crew was Crew Manager Dominic FERNLEY, Firefighter Tom BUNDY, Firefighter Martin HOOPER and either Firefighter Thomas or Ben DOTCHIN. We have two brothers on the Red Watch at Croydon however on the night of the incident I cannot remember who I was riding with. Our call sign was H316.

I was designated as driver on the FRU (Fire Rescue Unit) so my first task was to check the vehicle and ensure that it was operationally ready. This included checking that tyres were not worn, there were no broken wing mirrors, no cracks in the windscreens, the lights and blues were working and that the vehicle had at least three quarters worth of diesel in the tank. I also ensured that all the relevant kit and equipment was in place and that there was no equipment missing from day time operations. I then conducted a check on my EDBA set which consisted of me checking that it had the right amount of air inside which is a minimum of 270 bar and the communication facility was working.

At approximately 2100 hours we went upstairs for a lecture which is something is done regularly when we are on a night shift. This is conducted to discuss new policies and procedures. I cannot remember what the topic was on the night of 13th June.

At 2200 hours we met up in the TV room for a briefing where we sat around having as chat and cups of tea. At 2230 hours everyone then dispersed to their own areas. I made my way upstairs and read a book on my tablet until midnight where I was then able to go to sleep. This is known as stand down time.

At about 0405 I was woken up by the bells which alerts us that we have a shout. When I heard my call sign it was then that I began to run along the corridor to the Watch Room. I grabbed the TIP sheet which had the map reference from the incident, the incident mobilisation number and an incredibly long list of

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the vehicles that were attending the incident. In my fifteen (15) years in the Fire Service as I have never seen a list that long. The TIP sheet also pointed out that the incident was a fire as opposed to another incident such as a 'persons reported'. The information about the incident is always very basic on the TIP Sheet. It is simply an overview of an incident. I remember thinking to myself that it didn't look right and that there was something serious going on. I went straight out to the map room and immediately looked at the grid reference. I said to myself that I knew this neck of the woods so I made my way to the vehicle and made sure that all of the boys were on the Fire Engine ready to go.

As I was the driver I was not in my Firefighter kit however the rest of the crew were either in theirs or were getting ready in the Engine even though that this is something that should not be done. I then drove straight out of the Fire Station and headed to the incident. We turned left out of the Fire station and headed towards Streatham before driving into Streatham high Road before turning left and then right into Tooting Bec Common before driving into Trinity Road and then over Wandsworth Bridge. I then turned right and then left into Fulham Road and then into North End Road through Hammersmith and into Shepherds Bush. It was at the point when I had the BBC building to my left that we were all talking amongst ourselves wondering how serious this fire was and within a few seconds I looked to my right and saw something that resembled a Roman candle. I thought "Oh Fuck!" I knew then that this is where we were heading. I shit myself. I was bloody scared. Absolutely petrified looking up at the Tower on flames thinking that I am going to be going into that building. The mood in the Fire Engine went from general chit chat around to a sudden silence at the point of seeing the Tower. People began to realise what we were going into.

I had never been to Grenfell Tower and had no prior knowledge of it. I did however know the surrounding area as prior to being a Fire Fighter I delivered fruit and veg out of the Covent Garden Market to the West London area.

We arrived on scene at around 0430 hours. I parked the Fire Engine as close to the incident as possible. I cannot remember the name of the Road but I do remember that once I had got changed into my Fire Tunic Trousers, jacket, boots, flash hood with my EDBA set on my back and helmet in my hand we proceeded together on foot through an alley way with a gate which came out to a leisure centre which was located to the right of Grenfell Tower if you are facing the front of it. At this point Crew Manager Dominic FERNLEY went off and reported to the incident command that we had arrived on scene. I believe that he would have handed over an incident roll board which is a list of our names. The rest of us were waiting by a grass verge area located outside the leisure centre. From here I was able to see Grenfell Tower fully

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alight and it was also at this point that we could see a male at a window on the 9th floor. Many Firefighters were pointing their fingers towards the window. It was as if he had just woken up and realised that the block was on fire. I could not describe him as all I could see was his head moving around the window area. Dominic arrived back a short while later.

From the Grass verge area we made our way to an area that was located near a children's playground area which is located at the bottom of Grenfell Tower. There was also a large wall there and in this area was at least twenty (20) Fire Fighters waiting to be deployed into the tower. It was hard to gauge however I would say that we were waiting there for about twenty (20) minutes maybe thirty (30) before being deployed. Again I was able to have a clear view of the tower and I would describe it as when a Volcano explodes but instead of ash falling it appeared to be foam and dust. The air was completely filled with dust. The flames on the outside of tower were visible. The first two (2) to three (3) floors appeared to be fine but from then on the fire appeared to 'snake' its way around the tower all the way to the top. I could also see flames coming from within the tower higher up.

As EDBA we were sent to the front of the que where we were ready to go in. At this point there were a number of police officers with riot shields who would offer protection to myself and other Firefighters. This was to protect us from falling debris when manoeuvring into the tower. The Police Officers would be back and forth assisting Firefighters. I would say the distance between the front of the que and the tower was about ten (10) to fifteen (15) meters. The distance was short however there was twisted metal and aluminium metal failing from the tower which reminded me of Beirut in the 1980's. There was metal all over the floor and we had to be careful where you put your foot as one (1) wrong footing you could be falling over causing yourself to be impaled on anything. The area was completely littered.

Once escorted into the Foyer of the Tower I noticed that the temperature was quite warm. There was a lot of water. Approximately two (2) to three (3) inches worth. I remember the water covering the sole and toe caps of my Fire boots which are quite thick. The water was pouring down the centre of the Tower. I proceeded into the larger foyer area passing a number about fifteen (15) Fire Fighters and into a lift area where I sat down with the rest of my crew and waiting to be further deployed. The lifts however were not in use. Amongst those Firefighters were officer's part of the command and control structure for the incident. Visibility in this area wasn't too bad at all even though there were parts of debris that had fallen. The temperature wasn't too bad either. We were there for about ten (10) to fifteen (15) minutes before making our way together up a small flight of stairs to the Bridgehead where on the wall was lots of writing

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which showed where Firefighters were deployed to. The Bridgehead is an area that an officer can control and Firefighter deployments. This is normally two (2) floors below a fire at a high rise incident.

Upon arriving at the Bridgehead it appeared chaotic however the officers seemed like they were in control of what was going on. It seemed that the officers were obtaining all the information from the Firefighters making their way out before passing it on to us Firefighters who were about to go up. The exchange of information was good. My crew was then divided up and I was now in a three (3) man crew. I was now with Firefighter Tom BUNDY and Firefighter Ben DOTCHIN. We were then subsequently tasked to get to the 9th floor and push on as far as we can and get out as many as you can. My immediate reaction was "Where was the Fire Fighting media?" to which we were told we had none. All we had was a TIC (Thermal Imaging Camera) to assist us. We were given these instructions by Pat GOLBOURNE who I believe was the officer in charge of the Bridgehead.

As a three (3) man crew we came out of the Bridgehead and made our way up. We went up a small set of stairs then onto another set of stairs before walking down a small landing and into a small corridor before getting to the main staircase which wound its way up. I would describe the staircase as a zig zag type staircase system. As we left the corridor area and onto the staircase it seemed like someone had turned the lights out. It was pitch black. I was point man with Tom and Ben behind me in a single file formation. Due to the extremely poor visibility I could not describe the staircase or any other features around me. Trying to work out each floor also proved extremely difficult. We did attempt to scratch numbers onto walls but later on when we would be coming back down the stairs the markings would have been covered up. The temperature was hot. It felt like walking through a barometer. Whilst making our way up we did pass a number of Fire Fighters who were firefighting on different floors. I remember seeing hoses snaked into corridors.

I cannot remember which floor it was but we came across a body. The body was large and in the Fire Brigade we would describe it as bariatric. I relayed to the Tom and Ben behind me that we have a body. At this point I distinctively remember thinking to myself "Jesus. Do I really have to do this?" I then jumped over the body because the body was laying in an awkward position on a landing area between two flights of stairs. It was unnerving for me as I tried to put my foot on some hose in order to get passed. I could not describe the body any further than being large as it was too dark. There were no signs of life. There was no possible way the casualty was alive. The smoke was so thick. I had to keep wiping soot off of the visa on my helmet.

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After proceeding up a further two (2) to three (3) flights of stairs I was hit by extreme heat and in the distance I caught the site of another body which I believe to female due to the hair. I could see a head and an arm across the stairs. I could not tell which floor the body was on. I was disorientated due to the heat and because of this we made our way back down to a floor again unknown. It may have been the 11th but I could not say for sure. We started our search in the corridor of this particular floor but conditions were far too hot. I remember going in to the corridor on the right and being heat by what I would describe as a fist of heat. I thought "Fuck me!" We then got on our hands and knees but I could feel the heat coming through my knee caps as well as the tips of my gloves. I could also feel the heat on the back of my neck. Due to the extreme heat we decided to get in a squat position and scurry along. We kept to the right hand wall in order to know where we were. We approached the first door on the right. I opened the door and straight away thought "Fuck me". Tom, Ben and I were in the flat and we immediately noticed that the windows had gone. Even though there was little bit of light coming in from the outside I still could not see much. Everything looked so black. The heat was still extremely hot. My fingertips were tingling through my fire gloves. I would describe it as picking something up out of an oven and dropping it due to the heat. I would say I was inside the flat for about thirty (30) seconds to a minute before realising that it was far too hot to be inside. We withdrew from the flat and assembled as a crew back in the stairwell. At this point, Firefighter Tom DOTCHIN and Firefighter Kyle McCLENNAN from our pumping machine at Croydon Fire Station joined us and we became a five (5) man crew.

From the stairwell after a few seconds of chat we went back into the corridor but this time stuck to the left hand wall. At this point I was now 'tail end charlie' which is the last man in the formation however as soon as I entered the corridor area I made a dynamic risk assessment and decided that we were all withdrawing. It was far too hot, my fingers were burning therefore I wasn't happy with us proceeding any further. It was that hot that the TIC (Thermal Imaging Camera) was now not working. A discussion ensued between myself and a junior Firefighter about us carrying on however I made it clear that it wasn't a choice. We were getting out and that was that.

Upon coming out we made our way down stairs before being alerted by our 'Barry' radio that there was a live rescue. The communications on the 'Barry' radios throughout the night were ok however they should have been a little bit better for the scale of the incident. The casualty had been located on the 9th floor so we decided to make our way down to lend them a hand in getting the casualty out however once we arrived to them they had the situation under control and were moving the casualty down the stairs. I did not see the casualty as I was still the last man in the formation. I did however notice the initial casualty

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we came across earlier on. The body was still in what appeared to be the same position. Again the visibility was still poor. It was pitch black. There were some lights that had been put up to assist visibility but they were no good.

We as a crew then had a discussion and decided to stay on the 9th floor to see what else we could do. We entered the corridor where visibility was a little better however we didn't knock on any doors as I believe my air was running down pretty low as the set began to flash. I cannot remember how long I was in there for and I was not able to look at my watch as it was tucked in underneath my tunic. We made our way down to the Bridgehead where I relayed to Pat GOLBOURNE that we had done what he had instructed us to do however we were not able to proceed into flats due to the heat and also that our TIC had gone down. I also informed him that we had to step over a body before seeing another body from a distance further up. He then thanked us for our efforts and told us to go and close our sets down and get a something to drink. We made our way back down to the final foyer area before being escorted out of the tower, again by a police officer with a riot shield.

Once outside and away from the Tower we made our way back to the area by the large wall where we were able to grab a bottle of water. I took my helmet, flash hood and gloves off to allow my body to cool down. Again I cannot remember how long I was sat waiting. I was extremely exhausted and my body was shaking.

Our next deployment was to go back into the Tower with a basket stretcher to assist with removing the bariatric casualty which we had come across earlier on. This was requested by a Police DVI (Disaster Victim identification) officer and we were informed of this request by one of our senior officers, Julian SPOONER. I took a crew of four (4) Firefighters back to the Fire engine to get a basket stretcher and it was at this point that I was approached by a member of the public who stated that she had family inside. I stated to her that we are still in the process of getting people out and that she should ring the local hospitals to see if they are there. Once we had got the basket stretcher from the fire engine we made our way back to the tower and with the assistance of the police and the riot shields we were escorted back inside. I believe by this point that the Bridgehead had been moved, It was no longer in the foyer. My EDBA set was still on my back and I had about 25kg worth of equipment with me. This consisted of the basket stretcher, line bags, slings, metal slings and lifting harnesses for the basket stretcher.

I cannot remember which floor it was but it was about two (2) to three (3) floors up. We went into the corridor to find that it was now the Bridgehead. A discussed ensued between Julian SPOONER and the officer who was now in charge of the Bridgehead. I cannot remember his name. We were then told that

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we would not be going to remove any bodies. From this we put all of the equipment into the corridor and out of the way. I was still in company with my crew from Croydon. Visibility was far better this time than the first time I was deployed into the Tower. There was still a lot of water everywhere and working out the floor markings still proved difficult but conditions had slightly improved.

Following being told that we would not be removing any casualties the Bridgehead moved again. This time up one more floor so I assisted in taking some hose and branches up. We then assisted in searching the flats on the floor of the new Bridgehead. These flats had been previously searched and the floor was deemed as a safer area but just in case people had not been found earlier on we conducted secondary searches. Within fifteen (15) to twenty (20) minutes we were informed that the Bridgehead had been compromised so this time I assisted in collecting equipment and taking it down a couple of flights of stairs. This was to happen on at least two occasions until the Bridgehead was set and it was unlikely to be comprised again. The Fire Fighting began to push up floor by floor and as a crew were sat in A flat waiting for our Firefight. I cannot remember the flat number but I do remember hearing the flat creaking around me. At this point I was sat waiting with Firefighter Enio GONNELLA and Tom DOTCHIN. We were in and out of the flat for a number of hours firefighting which consisted of damping down areas and hotspots, turning things over making sure there was no chance of the fire reigniting. Whilst we only stayed on the same floor to rest we did move up to the floor directly above us to Firefight. We did not go any higher than that.

I believe that an officer whose name I cannot recall did eventually speak with one of our crew managers and instruct us to make our way down as we had been working for a number of hours. He stated that we were to go and grab something to eat and drink. Again once making our way down to the foyer area we were escorted out by the Police officers with the riot shields.

I was extremely tired by this point. I made my way over to get a cup of tea before finding a space to relax for a while. I was not interested in looking up at the tower. I would say that we then rested for about an hour to an hour and a half before we were finally dismissed from the incident. There were a lot of firefighters around at this stage. A Protective equipment group had set up a tent where they would fix our EDBA sets for us before we were able to place them back onto the Fire Engine and leave. By this time it was around 1500 maybe 1600 hours. I drove the Fire Engine to Paddington Fire Station where we would complete out statements before heading back to Croydon.

After the incident I felt mentally and physically tired however the real emotions didn't really kick in until I was deployed back to the incident as Urban Search and Rescue (USAR). This was to assist with the DVI

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(Disaster Victim Identification) process and it was at this time that I was really able to see the fall out of what had happened. There was one particular floor that we went into and it knocked me for six. The flat in particular contained the remains of a Father, mother and children. The BTP officer (British Transport Police) was able to identify and explain the way the remains were situated. The officer explained that it appeared that the mother had put her children underneath a bed and mattress before using her body to try and protect them. I remember thinking to myself as a father this woman tried to save her kids but there was nothing that she could do. I had to step out of the room because it really hit me hard.

On the night I am aware that the stay put policy was in place and people were advised to stay where they were until Firefighters were to go and get them however It can be confusing as if someone is advised to stay put in a certain place they are much better at analysing their own situation than the Fire Brigade. If my place was on fire and I was told to stay put I would ignore this and get out. This relates to FSG (Fire Survival Guidance) but with FSG the controller will be on the phone to the person for the whole time and will allocate specific Fire Fighters and rescue teams to come and get them.

I was not aware of any other officer in charge on the night other than Pat GOLBOURNE. I had no knowledge of the command structure. I believe that the Crew Managers were the ones facilitating communication between the command structure and Firefighters.

I did not see any sprinklers on the night and did only see one means of escape which was the stairs. When I went back with a few days later with the USAR teams I noticed that the bin shoot area was completely untouched and I believe had people of known that then a lot more life's would have been saved.

Looking back I would say that the Thermal Imaging cameras need to be looked at. At least two went down within my own crew and this shouldn't be happening.

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