

WITNESS STATEMENT

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

Statement of: GEORGE, DAVID

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

Occupation: FIREFIGHTER

This statement (consisting of 8 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: D.GEORGE

Date: 03/10/2017

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

My name is David Martin George I am the Station Manager for Northolt and Acton Fire stations. My call sign is G31 Sierra. I live at an address known to police. This statement I give voluntarily. On Friday the 27th October 2017 I was interviewed on audio disc. The interview took place at Northolt Fire Station and was conducted by DC Preou and DC Rozario. I would just like to say before this statement commences that I made no notes of the incident and so some of my timings may be slightly out but can be checked on the BOSS system if needed.

In this statement I will talk about the day I was going to start my shift at Northolt fire station, between 08.00am and 17.00pm on Wednesday the 14th June 2017. I was sitting at home when I received lots of texts re a fire at Grenfell Towers so I turned on the television to see the fire ongoing. I then knew that when I got to work that day I would probably be involved in the incident.

The people I shall mention within my statement are Nathan Ashe who was in charge of G261 which was the pump that returned to Acton fire station from the incident that morning. Group Manager Andy Cane who I think was an ORT officer that asked me to wait until a meeting concluded at the CU, Station Manager Rod Wainwright whom I was asked to take over from at BA control directly outside the tower block. Group Manager Simon Tuhill who I received a number of phone calls from during the incident. Operations Commander Rick Ogden who I overheard having a conversation with Group Manager Neil Chisholm in relation to getting a bulk media advisor. I shall also mention Station Manager John Ryan and Group Manager Julian Spooner who is the USAR specialist, trained in building collapse and recovery.

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The places I shall mention will be the Command Unit based in one of the side streets, the Lobby area on the ground floor of the tower, Bridge Head on the fourth floor, BA main control based directly outside the tower and the floors I checked out within the building.

I have worked within the London Fire Brigade since 2004 and have been based at Northolt fire station since 2016 and am currently the Station Manager. At the time I was also the Station manager at Acton Fire station so often travel between the two stations. In my time within the service I worked for a period of time at Kensington as a fire fighter and a crew manager. Whilst in these roles I remember going into one of the tower blocks in that area but cannot say for sure which one or if it was Grenfell Tower or not. I have not attended any Section 7(2) d familiarisation visits within the Grenfell Tower the block though. I have never been posted to a Fire Safety Department as current role is as a Station Manager and in the past I was a Watch manager, Crew Manager and Fire fighter and have never worked on the fire safety side. On Wednesday the 14th June 2017 I was due to commence my shift as Station Manager with call sign Golf 31 Sierra at Northolt fire station at 08.00am, working a 08.00-17.00 shift.

I was sat at home when I started to receive texts from family members telling me about a large fire at Grenfell Tower in Kensington. I switched on my television and saw the fire and immediately realised that when I commenced duty I would probably be involved in the incident. I then attended Northolt fire station and booked on at 08.00am. As I was already aware of the fire I then made my way to Acton fire station as I knew that the fire fighters from this station had been the ones to who attended the fire immediately and not the Northolt crews.

I arrived at the station at about 09.30-10.00 am and drove there in my leased vehicle with registration LS64ZDA which is a White C220 Mercedes leased for me by the London Fire Brigade to use whilst on duty for work. When I arrived I spoke to Blue watch who were now on duty and told me Red watch had the pump and had not returned from the incident yet as the crews that had attended the fire had been asked to go to Paddington fire station when they left the incident for a de-brief and any counselling they needed at the time. As they were at Paddington I knew that they were all away from the scene so I waited for them to return to Acton fire station where I met them to see if they were all personally ok.

They returned at about 10.30-11.00am. The pump ladder they were riding was call sign G261 and there were five fire fighters on the appliance, the one in charge being Nathan Ashe. They all seemed ok when I spoke to them and so they went off duty leaving blue watch to service the appliance and equipment that had been used on the shift so that Red watch could get home to their families. This is standard practice when one watch takes over from another each shift.

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At 11.52 I received a message on my pager to attend the tower. At this point I called control as I already knew what was happening from the television, from monitoring BOSS, and after speaking to Red watch. I asked control if I should attend on Blue lights to get there quicker.

They said yes I should attend on blues so I booked status 2 (this shows on the system that I'm on route to the venue). I drove down Gunnersbury Avenue and then right into The Vale towards Shepherds Bush and Grenfell Tower. Traffic became heavy as members of the public were in their cars watching the fire and I remember being sat in traffic along with a police car both having our blue lights flashing but no sirens on. It took approx. 30 minutes to get to the venue and I parked up in Elgin Crescent on the corner of Ladbroke Grove and booked status 3 at 12.26 which means I had arrived. My vehicle stayed at this location for the entire time I was at the incident. I booked in on the radio which I had no difficulties doing and not on the nominal role board which is sometimes used. I knew from the BOSS system that this was an unprecedented fire the likes that I had never seen before in my entire career.

I noticed there were lots of pumps parked in Ladbroke Grove, some coming to the venue and others were leaving. I noticed some fire fighters that I knew from Southall so went over to speak to them. I could see from their faces it had been a very stressful event. They pointed me to the Command Unit although I do not remember the CU call sign.

I eventually went to the booking in command unit which was situated near to the sports centre and handed in my nominal role board to a CU operative there. When I arrived I saw the Incident Commander and Operations Commander having a meeting. One of the ORT officers on the CU, I think was Group Manager Andy Cane, asked me to wait outside until the meeting had finished. As I could see the meeting was continuing I asked if anyone wanted a coffee and then made my way to the Salvation Army van to collect them. As I reached the van which would normally be surrounded by fire fighters I found no fire fighters there which I remember thinking was very strange.

I returned to the CU with the coffees and was then tasked to take over command at BA main control from Station Manager Rod Wainwright. BA main control was situated outside the tower near the entrance to the sports centre. I noticed when I looked at the tower that there was lots of murky grey smoke and some flames still coming from the tower and the exterior was mostly black in colour due to the fire damage. There were pocket fires in some of the flats still but it was not raging anymore. This went on until early afternoon. By the time I arrived I wasn't aware of any additional members of the public being saved from the building.

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On arrival at Main control Station Manager Wainwright briefed me on what he was doing and where the resources were in his sector. He stated he had a large pool of fire fighters and equipment that he was corralling. He identified the area he was managing was the green grassed area outside the sports centre and one of the sports halls within the centre that had air conditioning where the fire fighters could go to rest.

He told me one of the problems he was having was reuniting the fire fighters with their pump to get them away from the scene as the fire engine cannot leave until all its crew are on board. This was proving to be an issue as they were split all over the place and were going in and out of the tower and changing out BA cylinders and going back into the tower to try and save lives. There was a real keenness throughout for the fire fighters to save lives.

I took over command and had a Watch Manager also helping me which made my job easier as he kept track at the main control and the recording of fire fighters in SDBA and EDBA apparatus meaning I could do other tasks as well as overseeing BA main control.

I put into action a kind of queuing order to make sure fire fighters got some rest when they came out of the tower. The EDBA wearers were asked to wait on seats in a shaded area outside the sports centre and SDBA wearers on the grassed area. When required they would be called to the lobby sector just outside the building and then tasked by another officer in charge of the lobby sector to attend the fire sector within the building.

The national policy when dealing with high rise fires is to have vertical sectors for the building so each sector can be monitored. The fire sector would be one floor above and one below the fire floor. The lobby sector is below the fire sector and is where resources are deployed to before being called up to the bridgehead and onto the fire or search sectors. The search sector is normally every floor above the fire sector in the building.

The bridgehead had been placed on the fourth floor at the time I went into the tower. As the lobby sector was very close to the ground floor it had been decided prior to my arrival to place it directly outside the building and not within it. As the fire fighters came out of the building they were given water and had a chance to rest by going to the back of the queue and I would ask them which other crew members they had come with to try and reunite them with their team to get them away from the incident. This proved a difficult task.

Whilst at BA command I took a number of phone calls from Group Manager Simon Tuhill who was trying to locate keys for a number of Ford Torneo vehicles we had parked up in the area which were

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required by the fire rescue centres to bring fire fighters to and from the incident. I tried to help find the keys but it was difficult as fire fighters had them in their pockets in the building in some cases and it was just very hard to find them as no one seemed to have track of who actually had the keys in the CU.

It was fairly easy to manage the BA command sector as crews would go in and out of the building at a steady rate by this point as the incident had been running now for a large number of hours and the rate at which crews were being committed had slowed down a bit. The recording of the fire fighters was being done by the Watch Manager helping me.

Due to this I was also given the task of checking the diesel levels in the pumps which had been pumping all day to make sure they did not run out of diesel as if they did they would stop pumping water into the tower. I check some three to four pumps around the building and detailed fire fighters to top up the ones running low on diesel.

Whilst checking the pumps for diesel I was able to walk around the entire fire ground and this gave me an overview of the positions of pumps and hoses.

At approximately 16.00 or just after I was nearby when Ops Commander Ogden and Group Manager Chisholm were talking to another senior officer whose name I cannot remember when I overheard them talking about requesting a bulk media advisor. This is a specialised role I had to undertake additional training for which involves advising on how to get rid of large amounts of water and foam from an incident site or to get water in. I then offered my services in this area to the Ops Commander. He explained that Group Manager Chisholm was having problems getting water into the tower. GM Chisholm was in charge of the fire sector and was situated at the bridge head on the fourth floor.

I left my section with the WM in charge of the sector and found two water board representatives that were nearby and walked the ground again with them explaining the water issues we were having. I checked with two of the pumps and they seemed to be pumping water into the building ok. On stepping on the hose pumping in the water I could tell it had pressure so I could not initially see the problem getting the water into the building.

I dismissed the two water board representatives and set about finding out what the problem was. I could see that the North Kensington pump ladder was supplying water to the Dry Riser in the tower Ok. The time was now about 16.00 hrs. It was at this time that I made my first visit into the tower.

I asked a nearby police officer with a shield to cover me from any possible falling debris as I made my way into the building on the ground level. Fire fighters would have been aware that some of the debris falling was the burning cladding from the outside of the building although I do not know when they

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would have first been alerted to the issue as I was not at the incident at the early stages. This was not the main entrance to the building but one that crews were using to go in and out also.

Having entered I do not remember seeing any fire safety signs or sprinklers and no alarms were sounding that I heard. I saw lots of water cascading down the stairwell and also coming from the ceiling too. There was broken glass lying about and many fire hoses. None of this struck me as unusual at this time as it is what I would expect to see at a fire like this.

I made my up to the bridge head on the fourth floor and spoke to GM Chisholm and he explained he had not been able to get any water out of the dry riser above the 11th floor. I asked him if any water was coming out at all, even a dribble but he could not confirm either way on this point. I was confirmed (concerned) the riser may have become blocked or was broken in some way.

It was at this point I considered the height of the building and the 11th floor was a long way to pump water up to. I radioed down to the pump operator on the North Kensington pump and asked him what the RPM was on the unit's engine. This was to indicate to me whether it was pumping a lot of water or not. Instead of telling me the RPM the operator told me the pressure on the pump which was at 5 bar of pressure. I knew this was not adequate in order to pump water up to the 11th floor and above so told him to put the pressure up to 10 bars.

I never asked why he was pumping at only 5 bar, I assumed it was as it had been set at this pressure at a different time and he had taken over on the pump and left it at the same pressure. I knew he had changed the pressure to 10 bar as I could hear the engine pitch change from the window I was stood nearby. I was also aware there were no fire fighters above the 11th floor that needed water at that time.

Whilst I was in one of the flats on the fourth floor, having a meeting with GM Chisholm and Ops Commander Rick Ogden, a WM came into the room although I do not remember his name. He said there were loud bangs coming from higher up in the building. Someone asked him if it could be the wind banging doors open and shut. He said it was louder than that and did not think that doors banging was the cause of the noise.

I explained to GM Chisholm and DAC Ogden that I needed to go up to above the 11th floor to find an outlet to the dry riser to see if the water pressure increase had solved the water supply problem. I was aware that fire fighters had been previously been plugging into the dry riser during the day otherwise which is how the issue had come to light.

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As the Ops Commander Ogden wanted to investigate the banging noises and I needed to check the riser we decided to go up the tower. We were joined by SM Ryan and GM Spooner as he is a (USAR) Urban search and rescue advisor. This is someone who has had extensive training around building collapse.

We proceeded up the stairwell which was clear of smoke so no BA was required by any of us. We made our way up to about the sixteenth floor stopping on various floors to see if I could find a suitable riser to access by opening the fire doors, which although were burnt still appeared to be working. As we were making our way up the banging noises became louder.

I remember thinking that the stairwell was very tight and it would have been difficult for people to pass each other due to this issue. The sixteenth floor was the first one I could see a riser outlet which I could access as the other floors had too much debris lying about when I checked them. I never used the fire lift to go up the building as I was not actually aware of one in the building and it was not pointed out to me by anyone else at the incident. I started to walk towards the dry riser on the 16th floor and then GM Spooner said something like 'we should not be in this building'.

I think he thought it might collapse and I became very uneasy and so we basically ran back down the stairwell before I had a chance to check the dry riser. As we reached the bridge head we shouted for everyone to get out of the building which seemed to take a while to get the urgency into people's minds as the banging noises on the lower floors were not as loud but in the end they all left through the main entrance to the building. The time by now was about 16.30.

I, GM Chisholm and SM Ryan went back to the area in front of the sports hall and a roll call was completed from the other sectors although I was not involved in this.

I was aware that a discussion had been had between the Ops Commander, GM Spooner and the surveyors and all were concerned the building may collapse. A decision was made to move all personnel, but not the pumps, as far away from the building as possible in case it did collapse.

The time was now about 16.30-17.00 and crews were being withdrawn from the incident with new crews taking over. I handed over to another SM whose name I cannot remember and left the incident in my car about 18.30 and booked off at 19.00 returning direct to my home address.

I never found out what actually caused the banging sound in the building, but I do remember at the time feeling very worried when I was inside the building hearing it.

I did not witness anything that may have promoted the fire, but in my experience if a fire door is left open it permits the fire and smoke to spread. The decision to stop fire fighting was made by Op Commander Ogden at approximately 16.30 hrs. The fire fighters would have been using Thermal imaging cameras but

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I am not sure where these recordings would be stored. There would not have been body cameras used as they are not issued to firefighters.

The fire took in excess of 24 hours to extinguish as there were pockets of gas fires still burning which took longer to put out due difficulties isolating the gas supply to the block. I did not speak or have any conversations with any of the occupiers of Grenfell Tower.

The last practical training in high rise procedures I undertook was in April 2016 and I undertook an incident command course in May 2016. I consider myself competent in my training status. I have previously attended high rise tower fires and have numerous experiences of fighting these types of fires. I am unaware of any pre-prepared plan for compartmentation failure, although our procedures have contingencies for this.

The stairwell was the only means of escape for the occupants/survivors. I did not see any sprinklers being activated whilst I was in the Tower. There were no radio issues or problems whilst I was there. I was not in attendance in the early stages of the fire breaking out. I am not sure what condition the dry riser was in as I was not initially there.

The IC was on the CU as far as I can remember. What is referred to as the stay put policy is in fact called "Know the Plan". The policy is not written in stone as each fire is different. If the situation determines that you leave, the instruction to leave will be given. If you are on an upper level theoretically you should stay put as the building should adhere to the compartmentation design and should permit the fire fighters to attend and extinguish the fire before it spreads. The search sector would normally clear each floor individually on their way up. But on this occasion the search sector became involved in the fire very quickly. The stay put policy is not made by anyone in particular as it is general procedure unless instructed otherwise. I am not sure who changed the stay put policy on the day, but it should be recorded on the key decision log. The IC would request additional information given to him by the Ops Commander. The National Incident Command Structure was utilised on the day. The structure consists of 3 to 4 CU. One would be giving FSG, another would book in personal, one for various management meetings and lastly one would be used for resources.

The chain command on the day was an IC followed by Ops Commander, Sector Commanders, Safety Officers and finally Fire Fighters. I was unaware of any changes being made. I was unaware of any fire fighters assigned to monitoring fire spread on each face of the Tower. There is no specific training required for this role. Recruit fire fighters would not be permitted to take on this role.

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On the lower floors there were windows present. The upper levels did not have any visible windows as they had all been burnt out. I did not notice anything specific towards the construction of the windows. I noticed an Arial ladder platform was being used which was supplied by Surrey Fire service. This was positioned on nearest to the face of the tower to the sports centre. I did not witness the fire spreading as I was not initially there. I did not witness the fire behaving as previously explained. I did not receive any injuries or near misses. I did not see any firefighters suffering any injuries. I did not receive any first aid or medical assistance from the LAS and I have not required or received any counselling. I have never witnessed a fire in a high rise tower of this magnitude in my entire 14 years as a fire fighter. I left the incident at around 18.30 hrs. I have nothing further that I would like to add or say in this statement.

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