

**WITNESS STATEMENT**

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

Statement of: O-BRIEN, DENIS

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

Occupation: FIRE OFFICER

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This statement (consisting of 7 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 O'BRIEN

Date: 14/02/2018

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

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This statement relates to the incident at Grenfell Tower on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2017 and covers the actions I took and instructions given on the night. This is a written account from an interview conducted by PC Suzanne HARRIS and PC Richard GREENGRASS at Old Kent Road Fire Station on SUNDAY 21st JANUARY 2018. Also present during the interview is my fire brigade union representative Scott YOUNG

In this statement I will refer to the fire fighters I was posted with on the night; Watch Manager (WM) HAYWOOD, Fire Fighter (FF) NGO, Fire Fighter (FF) ATMORE, Fire Fighter (FF) LAWS and Fire Fighter (FF) CUMMINGS. I will also refer to the route taken from our station to the incident, the conditions of the areas surrounding the tower and the conditions inside the tower itself.

I am firefighter Denis O'BRIEN attached to Red Watch based at Old Kent Road fire station. I joined the London Fire Brigade in November 2001 and had my initial training at Southwark. In 2002 I was posted to Westminster on White Watch and I've been Red Watch at Old Kent Road for the last 13 years since 2004. I am fully trained to the fire brigade standard of competent.

My training at Southwark took seventeen weeks, during this time I was trained in various skills including the use of ladders, pumps and breathing apparatus. Breathing apparatus (BA) is a mask and cylinder that allows you to breath safely in an incident where there may be a lack of oxygen, I am trained in standard duration breathing apparatus sets (SDBA), the air supply on these will usually last approximately thirty minutes. I also had training in real fire condition incidents that took place at Chorley, Lancashire. These would also include procedures and policy regarding search and rescue.

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As a watch we have regular mandatory training which is usually held at Croydon fire station and is provided by a company called Babcocks. This includes of a two-day breathing apparatus course that is run at either Beckton or Park Royal. We have standard drills regularly throughout the year where we cover various guidelines, do ladder drills and receive updates on first aid training.

There is also station based training which is held in the yard here at our home station. We practice the use and deployment of ladders, there are refreshers on IEC first-aid training during incidents and some high-rise tower procedures to maintain the knowledge. The information for the training is on a computer and what we do on the day is decided by either a crew or watch manager.

I have had training on high-rise fires during my career but can't remember when it was last done, we always have lectures on this and do drills in the yard tower where we are told which equipment to take when at the incident., sometimes drills on larger stationary towers are done on other locations such as at an army barracks.

I have previously been on 72D familiarisation high-rise visits. These visits are where we will attend a premises that is high risk or a tower block and look at the layout to see how complex it is should we be called there. We would check the location of the fire hydrant, check the staircase for access, check the fire lift is operational and the location of the dry riser. I don't remember when I last did one of these checks. Prior to the incident at Grenfell Tower I had never been there so have no knowledge of the policies in place regarding any incident or fire safety procedures for this area, also I have never within my career been posted to the fire safety unit.

At Old Kent Road fire station, we have two types of appliance, a pump ladder will usually have a Watch Manager in charge when mobilised. This appliance has a 135 ladder that can usually reach around the fifth floor of a building, it will carry various equipment including lengths of hose, a thermal image camera (TIC) and first-aid equipment. We also have a turntable ladder, this is a longer ladder that can reach the tenth floor and is mostly used for high-rise incidents. This will also carry a large amount of equipment for fire related incidents. This appliance wasn't mobilised on the night of the Grenfell Tower fire.

On the night of the fire I started my night shift at 8pm, I was posted as call sign E351 on the pump ladder appliance. Early on in the shift we had a call to a small fire on our ground at the Avondale Estate where a chip pan caught alight within in a flat and a lady had badly burnt her hands. I don't remember any calls we took after that before the Grenfell fire or remember what we did for the rest of the evening.

The bells in the station dropped at about 1:50am signalling we had a call, we were being mobilised to a forty pump fire at Grenfell Tower. Someone from the watch went to collect the slip from the watch room

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printer that had the details on it, as a crew we went down and were looking at it initially thinking it was a mistake due to the amount of pumps that were going. Our driver that night was FF LAWS, he looked at the area for the route and in less than five minutes we were on the truck leaving the station. We were a crew of six that included, FF NGO, FF ATMORE, FF CUMMINGS and myself in the back with WM HAYWARD in the front with FF LAWS driving. We ran with the sirens on and the journey took roughly twenty minutes as the roads were clear due to the time of the morning.

The route we took was out of the station turning right to go up the Old Kent Road in the direction of Bricklayers roundabout, left down New Kent Road to the Elephant and Castle where we went up St Georges Road towards Westminster Bridge Road. We then passed over Westminster Bridge and went through Parliament Square and up Victoria Street into Grosvenor Gardens. We turned left onto Eaton Square, then went through Belgrave Place to Belgrave Square and left onto Beauchamp Place. We were on Brompton Road towards Knightsbridge and then near Kensington Church Street to Bayswater Road, we then got onto Ladbroke Grove and turned off into Blenheim Crescent eventually parking in Dulford Street located to the east of the tower at about 2:15 - 2:20am. This was as close as we could get to the tower due to the other trucks parked up around us.

On the journey to the tower I didn't see the tower but as we got closer I could see through the local streets the top floors which were alight. The mood amongst us in the truck was okay, we were all just talking about the equipment we would need to take when we got there and who within the crew would take which items. The radio was on in the truck but I don't recall what was being said or what information was coming through the mobile data terminal (MDT) display. I remember again thinking on the journey that they weren't going to need all of us due to the amount of pumps going, previously they have tended to send more machines than necessary at high rise fires but as soon as we arrived I realised that we would be needed. There were multiple calls coming in so we knew this was a major fire.

We had approached the tower from the east side, parked up and could now see that it was all alight, I would say from the fifth or sixth floor of the tower was on fire. I could see the flames were going up the side then coming down and there was thick black smoke out of the top. This kind of smoke would indicate that there was oxygen starved compartments within the tower that have the potential to explode or cause a backdraft when oxygen is introduced into them. In a block made of concrete like this, the fire should be contained in a flat by the fire doors and should be able to last thirty minutes which gives us time to go in and help or evacuate people. When the doors fail and the fire spreads it depends on the type

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of fire and how it is moving that will influence the incident commanders' decisions regarding if we should stay put or get out

We all got out of the truck, grabbed our BA sets and some equipment. I took a thermal image camera (TIC) with me and we ran to the tower, this took about two to three minutes. There were some people out on the streets but I didn't pay much attention to them as there was such a sense of urgency to get to the fire. We went past some flat and got to the east side near the bottom of the tower. Here I saw a firefighter from North Kensington that needed some help with a casualty he had on a stretcher. He was trying to push this person up a bit of a hill or a ramp to an LAS holding area by the leisure centre, without thinking I just grabbed the end of the stretcher and helped him. Once we handed the patient over to the LAS I left this area and ran back to the tower.

There was a turntable ladder from Paddington at the base of the tower near us that was spraying water on the east side, this was getting hit by the falling debris.

We were now on the south side of the tower queueing up in BA ready to be sent in, our watch manager had been sent elsewhere, I think he was now posted on the west side. There was an overhang from the flats we used to take cover under from the falling debris. I don't think anyone was running this section, it was just common sense amongst us all. I could see some people coming out of the tower with casualties. I did look up at that tower while waiting in this area and all I could see was debris coming down, I didn't want stick my stick up to much to look at this as so much was falling, I was thinking about the people stuck up there. All the debris coming down was on fire, there was just lots. Mostly all metal with some of the window frames too. Bits of it were sort of floating down whilst on fire and I remember that a piece of debris hit the dry riser on the ground by the tower causing the two lengths of hose leading from it to the tower to burst away stopping the water supply going inside the building.

We then all went round to the west side of the tower where the entrance being used was located. We went into the bottom of the tower where we were being held before we could go further. Some top ranking officers came in and told us to just do what we could and try not to get injured or injure anyone else.

The layout on this floor once inside the tower had a small room we entered with loads of fire fighters in BA sets waiting and senior officers in white hats giving instructions. The room was smoke logged, it was a sort of grey smoke that comes from burning material and chemicals. There was loads of water on the floor flooding up to about ankle depth.

There were firefighters waiting down a corridor from her by the stairs to go up to entry control which was positioned on a higher floor. We were still on the ground floor and I could see the area around the stairs,

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there was loads of water coming down, casualties were coming down either walking or being carried along with other fire crews. A couple of senior officers came in and said they were going to set up a holding area outside the building so we had to leave back out through the west side and wait there. By this point there were police with riot shields running between the building and the waiting areas holding them above us to protect from the falling debris. None of this hit me or got close and I none of my crew suffered any injuries during the incident.

The new holding area was near a playground on the west side of the tower, a grass verge was to the back of this and the officers were setting up a BA holding point. There were a couple of sheets on the ground for people to sit on and for equipment to be stored while we waited to be sent back to the tower. The air on this side was smoky and there were loads of fire fighters around with us waiting.

Between the new holding area and the tower there was a walkway that lead back to the tower next to a block of flats, this was where our Watch Manager was posted as sector commander. His role was to work with the police marshalling people safely through. I was now at the front of the queue waiting to go in and looking at the tower I could see people at the windows on the tenth and eleventh floor, they looked quite close to each other. The lower floor person had a phone light they were shining out of the window to get attention and the one above was waving a white shirt around. I could see the fire was coming down the building and that some of the windows had gone. It looked like the wind had taken hold of it, I've never seen a fire move so quick. It should be contained inside but the whole building was alight. I was hoping somebody would get to these people and help them.

On the ground outside the tower there were jets and ground monitors set up, these were spraying water on the building and the debris that was falling down.

A call came for two fire fighters to go in to the tower, I went as a crew with FF NGO and again entered through the west side with the help of the police and the shields. We went in and the water felt deeper this time, there was more water coming down and a lot more smoke. Again there were lots of people in here doing various tasks, the entry control bridgehead had moved down and was on the ground floor. There were two BA boards here, these are used to log our air pressure on the BA sets and also have a telemetry system that communicates with the BA sets telling the time we enter the tower and gives off an alarm when we are low on air and need to come back out. The alarm is also used if we get in distress as it will sound a whistle if we stop moving for a length of time alerting others that we may need help. Our BA sets have a piece of yellow plastic called a tally connected to them, this is removed and plugged into the BA

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board and that how the information is communicated between the two. I saw two boards set up here being run by fire fighters.

A bridgehead is usually set up two floors below the fire floor and is where the entry control BA boards would be located along with spare equipment such as extra hose, first aid kits and breaking in gear. The initial bridgehead at this incident was higher up as this wasn't here when I first came in the tower.

There were loads of people here doing various things, it was busy and chaotic, myself and FF NGO handed in our tally at the entry control and were sent up as crew of four with two firefighters from West Hampstead who I didn't know. Our brief came from a senior officer I think was named Pat GOLDING. He tasked us with helping to move and extend some 45mm jet and hose from the sixth to the twelfth floor as there was a dry riser on one of the floors not working so water wasn't getting up.

We made our way to the stairs, firstly we came to a mezzanine floor that had loads of water coming down, this then lead into the main staircase that went up the tower. The conditions in the stairs were ok, we could see fairly clearly. The next few floors the lighting wasn't good, the stairwell was very cramped, you could get two maybe three people side-by-side going up. There was hose all over the place that was tangled and entwined with itself. There were crews going up and coming down constantly, it was hard to manoeuvre in there. The higher we went up there were more firefighters and the visibility became poor. The journey from the ground to the sixth floor took roughly five minutes.

We got to the door to the lobby from the sixth floor stairwell. I was the first one through the door and could see that the hose on this level was all tangled. We were trying to find the branch for the hose we had to extend. A branch is on the end of the hose and controls the water spray. I was working with FF NGO trying to pull the hose out, it took a lot of effort to get it out, untangle it and move it up to the twelfth. We got it out to the stairwell where the visibility was still poor and busy with fire crews coming down.

Higher up there was a body on the stairs between the eighth and the tenth floor but I can't be certain which. This obviously made moving the hose more difficult as we had to get past and the visibility was getting worse. On a scale of one to ten with one being clear and ten being nothing I would say this was a seven or eight.

The visibility was still the same when we got to the twelfth as the lighting was really dim. It seemed really low, there were lights on the stairs but just really low. During the whole point of going up I don't remember seeing any sprinklers or hearing any alarms going off.

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We got to the twelfth floor lobby entrance stairs and our brief had been to leave the hose and the branch on the stairwell outside for the next team to use. We didn't go in the lobby area or open the door at any point.

We then made our way back down to entry control, as we got back to the mezzanine floor the visibility improved and we could start to see more clearly again. The time we spent in the tower was roughly twenty to twenty-five minutes. We got to the BA entry control to collect our tally and were told to go outside and do a fire ground A test in the BA holding area. This test is where you change your cylinder, breath the air through the mask and check the system to make sure everything still works correctly so you're ready when you need to go back in.

We left the tower again through the west side exit and were taken along under a covered walkway with garages that was on the south side. This walkway led to the BA service area, while walking I looked at the tower and the fire seemed to be getting worse, it was all still alight. It didn't look like we were making an impact; I've never seen anything like it with the whole building on fire like that.

Once we had serviced our BA sets and taken on some water we returned to the holding area on the west side of the tower back past the garages under the cover. The debris was still falling and there were fire fighters everywhere. We were in this area waiting to be briefed again, I've no idea how long we waited. An officer then gave myself and FF NGO a task of relieving a crew on a covering jet located in the playground. We took over and were spraying water on the debris coming down and protect the people going in and out of the building. We were rotating between hitting the lower floors of the building that were on fire with water and then spraying the area around the entrance of the tower when the police were either taking people in or bringing them out. We were able to control this between us with one directing the water flow using the branch and the other supporting the hose behind. We had good water pressure, I would guess it was at the maximum of seven bar which is very strong. We were on this jet for hours before we were relieved by another crew.

I think Blue Watch were starting to come on duty now so we moved to the leisure centre where some food and drinks were being provided. We waited for the rest of the crew here, I'd seen FF ATMORE and FF CUMMINGS during the night and this was where we would all meet. After about half an hour we walked back to our truck that was still on Dulford Road. The road was full of trucks trying to leave, some of our crew helped to move some of the other appliances.

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We were then sent to Paddington Fire Station. I've no idea the route we took, honestly I don't remember much about this journey as I was feeling very upset and wishing we could've done more to help the people in the tower.

At Paddington we had some food, drink and were told to write a statement which we did. I spoke to a counsellor briefly but felt okay. We left and made our way back to our station arriving at about 6pm so maybe one to one and half hours until the next shift. I just went and laid down.

I am providing five exhibits. The first is a copy of my contemporaneous notes made after the incident. This is exhibit number DNO/1 and has a Metropolitan Police label with the seal number MPSZ13114296. The second is exhibit number DNO/2 and is an elevation map of the tower that was referenced during the interview, this has metropolitan police label MPSZ13114297. The third is exhibit number DNO/3 and is an aerial view map of the tower and surrounding area that shows various locations referenced during the interview. This has a metropolitan seal label number MPSZ13114298. The fourth is number DNO/4 and is a zoomed in aerial view that was referenced in line with the exhibit DNO/3. This has an exhibit label with the number MPSZ1311 4299. The fifth is a black and white aerial map of the tower that shows various locations positioned around the tower referenced during the interview. This is exhibit DNO/5 and has a label seal of MPSZ13114300.

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