

WITNESS STATEMENT

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

Statement of: OKOH, ERNEST

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

Occupation: FIRE FIGHTER

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: ERNEST OKOH

Date: 20/12/2017

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

This statement refers to the fire that occurred at Grenfell Tower.

I am the above named person ranked as Fire Fighter for the Red Watch based at Chelsea Fire Station.

I started my career in JUNE 2003 posted as a Fire Fighter in Clerkenwell Fire Station. In 2014 Clerkenwell Station closed down and I was moved to Chelsea Fire Station posted on the Red Watch where I have worked since.

There are two Appliances attached to Chelsea Fire Station:

G341 is a Dual Pump Ladder (DPL). It is equipped with a 13.5meter ladder and a hose that connects to a hydrant. Crews riding the DPL are equipped with Standard Duration Breathing Apparatus (SDBA)

G346 is a Fire Rescue Unit (FRU). The FRU only attend incidents where rescues are required. It has various equipment used to conduct rescues but it does not have the capability to distribute water. Crew members riding the FRU appliance are equipped with Extended Duration Breathing Apparatus (EDBA).

I cannot remember the last time I received high rise block training but it is done consistently during

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our training regime. This involves table top exercises where we discuss tactics and procedures when attending a high rise incident. At the end of this training I was considered competent.

Prior to this incident, I have attended a number high rise calls but I cannot remember when the last time was. Grenfell Tower is a residential block of flats that has twenty-four floors. The main entrance has glass windows situated on either side and it is located on the front side of the tower. Opposite the front side across the pathway is a building. As you face the front side of the tower, to the right is a flyover, to the left is a playground and rail tracks with arches. I do not know what is on the rear side of the tower.

Through the main entrance is an atrium. On the left is door that leads to another atrium that looks out to the playground, situated on the right are glass doors to stairs. The stairs ascend two floors to a balcony. Across the balcony is a set of double doors that leads to an area where the lifts and a stairwell is situated. The stairwell is approximately 1.5 metres wide and leads all the way up the tower. This is the only stairwell that I know of. Prior to the incident, I have never been to the Grenfell Tower itself, but I am familiar of the area from my experiences as a youth worker and attending the Notting Hill Carnival.

At the time of the incident I was riding G346 (FRU) with my crew: Crew Manager (CM) Raoul CODD, Driver/Fire Fighter (FF) Nicky UPTON, FF Tom REDDINGTON, FF Alan SIME. All of us were equipped with EDBA.

Riding G341 (DPL) were my colleagues: Watch Manger (WM) Louisa DI SILVO, FF Anna REPAS, FF Nicholas FERGUSON, FF Russell BUTLER and FF Bob PETIT.

I would also like to mention: Deputy Assistant Commissioner (DAC) Pat GOLDBOURNE, WM Brian O'KEEFE and Commissioner Dany COTTON who were all present during the fire.

On TUESDAY 13th JUNE 2017 I was on night duty starting at 8pm with a view to finish at 930am the next morning. I was posted on the FRU and allocated the role of managing the watch room. This role consists of logging all mandatory checks and acknowledging any calls that come in through the night.

On WEDNESDAY 14TH JUNE 2017 between 12:45am and 1am I was upstairs in the rest area when I was alerted by the station lights and alarms going off indicating that a call had come in. I went down into

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the watch room to retrieve the “call slip”. Call slips usually consist of a few details printed on an A4 sheet of paper but on this occasion, the call slip was approximately two A4 sheets long. For what I remember, the call slip referred to a fire at Grenfell Tower. There was a long list of appliances, approximately twenty, from other grounds that were assigned to the incident. On seeing the list of appliances, I knew a large serious incident was going on and that FRUs were also going to be sent to it.

My colleagues riding G341 left shortly after the call came in.

At approximately 1:20am, the station lights and alarms went off indicating another call slip had come in. The call slip listed the same information as the previous slip but now twenty-five appliances had been assigned and FRUs were requested.

My crew and I gathered our kit and boarded G346. FF UPTON drove as I sat in the middle seat of the back row. FE SIME directed us as we started heading our way to Grenfell Tower on sirens. I cannot remember the exact route but we approached from the south passing Westfield Shopping Centre. We took a number of turns and onto a single road where I first saw the tower. What struck me was the size of the tower and the amount of fire spread. I could see a line of flame running up the middle of the right side of the tower. The line of flame started from the fourth floor and was going all the way up to the top.

As we got closer, I could see the line of flame was spreading sideways to the right creating a triangle. I was shocked by what I could see and the sheer scale of the fire. I started to mentally prepare myself and thought of the people within the tower.

At approximately 1:30am, we parked on SIRDAR ROAD blocking the road. The road was congested with parked cars on either side of us and there were two appliances already parked ahead of us. My focus was instantly drawn to the tower which was approximately thirty meters from where we had parked. I could still see the front and right side of the tower with the line of flame running from the fourth floor to the top. The wind was blowing the top of the flame causing it to expand and spread. In my previous experience I have seen buildings burning from the inside out, but on this occasion I could see the fire was burning from the outside going in.

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My crew and I were informed (I do not know who) to bring all our EDBA kits at the muster point and assemble under the flyover. My crew and I gathered our EDBA sets and followed the crowd of Fire Fighters to the muster point under the flyover, arriving at approximately 1:35am.

We were now few meters away from the tower and I had a closer view of the front and right side. On the front side of the tower, I could see people on the upper floors, shining torches from their balconies. The flames on the right side were now starting to spread towards the front of the tower. There was a person, in one of the middle flats on the middle floors, dangling a line of cloth from their window, in a desperate effort to climb down. People on the ground floor were screaming - pleading for them to stop as the cloth was too short. I do not know what happened after.

There was also an ALP (Aerial Ladder Platform) operated by two Fire Fighters with a single hose. They were on the right side of the tower fighting the flames above them. Their efforts seemed futile as they could only reach up to the sixth floor as flaming debris started to fall towards them. The debris started to fall frequently causing the ALP to withdraw and re-position.

A number of people were coming out of the main entrance of the building, some were being carried. At some point we were requested to put down our EDBA sets to assist with rescues and to bring further rescue equipment. My crew and I put down our EDBA sets at the muster point and CM CODD tasked me to retrieve the rescue equipment back on the G346.

I rushed back to where we had parked on SIRDAR ROAD passing the entrance of the site where I came across FE BUTLER who was riding G341. He was with Fire Fighters from other stations and was talking to an Asian male who was on his mobile phone standing by the railings. The Asian male was very emotional and was frantically speaking on the phone to one of his relatives who were on the eighteenth floor. Myself and FF BUTLER advised the male the best we could and to phone 999 so they could treat his relatives as a FSG (Fire Survival Guidance) call.

I left FF BUTLER with the male as I continued to SIRDAR ROAD. Whilst walking back, I was approached by a black male who was concerned about his family on the fourteenth floor. I gave the same advice as before, informing the male to phone 999 and that we will do the best we can.

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I eventually got back to G346, gathered the rescue equipment and made my way back to the muster point rejoining my crew.

On my return, CM CODD informed us to put on our EDBA kits. I rushed to put my set on before we entered the tower via the main entrance into the atrium.

At this point, there were a lot of managers standing at the entrance by the stairs to the balcony and by the doorway that lead to where the bridgehead was positioned. I paired up with CM CODD as we queued to get to the bridgehead on the third floor.

We've walked through the doorway onto the balcony to the Entry Control Board (ECB) which was being managed by WM DI SILVO and WM Brian O'KEEFE.

As CM CODD and I approached the ECB, I could not find my tally. WM DI SILVO informed me that I could not go through without handing it in.

CM CODD was paired with someone else as I went back outside the tower to look for my EDBA tally. I went to the first muster point where we had initially left our EDBA sets when I realised I was wearing my EDBA set incorrectly and my tally was around the back.

I adjusted my EDBA set and went back in the tower via the main entrance. I went up the stairs to the balcony where I came across a crew carrying a woman down. The lady was conscious as I helped the crew carry her down to the atrium and exiting the tower via the main entrance. We placed the lady on a stretcher and wheeled her to where paramedics had gathered. I cannot remember where exactly the paramedics had gathered but we turned left pushing the lady on the stretcher for some distance before I decided to return back leaving the crew to continue.

I then ran a return route into the tower passing the muster point and into the atrium. Whilst walking up the stairs to the balcony, I helped another crew who were walking a male down the stairs. I assisted them escorting the male down the steps, into the atrium and leaving them by the main entrance before running

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back in.

I returned to the atrium where I paired up with FF Alan SIME. At some point, we approached DAC Pat GOLDBOURNE to be tasked. I cannot remember where exactly this was but it was either by the stairs to the balcony or in the bridgehead. DAC GOLDBOURNE appeared calm and controlled as he contemplated whether to send EDBAs to the tenth floor and SDBAs to the floors below.

DAC GOLDBOURNE first assigned us to a FSG call with regards to an individual in Flat 73. FF SIME and I started to go up the stairs when we were called back by DAC GOLDBOURNE who re-tasked us to fight the fire on the fifth floor. I do not know if another crew were tasked to complete the FSG in Flat 73.

FF SIME and I then made are way to the bridgehead jumping the queue of the Fire Fighters on the balcony. We entered the doorway into the bridgehead where WM DI SILVO and WM O'KEEEE were still managing the ECB, which now consisted of two boards. I cannot remember how many tallies were connected to the ECB but it was the most I have seen in my career as a Fire Fighter. FF SIME and I informed the ECB of our task before we put on our breathing masks and handed our tallies. FF SIME and I entered the stairwell and began our ascent to the fifth floor. The stairwell was regular sized but the amount of activity going on made it seem narrow. There were hoses running on the stairs as well as other Fire Fighters and residents running down it.

FF SIME lead as we made our way up the floors. The floors were numbered in printed black ink but visibility started to diminish the higher we got up due to the smoke. I did not see the floor number but we went up a couple of levels to where we believed the fifth floor was to find a hose ready for us to use. The hose had wedged the door to the landing open. We grabbed the hose, with me controlling the branch, and entered into the landing. We turned right entering through a door way before taking another right where we entered a flat door. Both doors were closed as we entered. I do not know which flat it was but it was positioned on the far right. It was pitch black due to the thick smoke. I could not see where the fire was but I could hear the loud sound of the flames raging at the other end of the room.

I aimed the hose in the direction where I could hear it and started to fight the fire. FF SIME had a thermal imaging camera and positioned it in front of me. I did not read what the temperature was but the heat

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images were yellow and red. The fire was raging some distance away from us on the other side of the room. I started spraying as much water as possible towards the heat source but the trajectory was just about reaching it. I assumed the fire was coming from the outside in. I heard a number of loud cracks that sounded like mini explosions which, I believe, were coming from the gas piping. The atmosphere within the flat was very loud and hostile. There were times that I started to think the worst and if it did happen than at least I was with a friend. FF SIME and I remained for approximately ten minutes fighting the fire but our efforts had little effect on the flames. We tried updating the bridgehead but our radios in our BAs were not working. At this point, FF SIME and I agreed to stop fighting the fire and return back down to inform the bridgehead.

We descended down the stairwell, back to the bridgehead and reported to WM DISILVO that our efforts in fighting the fire were futile.

FF SIME and I then went down to the atrium, out of the tower and on to the grass verge where we took off our EDBA kits. I looked up at the tower and could see the flames have expanded. The flame had spread from the right side to the front. The cladding on the front top right corner was now burning.

We remained on the grass verge for a while to rest and recharge our EDBA air cylinders before going back into the tower.

At this point, flaming black chunks of debris started to fall frequently outside the main entrance. Police were now escorting us to main entrance under shields protecting us from the falling debris.

As we entered, rescues were still passing though and the atrium had now become a waiting area. We waited in the side room with other crews queuing up to be assigned.

I cannot say the exact time, but it was a couple of hours into the fire. After twenty minutes we reached the front of the queue. FF SIME and I with two Eire Fighters from Croydon were informed by SM GOLDBOURNE that, for or some reason, water could not reach the dry risers on the higher floors. The four of us were tasked to take hose with a branch and plug them into the dry riser on the tenth floor and use it to fight fire on the floors above. We were also made aware of a person of large build, lying on the

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stairs of the tenth floor.

Once briefed, the four of us gave our tallies to the bridgehead and started to ascend up the stairwell. I cannot remember what floor it was, but I opened the door to one of the landings and the smoke was too thick to see. We continued up the stairwell as the smoke became thicker the higher we got. I do not know what floor we had reached but eventually we could not see anything.

We carefully continued climbing up until I came across an obstruction on the stairs feeling it with my feet. I could not see the obstruction but it felt like a large human body lying on the stairs. I instantly knew that this was the person that we had been informed of and that we had reached the tenth floor. The four of us carefully stepped over the body and continued with our task.

We managed to find the dry riser on the tenth floor and tried connecting the hose but there was no water coming out of it. One of the Croydon Fire Fighters tried to communicate this to the bridgehead, but radio signal was poor. The four of us decided to report back down to the bridgehead leaving the hose behind. We started our descent, carefully stepping over the body lying on the way down. It took us approximately ten minutes to reach the bridgehead where I informed WM DI SILVO what we had encountered before making our way to the atrium.

At some point during our task on the tenth floor, the main entrance was no longer being used due to the amount of debris falling. An entrance/exit point had been created on the side facing the playground. It was still dark as we exited the tower via the new exit/entrance and made our way around to the front. My memory is a blur after this point. I did not conduct any other tasks where I was required to wear a BA set but I continued to assist as casualties were still coming out.

I do not know what time it was but it was now day light. FF SIME and I spent a duration of time waiting to be tasked. We then decided to go back into the tower to try and help.

We were under Police shields as we made my way into the tower on the playground side. I noticed the ground was uneven with debris and there was a lot of water on the floor. I saw hoses running from the pumps to the dry riser had been punctured by the falling debris, and water was spewing out of them - much like a water park. On seeing this, I assumed this was the reason why water was not running up to

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the tenth floor. Normally, punctures are patched up but I believe this could not be done due to the danger of the falling debris.

By this point I had lost count of the amount of times I had gone in and out of the tower. The bridgehead was now on the ground floor. FF SIME and I were waiting in the atrium when someone had brought in a fan to ventilate the atrium. This idea was abandoned as more smoke was blown in and started fill the atrium. I cannot remember much after this point.

From 6am-8am we left the Tower and met up with rest of my crew and G341. Fire Fighting activity and the amount of casualties started to depreciate. My crew and I with a number of other fire fighters had congregating on one of the fields around the tower.

The flames were still burning. I could see the fire had breached internally in the middle flats on the upper floors and the flames were raging within.

As we were waiting on one of the fields outside the tower, we were approached by Commissioner Dany COTTON. She thanked and gave us words of reassurance. I cannot remember when but I do remember seeing her earlier on in the atrium, working with the managers.

At some point we were stood down. We reported to Paddington Fire Station at 10am where I wrote my contemporaneous notes.

I then returned to Chelsea Fire Station and recommenced night duty later that evening.

During the incident, I did not observe any fire preventing measures at the time of the fire. There were no sprinklers or alarms going off.

The Command Unit, analyse and plan tactics at an incident where four or more appliances are required. They manage message and communicate with control. The rank of Watch Manager and above are normally attached to the Command Unit.

The stay put policy advises residents to stay in their flats, cover any gaps with a damp cloth, retreat to the balcony, call 999 and await Fire Fighters to rescue you. The idea of the stay put policy is it to prevent

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residents putting themselves at risk. During the Grenfell Tower fire, I do not know who implemented the application or withdrawal of the stay put policy.

The decision making process is the constant assessment of resources, tactics and plans.

The fire at the Grenfell Tower was an unusual type of fire reaction. The speed in which it spread was a reaction I have never experienced before. I was taking back by the size but it did not prompt me to behave differently. My consideration remained the same - protecting the people.

The main factor that would have assisted our ability to Fight fire and conduct rescues what be better communication equipment and the use of the drones. A direct line of communication between the front line Fire Fighters and Control should have been in place. I believe this would have given Control live information on how the fire was reacting which may have prompted the withdrawal of the stay put policy sooner.

During the Grenfell Tower, there were so many things going on at the same time. Some Fire Fighters went against policy and put themselves at risk to rescue people. I can only recall attending incidents that involved one FSG call. Sometime after the incident, I was informed the amount of FSG calls we were dealing with were between one hundred to one hundred and fifty.

The magnitude of the fire, the volume of casualties and the sheer scale of the incident went above and beyond my previous experiences as a fire fighter.

Since the incident I have received six sessions of counselling provided by the LFB.

With regards to the casualties I assisted during my time at the Grenfell tower, I can only give a brief description of the following:

The conscious female that was being carried and put on a stretcher was of Afro Caribbean heritage, aged thirty years, slim build, black (not too long) hair. She was wearing a night gown.

I cannot remember much with regards to the male I assisted walk down the stairs. He was either White or

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Asian, approximately 30 years of age with dark hair.

The Asian male who was speaking to FF BUTLER, was 20-30 years of age, F509, slim build, short dark hair and spoke with a London accent. I do not remember what he was wearing but I believe it was casual wear.

The Black male that I advised was aged late 20 years, F507, slim build, short black hair and spoke with a London accent. He was wearing shirt and trousers I cannot remember what colour.

On TUESDAY 5th DECEMBER 2017, I was interviewed by DC VALDEZ and DC LOVEKIN at Hammersmith Fire Station. During my interview a copy on the contemporaneous notes that I wrote at Paddington Fire Station were produced to me. I confirm that these are the notes I had written and I exhibit them as EO/1.

During my interview I made two sketches:

EO/2 — is a sketch of the tower from my first view with the line of fire running in the centre.

EO/3 - is a sketch of the tower from my second view showing the right side on fire.

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