

**WITNESS STATEMENT**

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

Statement of: HISCOCK, GARY

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

Occupation: FIRE OFFICER

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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: G HISCOCK

Date: 07/02/2018

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

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The content of this statement constitutes a comprehensive summary of an interview conducted of an interview by DC Amanda WEBSTER and Civilian Investigator Ivan AGNEW with myself at Heston Fire Station, London Road on 04.12.2017 between 11:28 and 14:31.

Throughout the course of this statement I will refer to a document entitled Contemporaneous Notes, which I exhibit as GHI/1.

I have been a fire fighter for the past 17 years and am currently attached to Red Watch at Heston Fire Station which acts as our base station for the purposes of mobilisation. On the 14th June 2017 my training was up to date and was classified as competent in the role. We conduct simulated drills on stair climbing procedures. How to effectively open doors and deal with basement fires. This training takes place on strategic release days. I also received Breathing Apparatus or BA training as we call it, once a year.

I first became aware of the Grenfell Tower Fire when I was awoken at 02:39 on the morning of the 14<sup>th</sup> June 2017 by a fire call on the fire station tannoy alerting me to a fire. I dressed quickly, slid down the pole, ran to the Watch Room and picked up the slip of paper called the ticker which provides the location of the incident. This is my responsibility as the driver of the fire engine. I consulted the large wall map to confirm the general location of the fire and how to get to the Ladbroke Grove area.

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Our fire crew of five quickly manned our Fire and Rescue Unit (FRU) with my Crew Manger Paul GRAY in the front of the cab with me. The call sign for this vehicle is Golf 386 (G386). The other 3 Fire Fighters Alan HUDSON, Ben HOLEHOUSE and Dan PEGRAM were in the back of the vehicle. I was aware that a ladder pump had been deployed which indicated that this was a major fire we were about to attend and that 40 pumps were being deployed. The FRU has a Mobile Data Terminal (MDT) fitted which provides an exact location of the fire along with GPS to provide an updated road map to the scene, where water hydrants are located and a direct radio link to the control room.

On route my primary concern was to ensure we arrived quickly and safely on the blue light run to the scene of the fire and wasn't able to concentrate on everything that was being said over the radio but from the snippets I heard I knew that people were trapped inside the building and it was a Tower Block. Paul GRAY did the map reading but I knew most of the route to the scene which we refer to as the fire ground. I would add that I have never been called to Grenfell Tower for any reason prior to that evening. On my arrival in the locality I followed two other fire engines through the side streets and ended up parking my vehicle in BRAMLEY ROAD near MAIN CONTROL and not at the rendezvous point (RVP) initially provided by our control. The RVP was already too congested with other fire appliances. One of these fire engines may have been one that left our fire station at Heston ahead of our lorry. It was at this point I had my first sight of the Grenfell Tower which I would describe as looking like a rerun of the Hollywood Movie 'Towering Inferno' in that it was ablaze on the outside over most floors with debris falling off the side of the building and crashing on to the ground outside of the Tower Block. My thoughts were that anyone left inside wouldn't be alive. Our specialist vehicle which is the Fire and Rescue Unit (FRU) does not carry a water supply. It's used for a variety of rescue situations so carries advances cutting equipment for Road Traffic Collisions (RTC) to free people trapped inside their vehicles. It has other specialist line operations equipment to rescue persons using ropes, an inflatable Emergency Rescue Boat (ERB) and dry suits for water rescue situations. Fortunately it does have Extended Duration Breathing Apparatus (EDBA) on board to carry out search and rescue primarily on fire incidents involving the London Underground tunnels.

Knowing that there would smoked filled areas within the Tower we quickly put the EDBA kit on, leaving the other equipment behind apart from a Thermal Imaging Camera (TIC). At that point I left my personal mobile phone in the cab of the lorry. Control had not asked us to bring anything else for the task ahead. As we made our way on foot to the BA Main Control we passed several distressed members of the public

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consoling each other and obviously concerned for the welfare of the buildings residents. I didn't speak to them as I was preoccupied with the task at hand. All 5 of our crew went to the BA Main Control situated near Kensington Leisure Centre. Only Paul GRAY entered Main Control to book our crew in and receive the tasking whilst we four waited outside. A short while later Paul exited Main Control to tell us that we would be entering Grenfell Tower via the West side of the building and we would be reporting to the Bridgehead for further instructions. Our entire crew of 5 moved to the staging area in sector 2 which was an area located on the West side of Grenfell Tower and waited to be safely escorted by police. The main entrance on the south side of the Tower was referred to as sector 4.

In order to enter Grenfell Tower safely avoiding falling cladding we had to line up in single file to be escorted under the cover of riot shields held aloft by uniformed police officers. We entered the Tower via an already forced opening on its West side. Once inside our crew reformed and walked up to the Bridgehead on the ground floor to hand in our Tallies to the Entry Control Officer (ECO).

The tally system allows the ECO to keep track of all the firefighters deployed into search and rescue or to fire fight. The electronic tally is taken out of the the BA set by the firefighter just prior to deployment and is placed into the ECO board. This action sets the digital timer to read off the amount of air time left within his air cylinder. The tally is placed on the ECO board and the telemetry shows the ECO the rate of usage by the firefighter. When the air runs low an audible alarm is activated on the firefighters BA kit. The ECO has the responsibility of contacting the affected firefighter by a radio located within his headset or his partner who should have a hand held radio. It's the ECO's responsibility to then mount a search and rescue operation for the firefighters should they fail to respond.

The Bridgehead was chaotic in that water was pouring down the staircase, firefighters were assisting an elderly couple to evacuate down the stairs followed by another fire fighter carrying an adolescent female down to safety whilst our crew and others were queueing to get up the stairs. Tally procedure completed and verbally briefed by the senior officer at the Bridgehead we walked up the staircase to the floor counting the floor levels as we ascended. I was armed with a sledgehammer to force doors if need be. Others in our crew had a door enforcer which is a short heavy metal manually operated battering ram and a thermal imaging camera. Our crew had activated our EDBA apparatus and were therefore relying on the integral radio set inside our face masks to communicate with the Bridgehead our fellow crew members and or Main Control. Additionally we were able to shout to each other despite wearing the EDBA face masks.

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On way up the stairs we had to step over a large apparently dead bariatric adult lying on one of the stairwell landings. I couldn't tell you if this this very large person was male or female. As we continued we walked around an apparently dead child covered by a blanket on one of the stairwell landings. I could tell it was a child as his or her feet were uncovered. I couldn't tell you which floor the child was on due to the smoke logging and lack of visible signage.

Crew manager GRAY received a further radio instruction retasking us to go to the 11<sup>th</sup> floor instead of the 9<sup>th</sup> which we did. I was feeling hot by this stage due to the climb and the heat generated by the fire. When we arrived on the 11<sup>th</sup> conditions were too hot to get to the flats on that floor so we made our way to the 10<sup>th</sup> floor. We checked for people in flats 71 and 72 by forcing the doors but they were empty and relatively untouched by the fire. It was at that point one of our crew heard banging, shouting and screaming coming from what I think was Flat 73. Due to the smoke filled corridor it was difficult to see the door numbering. When we forced open the flat door we found 4 people, all adults in the living room. I think they were all female but I cannot be sure. All were foreign and spoke limited English. Their flat was relatively smoke free hence their reluctance to step out on to the smoke logged landing. We told them to put towels over their faces to provide protection from the heat and to a limited extent the smoke. A firefighter took one person each. Mine was an elderly lady and we rescued them by escorting them down the staircase to ground level where the Bridgehead was now located. She held my arm on the way down for support. The conditions were the same as when going up the stairs. There were hoses and running water on the stairs to be negotiated. On our arrival at the Bridgehead the casualties were handed over to other firefighters to evacuate them outside of the block where ambulance crews waiting to treat them. All of them were suffering from smoke inhalation as a result of the descent. CM GRAY provided a verbal briefing to the Bridgehead senior officers as to our actions. At this point we carried out a check and ascertained that 2 of our crew were low on air, so we picked up our Tallies and exited the building via our original entry point. Once outside we walked away to a safe grassy area situated near Kensington Leisure Centre where we changed and serviced our EDBA sets by changing the air cylinders and rested pending further deployment instructions. Having seen some media footage in which I can be seen post this incident I can confirm we rested near Station Walk. These equipment checks are referred to as fire ground 'A' tests.

I could see from my vantage point that the fire was wrapping around the block and plumes of smoke were rising from the top of the building. The heat was intense. I saw that the aerial ladder platform had been

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deployed to the East side of the block. Its aerial ladder was fully extended and its operator was hosing water on to the East side of the Tower. Around this time our crew were instructed by CM GRAY via a Senior Officer to help out with the setting up a hose on the top of an adjoining building at Grenfell Walk for the use of other fighters which we did. Another took over this task away from our crew as we were needed for other BA operations and they were not in BA kit at this time.

As a team of 5 we agreed that we would go back into the building again if tasked. Consequently we made our way to the holding area which had been relocated from earlier. It was now near Station Walk and from there we entered Grenfell Tower as before on the West side awaiting deployment. As before we were shielded from the falling debris by the riot shields held over our heads by Uniformed Police Officers. The fire officer in charge at our muster point in the lift lobby area on the ground floor needed 4 firefighters, 2 with Standard Duration Breathing Apparatus (SDBA) and 2 with EDBA kits. As CM Paul GRAY and I had the necessary EDBA kit we volunteered to go back in for a second time. He and I made our way via the stairs to the Bridgehead in the lift lobby on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor where we were briefed to ascend to the 13<sup>th</sup> floor to fire fight as opposed to search and rescue. We put on our EDBA kit on in an adjoining flat on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor which was unaffected by the fire. The conditions during the climb were much the same as before. As before we counted and called out the floor levels as the signage was either missing or couldn't be seen due to smoke logging. On this occasion we didn't have a Thermal Imaging camera with us but were aware that the area was hot. At one point we saw another crew coming down the stairs from above without casualties and assumed that the rescue phase was now over. We were aware that firefighting equipment such as hoses were already in situ on the 13<sup>th</sup> floor hence we didn't take any with us from the 4<sup>th</sup> floor.

When we arrived at the lift lobby area on the 13<sup>th</sup> floor to fight the fire we realised immediately that the water pressure was inadequate so we decided to go down to the 13<sup>th</sup> floor hoping the pressure would be better. It wasn't, so I shouted to Paul that I would go down to the 12<sup>th</sup> floor to find a hose with some water pressure. I found one and hauled it up the stairs to the 13<sup>th</sup> floor. I then connected the branch to the hose and gained some water pressure but not full pressure. Using this fire hose we sprayed water on the fire by opening the stairwell fire doors and aiming the water in the direction of the residents' flats, however as the water pressure was a lot less than it should have been and we were both becoming very hot from the proximity of the fire in front of us. We were on our knees for most of the time alternatively spraying the flames to reduce the impact on us. It meant that we had to retreat back into the stairwell on three

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occasions to cool down. By this stage the flat doors to our left had been burnt away as had all of the internal party walls. There were pockets of flame with very little smoke. The area in front of us was glowing red with the residual heat. The heat was intense. It was at this point we jointly decided that we couldn't take any more heat or extinguish the fire in front of us. We were running out of air so we abandoned the hose in the stairwell on the 13<sup>th</sup> floor and descended via the stairs to the Bridgehead on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor. I think CM GRAY radioed down that decision to senior officers prior to our decent as I didn't have radio communications fitted in my headset. I did know that the radio signal within CM GRAY's EDBA headset hadn't been working on occasions. Upon our arrival we verbally briefed the senior officers as to our actions then picked up our tallies from the Entry control Officer. On exiting the building again by our point of entry we walked over to Main Control where we were greeted by our Commissioner Danny COTTON and the Mayor of London Sadiq KHAN and an entourage of people with them. The Commissioner asked us if we had been up the building and to tell her what the conditions were like inside the building. Paul GRAY enquired if it was okay to speak freely in front of non-London Fire Brigade staff and to her credit she said it was. Paul told her exactly what we had seen and heard and the issues with water pressure and the nature of the fire. Commissioner COTTON thanked us for our efforts and we made our way to the rest area and made ready EDBA kits in the unlikely event that we would be deployed for a third time.

Subsequently we met up with the other 3 members of our crew Fire Fighters Alan HUDSON, Ben HOLEHOUSE and Dan PEGRAM. We weren't deployed again to the building so having been stood down by Main Control we all went back to our fire engine arriving about 2pm. From there we were released from the scene by main Control instructed to go to Paddington Fire Station to complete contemporaneous notes of our recollection of events and individual actions at the Fire Ground. Upon our arrival we were offered individual and group counselling concerning the night's events. As a crew we felt the best way forward was to deal with the trauma was to receive counselling as a group. Post this our crew returned to Heston Fire Station arriving about 6pm. We were then offered the opportunity of starting our shift 3 hours later than the usual 8pm start. As a group we all volunteered to start at 8pm.

Since the fire I have been back at the Grenfell Tower on three occasions, firstly for a 10pm relief on the 15<sup>th</sup> June 2017. This was only to collect equipment abandoned at the scene on the night of the fire by our appliances. These were located and taken back to our base. On the two other occasions to conduct Urban Search & Rescue duties. This only involved timber shoring up duties. My team and I constructed a

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covered walkway between the existing concrete walkway and the main entrance outside. It was constructed to protect members of the Disaster Victim Identification Team as they go in and out of the building from falling cladding and other loose debris.

I have been asked by police to provide as detailed description as possible of the people our crew rescued from Grenfell Tower but am unable to expand on what I've already said. I put this down to the circumstances and nature of the rescue in that the decision making had to be done within seconds. On leaving the flat my focus was on guiding my elderly casualty through the smoke filled environment that existed till we reached the safety of the lower floors. I didn't see my casualty post the hand over to other firefighters.

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