

WITNESS STATEMENT

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

Statement of: SANDERS, HARVEY

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

Occupation: FIRE OFFICER

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: HARVEY SANDERS

Date: 05/12/2017

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

I am a Firefighter with the London Fire Brigade. I am providing this account to DC Amanda WEBSTER and DC Judith KAYE from Operation Northleigh, Metropolitan Police Service on Sunday 26th November 2017 at Wembley Fire Station regarding my attendance at Grenfell Tower on Wednesday 14th June 2017.

During this statement I will refer to my original notes which I made at Paddington Fire Station on this date and which I can exhibit this as HMS/1.

I have worked for the London Fire Brigade for six years. I am currently stationed at Acton Fire Station but have also previously worked at Shoreditch Fire Station.

Due to these locations having a large percentage of high rise buildings I have regularly undertaken specific training in procedure on attending high rise fires. The training would also include the use of Breathing Apparatus and occur approximately every six months. We also run exercises with other stations or appliances in between this period and use the drill tower at the station to simulate the actions of a rescue within a high rise. I was also part of the pilot scheme at Shoreditch for the 'high rise bag' which is a back pack with additional kit to be used at a high rise. We did not have this kit at Acton on the night of the fire at Grenfell Tower. The pack contains items including extra branch, lift keys, bold cropper and washers. (It's like the First Aid kit for High Rises.) I am unsure which appliances carried this kit on the night of the fire at Grenfell Tower.

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On Tuesday 13th June 2017 I started my night duty shift at Action Fire Station at 2000hrs. I cannot recall any details of the shift until approximately 0130hrs on Wednesday 14th June when the 'bells went' and we were called to mobilise. I am unsure how I was made aware of the details of the call but remember it being a 'make pumps eight' confirmed fire with person reported. This information meant that eight fire appliances had already been requested to attend.

I travelled on our fire appliance call sign G261 with my Standby Watch Manager. Since this date I have discovered he may be called Nathan ASHE but cannot be entirely sure. Also with me was our driver-Firefighter Mandip SINGH, Firefighter Nick MERRIAN and a standby Firefighter - who I know only as 'WILL'.

The standby staff are people who normally work at another Fire Station but move stations when locations are short staffed. I believe the Standby Watch Manager was from Chelsea Fire Station and the Firefighter with us that night was from Ealing Fire Station.

I travelled in the rear of the appliance with Nick and Will. I did not know the location of Grenfell Tower as it was not an our ground so I did check on my phone for directions and assisted the driver- Mandip SINGH navigate our route and would I believe have also looked at a map before we left. I had only transferred to Action two (2) months prior to this date so West London was all completely new to me.

On our journey I could hear on the main radio within the appliance that the 'pumps' being requested to the incident were increasing. I recall this happened twice so I believe by the time of our arrival it was up to twenty five.

The journey itself took only around ten minutes to get there. On our approach I remembered seeing smoke coming from the building. From this and the 'makeup' messages I knew this was a very serious and quickly progressing job.

We managed to park quite close to the west side of the tower on a road which leads out west. I am unsure of the name of the road we used. We didn't really have any difficulties in parking.

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FF Nick and I were the nominated BA wearers that day (Breathing Apparatus wearers) and presumed that we would be needed straight away so our plan was to get set up and get right over to the building. Our officer in charge- Watch Manager ASH would normally have the responsibility of taking our nominal role and booking in our appliance and staff with the Command Unit. I believe he did this but I did not attend with him.

On arrival I put on my equipment and began the two/three minute walk towards the tower. I immediately felt there was a real 'air of panic'. We took only our BA sets and I think I took the TIC (thermal imaging camera) as I definitely had one on attending my FSG call but I cannot be entirely sure. I did regret my lack of subsequent equipment later as we were short of hoses and other items. I did not take them at this time as it is usually standard on attendance at a high rise fire that the initial crews would have taken any equipment needed to get to the bridgehead.

There were lots of members of the public in the area and some running away from the tower. I could hear people screaming and there was lots of smoke in the area. The atmosphere felt tense and I recall one woman shouting at us something like 'move quicker' and 'get on with it'.

As I got closer to the tower I began to see the flames coming from the building. We approached from the west to the south ending up at the front entrance of Grenfell Tower. On closer inspection of the fire I could see it was definitely on the outside of the building on the cladding I believe. It was very unusual as I would expect to see flames coming out of a window at this type of fire but it was not like that at all. I also noted a diagonal line of fire from about the 3rd/4th or 5th floor. I have never seen this before.

I recall before we reached inside Grenfell Tower we became aware via radio message from our driver FF SINGH that our appliance had been designated to be a FSG crew. By this I mean Fire Survival Guidance. The procedure would be that we would receive messages via control from persons inside the building and record them on a designated pad and pass them onto the Command Unit for FF's to them be deployed.

As Nick and I were nearly at the Tower when we received this message we told our crew to record the information and pass it on and we would get to the entry control and let them know our status as FSG.

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There was lots of activity around and prior to entering the tower. At the front of the building Nick and I met a man who was trying to run up the external stairs and enter the building. My BA partner- Nick told him he couldn't come in. He was very firm with him and told him he could not enter. The man was explaining that he had family members stuck in the lift on the 8th floor. He was very panicked and upset. Nick told him we would pass on the information and try to resolve it. We had to leave him so I am unsure if he entered or not but I did not see him again. The outside area did not feel like a managed situation. We then made our way into the building. There was a set of stairs leading to the main stairwell and then on the first floor we could see the Entry Control point.

There was not a lot of room to move around and there were lots of Firefighters who were queuing along the landing next to the stairwell. The 'Bridgehead' had been set up on the first floor and I remember probably three other BA teams ahead of us at this point also waiting. The Watch Manager of Kensington was in charge of the BA area at the 'Entry Control Point'. I don't remember his name but I believe he may have briefed up prior to Nick and I being committed. I do recall we informed him regarding our status of FSG but we had no specific details to give him. I believe there were plenty of 'slips' of information coming through at this time.

We had a lack of equipment including hoses and branches which held us up at this time. It was definitely a situation that was already unconventional. We normally would be dealing with one floor during a 'high rise' fire. It's fairly rare that it spreads to other floors where you would need to send lots of different crews to different floors for FSG calls. All of these Firefighters needed BA sets due to the smoke and some were taking hoses also. When we were committed after a briefing from the bridgehead we were sent to Flat 111 on the 14th Floor. We were aware that an FSG call had originated from this flat but we were unaware of any of the details of the occupants. We were 'backing up' another team in front of us. I did not know these Firefighters or where they were from. I was not given any information of the conditions of the floor or flat we would attend or who we would be attending in relation to numbers.

At this time I had no indication or belief that the fire would spread to the 14th floor. My belief was that we would attend the flat and tell those people what we always say in that situation and that it is to 'stay put' and we would deal with the fire. This would have been the safest place for them due to the smoke logged stairwell. I never doubted this to be the right thing to say as I did not believe people would get

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down the stairs conscious due to the conditions.

I took with me one length of 45ml hose and a thermal imaging camera (TIC). I was aware that as a 'back up' crew we didn't have sufficient equipment but believed we could still firefight and reassure residents on the floor. I was unsure what equipment the crew had ahead of us but expected them to also have hose and possibly other equipment. The stairwell was incredibly smoky and visibility was virtually nil at 'head height' from the third floor. Nick was ahead of me and I was keeping up with him via my TIC and holding onto his cylinder. I was also calling out him a regularly to make sure it was still him ahead of me as there were at least four other Firefighters on the stairs. We couldn't move particularly fast because of the hose on the stairs and other Firefighters. I could see nothing at 'head height' from the third floor upwards. We did 'sweep' with our feet on occasions to check the integrity of the floors regarding people and hoses. I was trying to count to keep a record of the floors we were passing. I recall also asking other firefighters.

We got roughly to the 10th floor and another crew member accidentally pressed Nick's distress signal unit (DSU) on his BA set. Due to this we had to go back to the 'ECP' at the bridgehead to reset the signal. The unit makes a really loud noise and the bridgehead would also be automatically made aware of the activation. The unit has to be reset at the bridgehead so we made our way back down. We did both have personal radios and Nick had a 'comms' set with a microphone and speaker attached but the reset has to be done in person. This process took around ten minutes.

On arrival at the bridgehead area we also did a 'gauge' check on our air levels on our BA sets. I can't remember the result of this check but I recall being concerned that Nick and I would not reach the 14th floor and get back down again with the amount of air we had remaining. Nick encouraged me to carry on and 'back up' the other team at Floor 14 or at least try so I agreed we should go back up and do that.

We got up to Floor 14 as quick as we could. As stated previously the stairwell was completely smoke logged from the 3rd to the 14th Floor. There may have been other Firefighters on the stairs but I did not see any residents at this time.

The landing area on 14th Floor was clearer and visibility improved a bit in the corridor around the flats.

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The smoke was slightly 'wispy' in the location. Nick led me out onto the landing area which was a corridor with possible ** flats. I was still using my TIC which was recording. The other crew we were asked to back up were on the landing also. There was no sign of fire and they had not 'set in' or connected to the 'dry riser'. As I came onto the landing there were flats to the left but I went straight opposite to Flat 113.

At this time all of the FF's were knocking on doors and speaking to residents to reassure them. I knocked at the door and the male occupant let me in quickly. I shut the door straight away to minimise any smoke entering with me. I believe there were three people inside the flat. It's difficult to remember but I believe it was a man, woman and child.

They were really panicked but seemed so relieved I was there. The male within the premises then 'dropped to his knees' and began thanking me for coming. He was asking if the fire was out. I explained it was not but it was safer for them to stay in their flat whilst we were dealing with it and then make it safe to get out. They had a window open in the living room area where we talked and the smoke within the flat was very little compared to the stairwell.

The man asked us not to leave them but I explained I had to go but to stay on the phone to control and if the situation changed that they should call back and keep control informed of what was happening. I explained it was a safer situation to stay as the stairwell was so smoke logged and that we would do everything we could for them. I also said we would send crews back to help them if they needed it. I still believed this advice and thought we would put out the fire and everyone would be safe. I can only describe the male as not white possibly Asian. I recall he spoke good English but I don't recall if he had an accent. I can't really remember anything about the female or child. I believe the man could have been Muslim because of the manner in the way he thanked me and he appeared to be praying with his hands. I believe this flat still had their electricity but I did not hear any smoke alarms sounding in the flat or on the landing area.

On leaving a colleague, I cannot give his name asked me what the situation was like inside the flat I had been in. I explained it was fairly clear. He then decided to move all of the other residents from other flats into Flat 113.

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The reason for this was due to the fact the other flats apparently were now fairly smoky so all residents who had been found on Floor 14 went into Flat 113 for this reason as it was the most clear air. In total this made a total of eight people inside the flat including the original occupants. I cannot say which flats they came from or describe them. I did not speak to any other residents or attend any other flats. There may have been other children within this party but I cannot be entirely sure. All residents were walking they were not very young children or babies.

At this time our advice to residents to remain within their flats was appropriate for the circumstances. Normally you should have protection within a flat from a fire when it is on a floor or flat below. I totally agree with the 'stay put' policy if you are in a flat above the fire. This policy is also utilised as we normally have enough time within a high rise fire to get there and put the fire but before it spreads too far. Also using this policy for Grenfell Tower seemed right as the stairwell was completely smoke logged. This method is part of Fire Brigade policy and for standard advice in high rise procedures.

Following moving the residents we then made our way downstairs. Nicks warning device on his air pressure activated during the descent so we knew he was low on air and needed to return as soon as possible. The stairwell was the same condition as previously described and Nick was leading me down the wall side. I can't recall how many Firefighters I saw on the staircase but I was aware of noises around me and some communications between teams. I definitely can't remember seeing any residents or casualties. I am unsure what happened to the crew we were backing up if they were ahead of us or behind. I was still was not feeling any heat from outside of my kit.

Once we arrived back at the bridgehead we gave a de-brief to Louisa de SILVA who was the Entry Control Officer at this time. This was still located on the first floor. We explained we had moved everyone on the 14th Floor to Flat 113. Watch Manager De SILVA was writing information on the wall on a 'china graph'. There was not a lot of information on the graph at this time. I don't remember the details of the graph. Watch Manger De SILVA gave the impression to me of being very 'in control' she was very reassuring. She also said 'Well done' to us and advised to 'drop our sets'. On leaving the building I noted a long queue of Firefighting Teams waiting to go into the stairwell to access the tower.

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On leaving the building at this time and heading back to our truck I noted the whole building was ablaze. In approximately twenty minutes I had been inside the building I had absolutely no idea this was happening. I did not have any awareness of the fire development whilst inside the building. I was aware of the smoke but not any heat.

On our route I could see lots of smoke and falling debris coming from the building. This was a variety of sizes including some 'big lumps' of plastic some of which was two or three meters in size. Some debris was still flaming as it was falling and there was piles collecting around the building. At this time I also saw the 'Arial appliance' positioned at the south side of Grenfell Tower. It was not supplying any water at this time. I do remember asking myself why this was not happening and also with others later in the shift.

We then headed back to our truck and did a fire ground 'A test' of our sets and changed our cylinders. I did not see the rest of my crew at this time. At this time we had a drink and rested for approximately ten minutes before making our way back to the 'holding area'. I can't recall seeing many casualties coming out at this time and most members of the public had been moved back away from the tower. On our route I could see lots of Firefighters around coming out of the building. Some of them looked absolutely exhausted. I recall one Firefighter who was virtually collapsed on the floor. I asked him if he was ok and he then told me a harrowing story of what he had experienced. He had taken in a lot of smoke but declined the offer of oxygen. I did not know his name. He was lying against a wall outside the tower. I saw lots of ambulances around at this time. I was informed by someone that the holding area had moved to the next to the Sports Centre on a grassy area I can't recall who said this. We made our way there and then waited for a long time. I can't say exactly but it felt around two hours. At this time a lot of people had arrived and there were a lot of BA wearers. They were obviously trying to get 'fresh wearers' in by this I mean people who had not used BA kits inside. I don't know who was in charge of this area. We had sectioned off really into groups of people who probably knew each other. It wasn't totally organised as to who would be going in next. It was mainly an officer coming to us and saying more people needed but I recall also they were asking for mainly extended duration 'wearers' which means a person with extended air or a 'fresh wearer' as described.

We thought we would go back inside so waited around pretty much in amazement of what was going on.

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We did not however end up going back up into the Grenfell Tower during the shift. Whilst waiting outside in the holding area I recall a very senior officer coming to speak to us. I can't remember his name but he gave a very 'rousing speech' about the fire and how it was the biggest fire of his life and the biggest fire of anyone careers really. He said he could not 'vouch' for the safety of the structural integrity of the building but there was still a lot of 'saveable life' within the tower. He confirmed that they would continue to commit crews inside. He asked us if there were any questions as it was not likely he would be back again. After that he left. I don't recall seeing him again.

I then recall being asked as part of ten BA teams to move to the back of building. To another holding area. Nick and I volunteered and made out way to the back of Grenfell Tower being the 'west side'. At the rear of the tower the fire was not as progressed as much as it had at the front. I can't recall how well established the fire was but it was not completely ablaze. I think the middle floors were not fully ablaze but it was clear it was enveloping the whole building. I had never seen anything like it. I believed the whole or a large bulk of the building would be lost. There was a crew (which were my old team from Shoreditch) who were 'damping down' the debris or hosing the rear of the building at a low level. The fire had taken hold so quickly and gone so high in my mind we could try and Firefight but believed we could not put it out. The whole thing was surreal.

At the back of the tower there were lots of BA teams just waiting again. It did appear we would not be going back in as I recall they seemed to be seeking more extended BA wearers and even these requests appeared to be slowing down. We waited for some time, I am unsure how long before an unknown officer asked us to volunteer to hold the Police 'riot' shields. The shields were being used to protect Firefighters and casualties and anyone who was travelling to and from the building so they could come or go in safely to prevent them being hit by the falling debris. I left Nick and put down my BA set and volunteered for this job. I was positioned with other Firefighters on the north side of the tower. I think I did this job for around two hours. It was mostly protecting Firefighters I think I only saw one casualty whilst doing this role. I recall at some point also escorting a Structural Engineer into Grenfell Tower. I can only describe the casualty as possibly an Asian male, middle aged. He was walking out at the North side. I saw him as I was lining up to do the shield work. This was the last casualty I saw on my shift at Grenfell Tower.

I do recall people shouting casualties were coming but I did not see any at the North side where I was

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positioned. We ran a relay system when taking people in and out. We were signalling to say when people could pass. There was lots of water approximately one ft. at the deepest point. There was lots of hose and debris. We had to go slow and wait for the signal to move at the safest point. The area was about a twenty meter stretch operating from one side to another with people stationed at each side. I was working alone for around two hours. As this work slowed down I then decided to go back to my previous holding area and try and find my BA partner- Nick. I can only estimate it being now around 0500hrs. Around this time I became aware or was told I am unsure but there was a burst supply hose between the Kentish Town pump and the Richmond pump. I liaised with the pump operators to complete the repair switching off the water for a short length of time to complete this. I am unsure how this happened but have heard since that there were several burst branch lengths caused by falling debris. This whole repair may have taken around 30 minutes as it took time to communicate with everyone involved regarding the water supply. I have encountered this in training but never in a live fire situation.

Following this I located the Salvation Army truck with Nick and had a drink and some food. I remained around the BA holding area around the Sports Centre until approximately 0700hrs. At this time I was not aware of anymore Crews being requested but cannot be totally sure of what was going on.

Nick and I decided to locate the rest of our crew and were informed by some method, I cannot remember exactly how that our Standby Governor - Watch Manager ASH and Standby FF Will were working on a ground crew on a roof of a building next to the tower. A ground monitor is equipment which enables you to leave a jet/hose in a position on the ground and prevents it from 'snaking off' when deployed.

We found our crew on the 2nd or 3rd floor, I cannot be entirely sure, but it was not a very high building located to the west of Grenfell Tower. I cannot say the name of this building. They were no longer firefighting when we found them.

We then went back to the Command Unit and found our driver- FF SINGH. I can't remember who gave us permission to leave Grenfell but recall it was around 0900hrs. I was made aware all leaving appliances had to go Paddington Fire Station for a de-brief. I cannot recall how this was communicated. We spent about an hour at Paddington during which we wrote our notes and had a few minutes of counselling. That really was someone asking us if 'we were ok.' I travelled to Paddington with all staff named previously

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on my arrival in the same appliance.

Following this I returned to Acton Fire Station again in the same appliance with the same crew arriving back approximately 1100hrs on Wednesday 14th June 2017. I came back on duty at 2000hrs on Wednesday 14th June 2017 and returned to Grenfell Tower sometime during shift at approximately 0000hrs-0400hrs on Thursday 15th June 2017. I had a new Watch Manager that night who I can only recall being 'big Dave' from Hammersmith. I can only remember being part of four other appliances that were on 'fire watch' it was not communicated exactly to me what our role was to be. I surmised it was to monitor any changes in the building including structurally or outbreak of fire. The building at this time was 'burnt out' and black. No FF crew members were inside of the building and I only saw slight smoke around the building whilst we were monitoring it.

I have not returned to Grenfell Tower since this date.

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