

**WITNESS STATEMENT**

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

Statement of: STEWART, JOHN

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

Occupation: FIRE OFFICER

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This statement (consisting of 9 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: JOHN STEWART

Date: 14/01/2018

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

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This is my account of the fire at Grenfell Tower in the early hours of Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> June 2017.

I will mention a number of people, all of whom are in the London Fire Brigade (LFB).

Commissioner Dany COTTON.

Assistant Commissioner (A/C) CUTBILL.

A/C Andy ROWE.

DAC DRAWBRIDGE.

Group Manager (G/M) Pat GOLDBOURNE.

G/M John GRAHAM.

Station Manager (S/M) Gareth COOK.

S/M Shaun MADLEY.

Watch Manger (W/M) Mark DEAN.

W/M Mark KENTFIELD.

I will mention Grenfell Tower and the internal layout of the ground floor and stairwell.

I joined the LFB in April 1989 when I underwent fire fighter training and was posted to Belsize fire station. In 1992, I transferred to West Hampsted and in 2001 was promoted to a leading fire fighter and

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posted to Euston. In 2011, I was posted to Edmonton and in 2015, was promoted to Watch Manager (W/M) and moved to Wembley fire station as a Command Unit operative. I'll explain what that role entails shortly. In July 2016 I transferred, in the same role, back to Edmonton. I was posted there at the time of Grenfell fire.

My training is different to normal fire fighter training in that operationally, I am not required to use Breathing Apparatus (BA) and so on. So I don't do their training but do training that is relevant to my role.

There are 8 Command Units (CU) within the LFB. A command unit will attend fires which require either 4 or more appliances, where there are persons reported, (that is members of the public inside the premises), or 4 or more separate calls having been made to the brigade. The unit will control the incident and act as advisors to officers and crews on the ground. In order to perform my role, I do best practice assessments on the computers, Command Support Computer System training and Tactical Decision Exercises which occur maybe 20 times a year. I am trained and authorised to run a Command Unit.

On Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> June 2017, at 8.00pm, I came on duty at Edmonton to start my 1st night shift of 2. I completed all of my checks of the truck and equipment and did some training from the diary, by way of a policy note. I can't remember exactly what the note was on. Nothing of significance happened until around 2.00am when we received a call. The call comes through by way of a tele printer which produces a paper call slip. I looked at it and it said that there was a 40-pump fire. A 40-pump fire means that there is a fire and staff at the scene are requesting 40 fire engines to attend to deal with it. I've never seen nor heard of a 40-pump fire. I looked at the slip 3 or 4 times just to make sure that what I was reading was correct. 40 pumps is massive and I knew that we were going to something extraordinary.

We had the address of Grenfell Tower and I looked at a map and my phone to get the route to the scene. I travelled in the control vehicle, call sign CU1 along with a colleague W/M Mark DEAN. The Control Vehicle can also be called a Command Unit. There are 8 such vehicles throughout the LFB and they are mobile vehicles, which attend scenes and provide a focal point for incident command. The incident commander can be based there. It has enhanced communications, computers, and white boards. It provides logistic support, planning, reliefs, operation planning and support. So my usual roll, which I am trained to do, is to staff the Command Unit, supplying all of the functions necessary to run a fire ground.

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I remember travelling along the A406 North Circular Road on blue lights and sirens. As we did I remember the radio traffic being really busy. The unit has a mainstream radio fitted, the traffic on which is controlled by a controller. There was so much traffic on the radio that I couldn't hear most of it.

I don't know the area but I remember the RVP being at Bramley Road. As we got nearer, in the Notting Hill area I could see the tower in the distance. I could see a tower block on fire from top to bottom. In 28 years service I'd never seen anything like what I saw as I got my first look at the tower.

Near to the RVP, there were crowds of people and road works, which meant we couldn't get through. We were getting quite stressed about not being able to get to the scene when a taxi driver stopped and told us to follow him. He was obviously local and knew the area so we followed him, which enabled us to avoid the road works. I remember that there were a couple of fire engines and an Aerial Ladder Platform (ALP) that followed us.

We parked up maybe 300 meters from the tower, left our control vehicle and looked for the control vehicle that would have already been at the scene and controlling the incident. I don't know where we parked but it was to the south of the tower. It was now 3.00/3.10am. We had tabards on which distinguish us as command unit officers.

We found the control vehicle, which I think was Fulham's unit, which had the call sign of CU8.

I briefly spoke to a police officer whilst Mark spoke to the command unit and he was given a task around mapping within that unit. Because it was so busy, I waited around 10 minutes before speaking to W/M Mark KENTFIELD, the officer in charge of it. Team Leader KENTFIELD asked me to go to the bridgehead inside the tower, speak to the officer in charge there and tell them to change to radio channel 2, which was to be used for incident command.

Our radios have a number of different channels that you can use and it appeared that they were having problems with the channel that they were using as it was so busy. The Bridgehead is where, at a fire at a high-rise block, entry into the floors of the building for fire fighters is controlled. You can brief and

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commit your BA crews, and you can plug into to the water outlets between the bridgehead and the fire floor. You need that area to ensure that the correct amount of fire fighters are going in and out. Without it, you will have no control over numbers and no idea as to who is where. It is normally set up two floors below the fire, so in a safe location. Fire usually travels upwards and so normally the bridgehead is in a safe position 2 floors underneath it.

I walked towards the tower from the South and saw that it was fully alight from the lower floors to the top. It was unbelievable. From then on, throughout my whole time at the incident whilst I was outside, I tried not to look at it. There was a turntable ladder parked nearby on the grass but I can't remember if it was pumping water or not.

I got to the main entrance which had a canopy above it. There was a queue of around 12 fire fighters waiting to get inside of the building who were controlled by a safety officer. The fire fighters were standing safely underneath a walkway, the edge of which was around 15 feet from the entrance.

I think that officer was a Watch Manager who was looking up at the building at the debris that was falling. There were chunks of foot square debris, some alight, some not, raining down onto the floor. His job was to spot gaps in the falling debris and when they appeared, allow fire fighters to travel the 15 feet or so and enter the building safely. I waited my turn for around 15/20 seconds and when it was safe, I entered the building to the side to the left. It was around 4.00am at this stage.

There was the main entrance but an entrance to the left of it had been cut out enabling a second means of entry into the building. The Bridgehead was on the ground floor in a big lobby. I remember seeing a kitchenette, then a corridor with some toilets then it expanded into a larger room where the bridgehead was. At that time, conditions were clear with wispy smoke. It was perfectly breathable at that stage and the lighting inside was fine.

There were fire fighters waiting to be tasked into the building with the SDBA and EDBA wearers standing separately from each other. In addition there were 8 or 9 officers on the bridgehead.

I saw Group Manager Pat GOLDBOURNE and G/M WELSH standing by the stairs.

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I thought the layout of the inside of the building to be a bit strange. There was a narrow staircase which, from the ground floor, led up to a mezzanine type floor above it. I didn't see a lift. There may have been one, but I didn't see any lifts. I knew G/M GOLDBOURNE from previous dealings with him and so recognised him. He was the bridgehead commander.

I saw some entry control boards being used for Fire Survival Guidance (FSG) taskings but throughout my time during the incident I had nothing to do with FSG.

FSG is when someone is in a flat and is unable to leave it through either fire or smoke. They will call 999.

The phone operator at Merton will stay on the phone to the resident in order to get information from them such as their location, their conditions how many people are trapped. As much information as they can.

A command unit is mobilised specifically to deal with FSG and will collate the information, which is sent to them from Control by way of a dedicated phone line or radio. From there the information will be given to the Bridgehead by way of radio and then to fire fighters at the scene who will attempt to rescue the occupants.

I told G/M GOLDBOURNE of the instruction to change to channel 2. That channel wasn't working but straight away, he tasked me. Although I am trained to run a command unit, there were already others performing that role and G/M Goldbourne needed personnel there and then to help him.

I will describe incidents and tasks that I completed in the next 4/5 hours whilst I was at the tower. I have since thought about the order in which they occurred but I am not sure as when each event happened. So some of the events that I am about to describe may not be in the correct order.

I remember Assistant Commissioner Andy ROWE being at the bridgehead and briefing and speaking to G/M GOLDBOURNE.

A/C ROWE tasked me to be a runner from the Bridgehead to the command unit outside. We needed

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communications between the two and with the radio traffic being so heavy and not working very well, he wanted a physical link between him and the Command Unit.

I saw someone dealing with FSG and writing the information on the wall of the building. G/M GOLDBOURNE was briefing the crews for the FSG calls and then sending them up into the tower. So I was tasked with running communications to and from the bridgehead and the command vehicle. I did this half a dozen times but each time had to wait for a police officer with a shield to allow me in and out of the building because of the debris. The shields were now being used to protect people above their heads from the debris as we went in and out. I'm [REDACTED] years old and this was becoming difficult for me to sustain as it was a fair distance from the tower to the command unit. So I found a Watch Manager, Pat DELANY, from CU2, the Islington control vehicle, to help me. He stood outside the building whilst I stayed inside. I relayed messages to him and he would then in turn relay them back to the command unit. That seemed to work. So G/M GOLDBOURNE would ask for, say, 20 SDBA wearers or 30 EDBA wearers, I'd send the message to DELANY and he would sort it from the outside. He would ask for hose, other equipment and situation reports and I'd use this system to ensure that everything G/M GOLDBOURNE was asking for was delivered.

At one stage, whilst inside the tower, I heard a loud bang from the outside. I looked through the ceiling high glass windows and saw a human leg on the ground. I saw fire fighters, police with a long shield and LAS crews pick the leg up and removed it. I remember that the bridgehead was becoming smoky and so told a crew to smash a couple of the windows in order to get some ventilation in the area and reduce the smoke. The floors were covered in water, coming up to the top of my ankles, which caused problems if you dropped anything. There was quite a lot of equipment laying and floating in the water.

At one stage, G/M GOLDBOURNE asked for a tight brief from the Incident Commander. He said that our position was compromised due to the smoke and debris around the bridgehead. He was also concerned that there was no water to fire fight above the 10<sup>th</sup> floor. Something may have gone wrong with the dry riser, but I'm not sure. I used the system to ask A/C ROWE, who was outside, what he would like him to do. Dany COTTON, the LFB commissioner was also outside and she quickly sent a message back saying that whatever he decided, she would support.

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G/M GOLDBOURNE decided to remain and continue with operations. No one else was coming to help us so in my view the correct decision was made.

Because the 9<sup>th</sup> floor or 10<sup>th</sup> floors didn't have water to fight the fire, G/M GOLDBOURNE asked me to try to solve the situation. So I arranged for crews and two fire engines that can pump water to get close enough to the building to be safe but to be able to pump water. The engine will connect to a water hydrant in the street and take its water from there. It will then pump that water through the machine and out through a hose which can be directed to wherever you need the water. I also arranged for hose to be brought into the building and taken up to those floors. Normally, you would drop a line from the floor, connect it to a hose outside at the bottom of the building and lift it up. However the debris outside was such that it made much more sense to drop the hose from the floors and connect it to the machine directly.

Because I had arrived in a control vehicle capacity, I didn't have Breathing Apparatus (BA) with me so wasn't wearing the equipment. But the hose needed to get up the building so S/M Gareth COOK asked me to help take the hose up to the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> floors. I went up and down maybe 5 or 6 times in order that there was water on those floors.

There was the single stairwell which was the only way up and down the building. It was narrow, perhaps wide enough for one and a half people but it was the only method we had for getting probably 50 lengths of hose up into the tower.

The higher I climbed, the more smoky it became. Without BA it became difficult to breath but it was just about breathable.

At one stage G/M GOLDBOURNE told me that there was a deceased casualty on the 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> floor which was causing an obstruction for our crews. He asked me if I could go up and move her to one of the lower floors in order to create space for the fire fighters. I grabbed 4 or 5 fire fighters, none of whom were wearing BA, briefed them and we made our way up.

We found the casualty, checked her pulse and realised that she was clearly deceased and was a very large lady. She was laying, wrapped around a bannister on the stairs. The area was smoky and it was difficult

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for us to breath. Every time someone opened a lobby door on one of the lower floors, the smoke was unbelievable. We tried moving her but it was impossible.

I ran downstairs to get a body bag from the ground floor which I thought would help us. I went back upstairs but it was so difficult to move her. G/M GOLDBOURNE came up to us and realising the difficulties that we were having, told me to withdraw saying that he'd get some fire fighters up with BA sets on to clear the stairs.

I returned to the bridgehead and carried on relaying messages from there to the command unit outside. When I first arrived at the bridgehead, there were a steady flow of casualties being brought down from the tower. I helped them out of the building to the medical crews. As time went on, the amount reduced.

The last person I saw leaving the building was a man in his underpants wearing a set of swimming goggles to protect his eyes from the smoke.

At one stage, a Fire Rescue Unit crew Bethnal Green were flagged up as being unaccounted for. They were 5 or 10 minutes over their air time and we had lost them.

An emergency crew were sent to find them and they rescued them from the floors above. I remember one of them in particular being in a bad way.

I was probably in the building for around 4 or 5 hours so it was now 8/9am. I was shattered, didn't feel well and realised that I wasn't sweating. That's a bad sign and so decided to leave. I told G/M GOLDBOURNE that I needed to take a break.

I left the building and sat around a staging area with some other crews and saw a casualty being taken out on a stretcher. I tried not to look at the building so can't describe how it was looking from the outside at this stage. I went to my control vehicle which was now being used by other operators for logistics with DAC DRAWBRIDGE heading it.

I took a rest and then assisted the DAC and Mark DEAN in the command unit with logistics. The incident from then on is a bit of a blur. I continued to reply messages to the initial CU. I was relieved at

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1.30/2.00pm with W/M Dean having formally handed over the command unit to blue watch from Edmonton.

Because my truck was being used as the command unit, we had no way of leaving. The police were going to take us but didn't materialise so at around 3.14pm, G/M John Graham drove us to Paddington Station where I wrote some notes.

We were offered the service of a councillor but I was so tired that declined it

From there, A/C CUTNILL took us back to Edmonton, arriving at 7.30pm.

I had a shower and a shave and was back on duty at 8.00pm.

At around midnight I was tasked to return to Grenfell Tower. I stayed there until around 2.00pm. I didn't go into the building at all during this second time at the scene. It was cordoned off and we were not allowed inside.

Operationally, I was assisting sector commander called S/M Shaun MADLEY, making sure he had enough resources. I remember that there was water being put onto some upper floors. Dignitaries were arriving and so I was used to escort them around whilst they spoke to emergency services and local residents.

I'm not a fire safety expert but a fire in a flat of a high-rise building should have 4 hours before the rest of the building is compromised. The building is designed to contain the fire. The fire should have been contained, by the building within whatever flat it started in.

I've been to many high-rise fires where the compartment has worked and the fire been contained.

It's because of this that the stay put policy exists, allowing other residents to stay in their flat safely whilst the fire brigade put the fire out. We then know where residents are and can rescue them after the fire has been extinguished.

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Statement of: STEWART, JOHN

Form MG11(T)

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I produce the notes I wrote at Paddington as exhibit JJS/1

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