

WITNESS STATEMENT

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

Statement of: EARL, JONATHAN

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

Occupation: FIRE OFFICER

This statement (consisting of 4 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: J EARL

Date: 14/02/2018

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

I am a serving fire fighter at Wimbledon Fire Station and have been for the last 11 years. In this statement I will describe my actions on the 14th June 2017 when I was deployed to the Grenfell Tower Fire. I will also provide details of my training history.

I am currently stationed at Wimbledon Fire Station and was on the night of the Grenfell Tower Fire. On this particular evening, I was completing a night shift. We all take it in turns to drive and that night I was posted as the driver for Pump Ladder Engine - H341. Also part of this crew were colleagues Watch Manager MCKAY and fire fighters JONES, STUART and ALLISTON. Throughout the night I interacted and was teamed with other fire fighters from different fire stations. I didn't always get to know their names.

I have never been to Grenfell Tower nor am I aware of any fire-fighting plan in relation to this particular building as it completely off my ground of coverage. I am familiar with high rise buildings and the existence of these particular plans. I have completed familiarisation visits to other high rise buildings. We frequently complete relevant training in similar building type and size. This includes practical and theoretical training. Our training expands to other areas too, including the failure of compartmentation of a fire and how to tackle this. I am trained in Extended Duration Breathing Apparatus. Not everybody is. We have to regularly take training refreshers (yearly) in this and other areas such as first aid. I have also

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gained a number of qualifications during my time as a fire fighter (14 years). This includes driving, ladder and fire rescue unit. I am at a competent level.

On Tuesday 13th June 2017, I was due to begin my shift at Wimbledon Fire Station at 8pm, however I arrived a little early so somebody could leave earlier. There was nothing out of the ordinary at the beginning of the shift and as usual we began with roll call followed by checks of equipment (including EPD, BA set, PPE). On this particular night, I was driving the pump ladder and so my checks included driver checks - lights, water levels, vehicle equipment and completion of the vehicle log book. On this pump ladder is a 135 ladder, 9 metre ladder, road traffic accident appliances, airbags, emergency first aid equipment and breathing apparatus. We had various calls throughout the night including around 1 - 1:30am where we attended a fire alarm at Wimbledon Shopping Centre. During this call I can remember hearing a Scottish man (who I believe is the Watch Manager for Battersea) over the radio system indicating there was a major incident in London. He was asking about the RVP location. Following the call to Wimbledon, we returned to base. Around 0230 hours, our FRU (Fire Rescue Unit) and ALP (Aerial Ladder Platform) were called out. Around 0430 hours, myself and the crew of H341 were mobilised. I heard the call and within 60 seconds I had picked up the call slip and was ready to go. The call slip stated '40 pump fire - relief, Grenfell Tower'. I instantly presumed they had it under control. Especially as it said it was for relief. I boarded the vehicle with Watch Manager MCKAY who sat in the front with me. Fire Fighters JONES, STUART and ALLISTON sat in the rear. This made up the crew of H341. We generally knew where to go but one of my colleagues in the back directed me using a map on his phone. I can remember driving through Wimbledon and then over Putney Bridge. I was directed the rest of the way and cannot recall exactly. I drove with lights and sirens and in the quiet traffic took around 20 - 30 minutes to arrive to the RVP. The RVP was located at Elgin Crescent. We parked and was met by another Watch Manager. We were told we would need our BA kit and any spare cylinders. The BA kits that we were carrying was Standard Duration. These are carried on Pump Ladders as standard. I put on the rest of my PPE (boots, leggings, tunic, flash hood, helmet, gloves) and locked the engine. We began to walk towards the tower with one carrying the Thermal Imaging Camera. The walk was approximately 10 minutes. On the way to Grenfell Tower, we were advised that we needed to take our sets and exchange to EDBA. The person that told us this had noticed our EDBA stickers on our helmet. I have marked the location we exchanged our sets as 'EDBA' on a map I exhibit as JAE/01. Also on this map I have marked the rough route from Elgin Crescent (not on map) that begins in the South East corner and heads North West towards Grenfell Tower. We arrived at the EDBA holding area and exchanged our system for the

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EDBA system. It is a complete different set, has two cylinders and is heavier (23kg). Completing my kit was my visor, breathing mask, a personal radio and torch. My Watch Manager has then advised we needed to wait for somebody to escort us further in. We were taken a specific route through an undercover and passed garages. I have marked this on JAE/01. The route ends with a cross to the West of the Tower. This is a second holding area. It may have been on the way or as we left but along this route I saw a deceased male who I think had jumped. He had a leg missing. At some point I saw people in white forensic suits taking photographs of this male. We met the FRU Crew from Wimbledon. I had seen the fire along this walk. It seemed the whole thing was on fire. All I was thinking was 'I have to get in there and help'. We sat around this grassed area for some time waiting to be called forward. It was close to a children's play area. I remember seeing a red lamp post that had paint coming off it because of the heat. After some time, a Watch Manager said he needed 10 EDBA wearers. Myself and Fire Fighter Stuart were at the front so grabbed our kit. Ten were counted and I was grouped with Croydon FRU. I was paired with a Fire Fighter called Ben. We were escorted into the entrance of Grenfell Tower by police who held riot shields above our heads. This was to protect us from the continuously falling debris. I have marked the entrance to the tower on JAE/01 with another cross. We were now in inside the building waiting to go up. There was a few others waiting around on chairs. Some of the chairs had broken because they couldn't take the weight of the fire fighters and their equipment. It was very wet in this room. The water was around 3 inches deep. Me and Ben waited there to be called forward to the Bridgehead. The Bridgehead was located next door to us on the ground floor lobby. The room is surrounded by floor to ceiling glass. A Bridgehead is usually at least 2 floors below the fire and would usually contain the entry control boards, first aid kits, branches and various lengths of hose amongst other things. I am familiar with what an entry control board does and it's interaction with the Breathing Apparatus. At the time myself and Ben entered the Bridgehead it was chaos. There was multiple entry control boards, hose everywhere and wet. I saw numerous fire fighters and senior officers with white helmets. Me and Ben received a briefing from one of the officers wearing a white helmet. He informed us that there was somebody on the 12th floor on a fire survival guidance call and that we needed to go up there and get them. A fire survival guidance call occurs when somebody contacts the control centre to report a fire. The operator will advise them to stay inside their premises and depending on circumstances, place wet towels at the bottom of doors, stand next to an open window and wait until rescued by a fire fighter as per the 'stay put' policy. We placed our tally onto the entry control board and ensured our EDBA functioned correctly. We made our way up to the stair well. This was the only stair well in the

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building and apart from the deactivated lift, the only way out. The stair well had streams of water running down it as well as tangled hose coming from everywhere. We made our way up towards the 12th floor, passing various crews coming down and others stood in the lobby at each floor. The stair well is narrow so it made it difficult. Visibility was ok even though there was smoke lingering in the atmosphere. This smoke did get denser and as we moved further up but I could still see. I did see a big change in the smoke stained walls and by the 7th floor, I couldn't see the numbering on the wall. The smoke continued to become thicker as we continued up. Before being called forward I had been told by FF Dave Friend that there was a deceased female in the stair well on the 10th floor. When I reached her, I knew I had made it to floor 10. I can remember it was difficult to make her out as the smoke was quite thick by then. Me and Ben continued to move up to the 12th floor. We entered the 12th floor hallway and almost certain the door was closed but not sure. I led and moved to the right, keeping the wall to our right hand side. This area was filled with thick smoke. To protect ourselves, I continually swept my left hand in front of my body to check for falling debris and stamping the floor in front to test the security. This is called 'safe movement'. I don't know how far we got in but there was fire in front of us. We couldn't go any further. We didn't have any water. There was no way we could get any further. We moved back the way we came to the stair well. We decided to go up one more floor to the 13th in case we got the floors wrong. It was still hazy and dark in the stair well. I could see thick black smoke coming underneath the closed door that led to the communal lobby. Me and Ben looked at each other and said, 'we are going to have to try' completed door procedure with Ben. I went down onto one knee with the door against the other, pulling it back so I had control. Ben looked in the lobby. We entered. It was black and couldn't see anything. We made it in 4/5 steps but couldn't face the heat. It was too hot and I've never felt heat like it. After we retreated back to the stair well I had to shake my arms because they were tingling so much because of the heat. Ben was doing the same. We shouldn't have gone in really. We then moved back downstairs. There may have been another crew on the 11th floor going in. We searched the 11th floor with this crew. I noticed a deceased male with a white beard in one of the flats. I'm not sure where he was but I think it was around a bed. We continued down to the 9th floor. At some point we found an enforcer so used that to start forcing doors to flats on that floor and others further down. I can't remember exactly what floors. We didn't find any casualties. It was then close to whistle so we had to return downstairs from one of the floors below 10. It didn't take long for us to get back down. Maybe a few minutes. On our way down we passed other fire fighter crews. I returned the tally and removed my breathing mask. It was a bit of a blur. I was absolutely exhausted. We walked back to service our EDBA sets. I took off the used cylinders

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and marked these as empty. I then fitted a new cylinder. I checked the body guard, that the systems worked, that mask works, check the amount of air and then checked straps were secure. I filled out the tally affiliated with this set. I remained in this area waiting to go in again. At some point I saw the Incident Commander - Dany COTTON. She spoke to me and said that all procedure is out the window today. The Wimbledon FRU returned around 40 minutes later. We spoke about our experiences. Whilst waiting I noticed that the flames remained on the higher floors but the lower floors had flames visible inside only. Most of the cladding had gone by that point. I know it was after 0630 hours at this point. They needed more people inside. I said to a colleague, Dave FRIEND, do you want to go in again?' He agreed even though I later found out he'd already been in twice so they wouldn't let him go. He's 52 years old. A CBRN team then entered the holding area. CBRN teams are all trained in EDBA. I spoke with two people from the CBRN team. We were called forward and I was paired with somebody from the CBRN team. We made our way back into the internal holding area using the same route. Police officers still had to escort us with not shields. Debris was still coming down. At point one I even saw a window frame fly out from the building. We waited here for a couple of hours. I continued to wait to go into the tower. I just wanted to get and up there. I wanted to do something. Water continued to flow from the tower and into this room. We were called forward as a group of 7/8 and told to put our BA sets down. I was aware that crews were coming down and informing the managers that hose was everywhere and tangled. We made our way up and began organising the hose. When I moved up to around the 3rd floor I saw an open hose expelling water everywhere. I traced it back to an engine outside the building and spoke to the driver, telling him to turn it off. I moved back up to confirm it was the right hose before returning to the driver to inform him we had the right hose. It was that hose that was causing the problem. I continue to move up in my group organising and detangling hose. None of this group had breathing apparatus. We reached the 8th floor. I saw smoke coming from the communal lobby area. It wasn't thick black smoke. The door to the communal lobby was open for some reason. It may have been hose propping it open. I moved low and followed hose and the smoke. A fire fighter from another crew followed me. I'm not sure where he was from. I saw the flame and the charged branch and started to put the fire out. The fire was contained in a room and looked like it was a small fire that had reignited. This generated more smoke and steam which restricted our breathing. We weren't wearing breathing apparatus so quickly realised we needed to leave this area for our own safety. During this process the visibility was fine but it was still hot. Upon my return to the stair well, I informed the watch manager of this fire and that BA equipment was required. He acknowledged this. I then made my way back down to the

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Bridgehead and then the holding area to retrieve my BA set. I waited for the CBRN Watch Manager I went in with. We were escorted back out and I returned where I collected the EDBA set. I returned my kit and that is where I saw the rest of my crew from Wimbledon. By this stage there was mostly smoke coming from Grenfell Tower, maybe a few flames on the top floors. We were dismissed and began walking back to our fire engine using the same route. Members of the public were thanking us and telling us well done. We drove to Paddington Fire Station where we completed a debrief. It was around 1345 by this point. We spoke with the station manager - Chris BROWN. I didn't complete the debrief questionnaire at this time because I was suffering with a migraine. I completed this at a later date. We returned back to Wimbledon and I slept before my next shift. I didn't go home.

Upon reflection, I've realised a few points that may have improved the effectiveness of the fire brigade; my personal radio was on my chest and because of my equipment it was muffled. We had repeaters on some of the floors but they were soaked from the sheer amount of water. Even I was drenched from head to toe. My phone was broken as a result. I think that the installation of sprinklers would have prevented the fire to spread how it did. Access was also an issue. Our ALP engine could not be used because it couldn't get in. There wasn't clear entry. I am aware that only two were used. It would have also had been useful if we had a charged hose when we made our way up to the 12th floor. It was also clear that all fire fighters should be trained on EDBA as standard or one single cylinder BA set across the front line. We also require torches to the helmets, communication devices improved and attached to breathing apparatus. I also question the effectiveness of my gloves as my knuckles were burnt and blistered.

Overall, I have never seen anything like this. It was a unique event that I hope I never happens again. I will never forget that day.

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