

WITNESS STATEMENT

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

Statement of: PITT, LAWRENCE

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

Occupation: FIRE OFFICER

This statement (consisting of 7 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: LAWRENCE PITT

Date: 08/01/2018

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

This statement refers is my account of the fire at Grenfell Tower in the early hours of Wednesday 14th June 2017.

This statement is an account of an audio recorded interview I gave to DC Paul PHILLIPS and PC Abhay DESAI on Monday 4th December 2017 at Wembley Fire Station. Present during the interview was a representative from the Fire Brigade Union (FBU). During the interview I referred to my contemporaneous notes that I made on 14/06/2017 and exhibit as LP/1

I will mention a number of people;

Fire Fighter (FF) DEVANI, FF Colin DOWDELL, FF BOULTON, FF BEER, FF TUCKER, Crew Manager (CM) Daniel BURTON, CM Jason HUNTER. All are part of the London Fire Brigade (LFB).

I have been in the fire brigade for 25 years, and always been at Wembley Fire Station part of the Red Watch as a fire fighter. I am qualified to use the Aerial Ladder Platform (ALP), Fire Rescue Unit (FRU)

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and the normal fire fighter appliances as well. I have been to quite a few high rise flat fires in the past. These normally have been contained within the flat.

In terms of my training, and particularly high rise buildings, there is a high rise procedure policy. I have received regular practical and theoretical training to tackle a fire in a high rise block. I am not aware of any pre fire-fighting plan specifically for Grenfell Tower.

It's not our ground so I wouldn't visit that particular block. We do though do visits to high-rise blocks on our own ground for familiarisation of high-rise buildings under Section 7(2)D. I have done such visits to various building to look at the general layout, any potential hazards, the location of the dry risers, access, where the water supply and so on in case of an emergency but I have never been to Grenfell Tower before.

For breathing apparatus (BA) equipment we do regular refresher training for which I am up to date. I have tackled real fires as part of my training and competent in my role as a fire fighter.

On the night of the fire I was on night duty. I came on shift to roll call and tested my sets and did the inventory on the appliances which is normal at the beginning of the shift. Our regular CM Daniel BURTON had to leave and he was replaced by CM Jason HUNTER from NORTHOLT FIRE STATION.

I was made aware of the first call of a fire via the mobilising system which actuates and prints off the call slip. The building lights came on and I made my way to the watch room. The first call was for a pump ladder to be mobilised to Grenfell Tower, when it was a 25 pump fire meaning that 25 fire engines were required. At this stage the pump ladder was mobilised.

I'm not sure what the time was but then a second call came in via the mobilising system and this time it was when the fire was a 40 pump fire. I did not see what the call slip said but we were mobilised and deployed to the tower from WEMBLEY FIRE STATION very quickly. A 40 pump fire is unheard of and I had never been to a fire this big, usually the largest a fire gets is 25 pumps.

On my pump, call sign G302, there was myself, FF BEER, who was driving, CM Jason HUNTER, and

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FF Colin, who was on standby NORTHOLT FIRE STATION.

We made our way there, along the A40, and I could see the fire. It was a big fire at that stage. On the way to the tower we had the appliance radio on but I don't remember hearing anything pertaining to the fire. Our appliance was not taking fire guidance calls.

Initially we parked with the Grenfell Tower on our left and we stopped. There was a lot of people looking. We weren't sure where we were going to park and we parked up behind some appliances in a road.

We were near a command unit and then we then moved the truck to get a bit closer and went and parked on TREADGOLD ROAD, which is where the appliance stayed from that point onwards. It was busy in the area and there was a lot of people around which made it difficult for us to get through.

From where we parked, I could see the fire. The top 4 floors of the tower was completely alight. The fire then in was slanted line going down from left to right as you looked at it. It was going across at an angle and down. The fire was wrapped around the building, which is unusual. The cladding panels were coming away from the building and falling to the ground. The fire was running down the cladding like a waterfall. Most of the debris coming down was due to the cladding.

I've been previously to fires where there the fire breaks through the windows if it's an intense fire inside but this fire was on the outside and progressing downwards at an angle across the building. I have never seen anything like this before. The scale of the fire was huge. It was numbing, like something out of a film.

Initially we took our BA sets and made our way round to near the entrance of the tower. We were using standard duration breathing apparatus (SDBA). We were marshalled to a covered area, queuing up and being taken across in groups. As there was debris falling from the tower there were people spotting for debris and ensuring it was safe for groups of firefighters to be ferried across into the Tower at various stages.

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Eventually we got taken in to the lobby initially then into a room, which I believe was a wash room and then beyond that in to a larger room where everybody was being marshalled. Everyone was wearing SDBA that I saw and several officers in white hats directing operations. It was a little bit smoky in there, which I would describe as hazy. We then queued up to be briefed and then sent in.

There was a lot of people in there, about 50. At the time there was no shortage of SDBA crews. We gradually filtered back in to the lobby. Whilst I waited in the lobby there was talks about breaking the glass out for positive pressure ventilation. This is where you blast air into the building but this never happened in the end.

The bridgehead at this point was on the 3rd floor. The bridgehead is where entry to the building for firefighters is controlled. This area is needed to ensure the correct amount of firefighters are going in and out. Without it, you will have no control over numbers and no idea who is where.

There was another staging area in the lobby. At some point the fire conditions changed and it was decided that the bridgehead would be moved from the 3rd floor down to the lobby area. I never went up to the bridge head whilst it was on the 3rd floor.

As this happened there was a lot more personnel coming down to the ground floor so we were moved back to the larger of the rooms on the side of the lobby area. There was a lot of information being written on the walls. There was a lot going on and I would describe the area as controlled chaos given the situation.

As there was a lot of personnel on the ground floor now, due to moving the bridgehead down, It was decided to move people outside the building to another staging area outside, which was just beyond a little playground which was on the rear right hand side of the tower.

We all got directed out to the new staging area where we waited. I waited outside along with my crew of FF DEVANI, FF BOULTON and FF BEER. It looked like firefighters wearing SDBA were no longer being sent into the tower. They wanted to send in firefighters who were wearing extended duration breathing apparatus (EDBA).

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The difference between SDBA and EDBA is the time the set will last. EDBA is generally twice as long and has two cylinders. SDBA would normally last approximately 25 mins with one cylinder of air.

There weren't any EDBA wearers around and the crew I was with were all trained in EDBA. I told the officer running the marshalling area of this. I explained that if they could get us some cylinders we could assist and go into the tower. The reason we needed more cylinders is because we don't normally carry extra EDBA cylinders with us on the appliance. Normally it's the fire rescue units (FRU) that carry the EDBA sets.

We found 4 EDBA sets on the ground outside on a salvage sheet laid out that had been used. These sets were ones which firefighters had dropped there after coming out of the tower. Shortly after about 10-15 minutes 4 cylinders were found. I attached the cylinders and tested one of the sets. We then waited to be sent in wearing the EDBA sets. I was in the outside staging area for at least an hour.

We then went back into the lobby and were escorted in by police officers using riot shields above our heads, to prevent it hitting us, as there was a lot of debris coming down at this stage. We were then marshalled into the lobby area again and queued up to be briefed and sent in.

We were briefed to go to flats 92, 94 and 95 on the 12th floor and check the 13th floor. Part of the briefing was to ignore any casualties on the stairwell. I'm not sure how many there were nor do I know the name of the officer who gave this briefing. The area was busy but in control. After the briefing I handed over our tally which was connected with the Entry Control Board (ECB) so we and our sets could be monitored remotely.

I was using my BA set on the ground floor. I had my radio on me but it was not receiving when I was in the building. In our crew we had communication in our BA sets which were easier and better to use than the radios in the environment I was in.

When we first went in the smoke in the stairs was hazy. We made our way up the stairs. It was reasonably clear up to about the 3rd or the 4th floor and then after that there was a deterioration in conditions. There

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was very thick smoke in the stairwell. The lights were on in the stairwell but due to the smoke I couldn't see it unless I was very close to it, maybe a foot away. Again due to the smoke I couldn't see any of the floor numbers.

We had with us either a sledge hammer or an axe but we didn't have any water or any firefighting medium. There was other crews working in the stairwell moving hose around. I had no involvement in the firefighting, and didn't handle any of the hose so I don't know if any of the hoses were connected to the dry risers.

The dry riser, also known as the rising main is fixed insulation in the building, basically a pipe with an opening at the bottom which you can plug into. On every floor or every other floor, depending on the building, there will be an outlet where you can just plug the hose into. That was in use at the tower.

We went up the stairs and in our brief we were told to ignore anyone found on the stairs and to proceed on to the 12th and 13th floor as they wanted to save as much life as possible and any one on the stairwell was deemed dead. We passed two casualties on the stairs on our way up. As we moved up conditions continued to deteriorate.

On my way up to the 12th floor I encountered a large lady, which we thought was a man at the time, who was believed to be dead. She was facing head downwards on the stairwell and was blocking the stairwell. This made it hard to get around her. She was a black lady but I couldn't see her face. There was one other casualty which I came across but I can't remember anything about this person.

Eventually we got to the 12th floor where we encountered another EDBA team, who were also a crew of 4, which were also going in to the 12th floor. To prevent confusion and due to the limited space we asked the other crew to check flats 92, 94 and 95 on the 12th floor which we were assigned to. This was because they were going onto the 12th floor anyway. We decided we would go up to the 13th floor to see what we could do there.

On arrival to the 13th floor we opened the door between the stairwell and the lobby area to the flats. The lobby door was intact. Although the conditions in the stairwell were bad, with a lot of smoke and very

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poor visibility there was a big difference in being in the stairwell and on the floor. The 13th floor was very noticeably smokier and hotter. This was not good at all.

Upon entering the floor the lobby door was shut behind us to contain the smoke and prevent fire spread but at this point it made no difference as the stairwell was smoky already. On the lobby floor we went right. I used my right hand to find the wall, stay in contact with it, and follow it around. I continued to make my way round to the right, and followed the wall around. We stopped at the first flat we came to, I think this was Flat 126. I could not see any other doors, this was the first door we came to of a flat. There was no concept of how large the area was because of the limited visibility in the lobby.

The flat door was locked, so FF BOULTON and I took it in turns to sledge the door. This took a lot of energy and was exhausting in the heat. The door itself was soft and not like a proper fire door. It seemed to have corrugated cardboard in the middle which the sledge hammer was going through and getting stuck. Eventually we broke the door in.

I went in to the flat along with FF BOULTON. FF BEER and FF DEVANI stayed by the door to protect our egress. We went in and searched around. Inside the flat was the initial corridor and the small rooms off that. At this point all I could see was smoke. I could hear the fire roaring behind a closed door which was directly in front of the front door. FE BOULTON had a thermal image camera (TIC) with him. I did not have any recording equipment on me, including any body worn cameras

The TIC lets you scan an area and see quite clearly inside the building, especially when there is thick smoke. He used it to look into the flat as the smoke made it very difficult to see. As I didn't use the TIC I don't know what the temperature was in the room but it was hot at that point. Every door we went through we were faced with different conditions inside the flat.

I could hear FF DEVANI and FF BEER saying that they wanted to get out of the building. As FF BOULTON and I were at the final door inside the flat I said to FF BOULTON we should have a quick look past the door. We opened the door slightly and the heat was incredible. I can only compare the sound of the roaring flames to a jet engine. It was extremely loud.

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FF BOULTON had a look around with the TIC and couldn't see anyone in there however there was no way we could have gone in. In the room was a massive fire and everything was alight, knew anyone in there would be dead. We closed up the door. By this point FF BEER and FF DEVANI were telling us again to leave due to the heat.

I was very hot and really feeling the effects of the heat and decided to make our way out. At this point I wasn't sure how much air I had remaining in my set. We then exited the flat and I used my left hand to find the building wall with a bit of fumbling around. I used the wall to guide my way back to the lobby door.

I felt unwell due to the exertion and heat and a slight panic set in at this stage. My legs felt rubbery and I was retching. Although the stairwell wasn't too wide it was ok for us to get down as we went one behind the other.

On the way down we had to stop regularly; three times, because of how I was feeling. If I didn't, I think I would have collapsed. We passed the same casualties which passed on the way up and we made it down without any incidents. At no point whilst I was in the building did I notice any sprinklers or any sprinkler system. Throughout my time inside the tower I never went above the 13th floor.

At the entry control point I closed down my set and took my helmet and face mask off. It must have been obvious that I wasn't very well because somebody took my set off me and undid my tunic and took it off. This was the same with FF BOULTON.

I was not in a fit state to do anything. I waited to be escorted out of the building by police officers with riot shields whilst FF BEER and DEVANI told the entry control point what we had done inside and where we had been.

We got taken out and there was an area where other firefighters were flaking out after they had been in. I sat down there and had water. It took me around 30 minutes before I felt like I could get back up again. There was talk of us being recommitted but I certainly couldn't go back in. We waited around recovering and it turned out that we didn't need to go back in as more EDBA wearers arrived.

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After I recovered I saw FF TUCKER, who was is on the FRU that night. He had a burn on his neck which I looked at and it was quite nasty. It was white and I was worried it was a full thickness burn so I took him to the ambulance crews which was at the top of the road and they had a look at it.

The medics had on orange jump suits so it may have been the air ambulance crews. FF TUCKER said he got the burn on his neck when they were going in and some of the debris came down, hit the riot shield and poured down along the shield on to his neck when they were going into the building. FF TUCKER still went into the building following the burn from the debris. I then went off to the Command Unit with FF TUCKER and spoke to a female officer, but cannot remember her name to try and get him a lift to hospital.

The crew I was with then got back together. There was a little church nearby that was giving out water and it was near to where we had parked our appliance. It was light outside by this point and we were waiting to be sent back home. We were dismissed went back to PADDINGTON FIRE STATION for about 1200hrs and completed our notes.

In all honesty I'm surprised that no firefighters were killed. Several times I thought to myself that I would die too and it reminded me of the twin towers. So many things were running through my mind including the integrity of the building due to the heat. I thought I would die and I'm glad no firefighters lost their lives.

I have been asked about the stay put policy. Normally the safest place to be, when there is a fire, is in your flat. If the fire isn't in your flat and you stay put you're not exposing yourself to the danger of smoke inhalation, the heat and the hazards of the fire, because theoretically there should be compartmentalisation in the flat. This means it should be contained to the flat. The residents of high rise fires are normally told to remain in their flats. I don't know if that policy changed, I never had that information.

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