

WITNESS STATEMENT

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

Statement of: HAROLD, MATTHEW

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: M HAROLD

Date: 21/01/2018

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

This statement relates to events I witnessed on 13th – 14th June 2017 where I responded to a fire emergency at Grenfell Tower, London W11.

I am a Firefighter with the London Fire Brigade based at Wimbledon Fire Station as part of Red Watch. I am also a member of the station's Fire Rescue Unit (FRU) call-sign H346. I have served as a Firefighter since May 2007.

I have a particular specialism being part of the FRU with experience in effecting live rescues often, involving working at height. Members of the FRU are trained in the use and deployment of Extended Duration Breathing Apparatus (EDBA). My training in relation to high rise incidents involves practical drills at Fire Stations and scenario based inputs operating with full size (dummy) casualties. The training is varied, and relevant, based on current operational tactics which prepares us to expect the unexpected. On Tuesday 13th June 2017 I commenced a night duty at 7.30pm due to finish the following morning (14th June) at 9.30am. On commencing duty I conducted my normal equipment check, testing my Breathing Apparatus (BA) set and ensuring my appliance was ready for deployment. I spend some time that evening in the gym and went to bed at about midnight, as we had no reported incidents during this period. At about 1.30am my crew were mobilised in H346 to attend a 40 pump fire incident at the Grenfell Tower. My crew consisted of Crew Manager (CM) Adam CLARKE, Firefighter David FRIEND (appliance driver), Firefighter Richard PEACOCK, Firefighter Louis RICE and myself. It was clear that this a major incident owing to the number of appliances involved, the largest incident I had previously

Signature: M HAROLD
2018

Signature witnessed by:

attended involved 20 pumps so this was a significant incident. I recall that CM CLARKE did not have a personal radio so, I gave him mine. I do not recall the route to the scene which took us about 25 minutes. Firefighter FRIEND knew the area and was able to get us there fairly quickly. We were told to put on our BA sets on arrival, and made our way on foot, as our appliance was parked a distance from the scene. As we approached the scene I could see the building, it was fully ablaze, it looked unreal, like a giant golden anaconda the flame twisting upwards.

I recall seeing lots of people (bystanders) and Police Officers controlling cordons; many of the people were thanking us, and telling us to do what we can. We entered the scene via a police cordon moving to an area where we met colleagues from Wandsworth Fire Station who were fire-ground testing their BA sets.

I recall the debris falling from the building burning, landing at the entrance, the debris was in various sizes large pieces of metal, window frames, smaller pieces of cladding all ablaze raining down at the foot of the building.

They (colleagues) looked absolutely shattered, they told us to be careful in the building, stating conditions were pretty nasty. I saw casualties some burnt, being escorted or making their own way out, I thought this is really bad, truly frightening.

We were tasked to gather as many spare cylinders as possible, CM CLARKE rescinded this and told us as EDBA wearers, we were urgently required at the Bridgehead. We met other Firefighters exiting the building who looked exhausted they told us to be careful, I believe they had been up to the 10th floor. We had also heard from Firefighters at the scene of a rumour that the building was likely to collapse, this was a source of concern for all of us.

We were directed to a covered walkway close to a children's playground area. It was here where I saw a lifeless male body under a salvage sheet. The body appeared to have sustained a severed leg. I recall seeing the blood running on the plastic sheet, so I knew that fatalities had occurred. I thought, how bad must it be if, people are jumping?

We were directed into the building by police using riot shields to protect us from falling burning, debris which was raining down from the upper part of the building. I entered the lobby area which was crowded with other Firefighters, there must have been 40 or more, in this compressed area.

I could also see casualties being escorted by Firefighters into the lobby from the stairway, many of whom were in states of distress or, unconsciousness and clearly injured, a number burnt.

Signature: M HAROLD
2018

Signature witnessed by:

I was partnered with Firefighter PEACOCK, we were handed a post-it note with a flat number 203 on it.

It was my understanding that this was a Fire Survival Guide (FSG) call, we were told that the person was on a phone line to Brigade Coordination Control (BCC) and another 7 people were in the flat, awaiting rescue. I was apprehensive about what I was been asked to do. We had heard rumours (from other Firefighters) that the actual building was structurally unsafe, and liable to collapse. I thought, we might not be coming out.

However, Firefighter PEACOCK and I had our instructions, and went under air (operating our BA) and started to make our way toward the Bridgehead which at the time I believe, was located on the 5th floor. We were then told to stop and return to the lobby area as the fire had comprised (got underneath) the Bridgehead which had to move down to the ground floor. We were told to return the post-it note instructing us to search flat 203. Our instructions had been changed. I was privately quiet relieved not to be expected to make our way to the top floor without firefighting extinguishing media.

Firefighter PEACOCK and I were now tasked to conduct search and rescue from the ground floor upwards. We were joined by our other colleagues Firefighters RICE and FRIEND, who formed the other half of our search team. Neither of us were equipped with hose or any other means of fighting a fire which looking back, was strange. We were caught up in the moment and just got on with it. We had secured door breaking equipment and started to make our way upwards.

I think we got to the second floor where we saw a male casualty on the stairway, he looked to me as

██████████ He told us his name was GOMEZ. He appeared distressed and told us his wife was trapped on the 15th floor. He was asking us to find her. He was pleading, begging us to search for her.

I thought, I can't do it. I was given instructions to look for other survivors, this was upsetting, a grown man, begging us to help him. I knew I had to follow procedures, we told him to go downstairs, get out of the building and seek assistance at the Bridgehead. Firefighter PEACOCK wanted us to abandon our task, and look for her.

The man, GOMEZ said his wife was pregnant. He was refusing to move, he was clearly distressed and suffering from the smoke and heat. I wanted to help but knew I couldn't, he could get help downstairs it was a real challenge for us, not helping him. His pleas were pulling at my heart strings. We wanted to, but couldn't. We were not really equipped to move that far up into the building. We would run out of air long before. We told him this, he had to get out and seek help downstairs. I think he believed that, if he went downstairs, he would be made to leave the building.

Signature: M HAROLD
2018

Signature witnessed by:

I learnt subsequently (via social media), that his wife was located and rescued, before meeting us. We didn't know that at the time, I am still troubled by this, but knew we had done the right thing, following our instructions. We started to search flats on each of the floors working our way upwards, none of the flats we searched, was occupied. I recall we both entered the flats searching each room. In one of the flats, I managed to get locked into a room, a sense of panic overcame me. I forced the room door and thankfully, got out. I realised how dangerous a situation we were in, I in particular, having no means of communication, reliant on my colleague staying with me.

We had now made our way to the 4th floor, conditions on this floor upwards were difficult. Visibility was poor, heat was extreme, I think we reached the 5th or 6th floor when our air started to give out and we decided to make our way back down to the Bridgehead. We couldn't see flames but knew we were in a fire.

On the stairway making our way down we encountered a Crew Manager (unknown to me), he was on the point of collapse. He was struggling to carry a young Asian girl, I think she was a teenager maybe 12 or 13 years old. I recall she was unconscious, I feared she may have been deceased, lying on the floor. She was dressed in pyjamas, the bottoms of which were pulled down, she was naked underneath.

I tried to pull the bottoms up trying to maintain her dignity. My gloves her wet, her clothing was wet so it was not possible. The 4 of us, carried her down the stairway the Crew Manager made his own way down. We made our way down to the 2nd floor, finding the man GOMEZ. He was still where we had seen him earlier. He was still refusing to leave begging for us to help him. We told him he must leave the building, it was too dangerous. We did not have the time to argue with him. I have since learnt that his wife had lost the baby she was expecting, but their other children survived. We made our way to the Entry Control (BA) Bridgehead passing our casualty to other Firefighters who took care of her. I was asked if I was prepared to return 'under air' after a break and refresh of our BA equipment.

We collected out Tallies (entry control markers) and made our way out of the building via police escort (running under shields) avoiding the burning debris still falling from the upper floors. Making our way to a BA holding area next, to a children's playground.

I was walking toward the leisure centre when a member of the public told me that an accident occurred involving a person falling from an upper walkway in Grenfell Road. I started to look for London Ambulance Service (LAS) personnel to assist. I also looked for a first aid kit from one of the many fire appliances parked nearby. I managed to refer the report to a member of LAS staff and later found my

Signature: M HAROLD
2018

Signature witnessed by:

colleagues, Firefighters Richard PEACOCK and Lewis RICE in the BA holding area, next to the playground.

Firefighter Dave FRIEND, I was told, had gone back into the building with another crew. We were re-equipped in EDBA as part of the Fire Rescue Team, ready for re-deployment. We were held in the waiting area for about 2 or more, hours in a rotation system. I think we were held too long, I was annoyed with myself, still wanting to do more. Colleagues told me on a 40 pump incident they would always be a lot of sitting around, as fresh resources were being deployed. They explained the building had only one stairwell so too many Firefighters in the building was a problem. Our other (Wimbledon) machine had arrived at the scene and I saw them in the BA holding area.

I was re-deployed in BA into the lobby area which was now flooded with water. The water level was up to our kneecaps. I knew people were dying and needing rescue, I just wanted to get back in and help. I recall looking up, as we entered the building externally, it was still on fire but not as fiercely as before. There was a report of a man trapped on one of the upper floors, I think the 10th. He I think, was the man that got a lot of TV coverage, waving his handkerchief at the window.

I together with Firefighter RICE were tasked to rescue him. I was not sure what flat he was located in. We made our way upwards without any firefighting media (hose). They the (Bridgehead) told us there may be hoses available, on the way up. I asked which flat he was in, they (Bridgehead) didn't know, other than it was a corner flat.

I was told, he is on the 10th floor you will know when you are on the 10th floor because, there is a big body on the stair landing. I think at this stage they thought it was a man. I now know, from social media, it was a woman, the artist I believe.

We were joined by another 2 Firefighters, I don't know which Station they were from, so now we were a crew of 4. We made our way up to either 5th or 6th floor, their (other crew) bodyguard went off (this is an audible warning system in BA equipment alerting you to low air supply). I think there was a crew coming down, so we had to get on our knees to let them pass us, the width of the stairway being, so narrow. There is also a movement alarm on our sets. If you do not move for a set period of time, the alarm is triggered, once activated you, as policy must get out of the building. So both Firefighters left us and made their way down.

We, Firefighter RICE and I, made our way up to the 9th floor, I remember counting the floors as we moved there was no numbering system visible after the 5th floor. Prior to that, floors had been marked by colleagues, visibility was so poor you had to rely on memory. We met another crew who were moving a

Signature: M HAROLD
2018

Signature witnessed by:

big body on the stairway. They said, we have a casualty (I think it was the woman artist) you have to help us.

I told them the person was dead, has been here for hours, we can't help, there was a debate over this. They said, alright we will do it on own. I told them we were sent to rescue a live person, we will do our job, you, do yours. The Bridgehead told us the trapped man has been on television, he is alive and that we the LFB, must rescue him, it was like according to a number of senior Officers, looking like a live execution, played out on television. His situation was on live TV, the fire, getting nearer to him all the time. I was unaware that another crew had successfully rescued him, passing us on the stairway. Visibility was zero. I have since found out that the man was partially blind.

We were struggling to get past the body lying on the stair landing. The other crew kept telling us to stop, we (Firefighter RICE and I) were apparently, standing on the body. It was so large, we couldn't move around it in such an enclosed area. We couldn't see where our feet were, the smoke was so thick. We managed to get past the body, but had now, lost our bearings within the building.

I think we were now on the 10th floor, still trying to locate the male (unknown to us, that had he been rescued). The smoke was thick, the ground covered in hose, I managed to locate a branch hose, that gave us firefighting media, and we started to search the flats. I recall a flat of the left hand side, the door was nearly destroyed, I, think I could make out the flat number 82, not too sure.

We made our way into the flat, which had been totally destroyed by fire the windows were blown and I could see clear daylight. Firefighter RICE said he could see a body in the room, I couldn't see anything other than debris, he directed to me to what looked like piping, getting closer, I could see intestines, so was sure the remains were human.

I couldn't make out any detail, as the body was so badly burnt. Firefighter RICE reported this (via radio) back to the Bridgehead. We continued to search other flats, smoke thick making visibility almost impossible. I put a jet (water) on other side of an area believing it to be a flat, it was a part of the corridor I was unable to see clearly.

The jet extinguished a number of fires and we searched the flats on the floor. Most were totally destroyed, the flat I believe that male we were tasked to rescue was partially destroyed and, still on fire. We searched each room putting out fires as the stud walls collapsed around us. We put out the fires and we were certain no one was alive in any of the flats. We were restricted in our ability to extinguish fire owing to the limited length of the branch hose. Firefighter RICE went out to pull more length to extend the hose and we momentarily lost each other. He called out, fearful he had lost contact I told him, I was at the

Signature: M HAROLD
2018

Signature witnessed by:

other end of the hose! Effective visibility was impossible, the smoke was so severe. We were sure all flats had been checked, and cleared of any live casualties.

We were now, fairly low on air and decided our task was completed. We could hear another crew (Battersea) making their way up the stairs behind us, so decided to make our way down to the Bridgehead. We told them that a branch hose was available on this floor should, they need it.

As we got down to the 9th floor, the large lifeless body was still situated on the stairway, it was clear the crew we encountered earlier, could not move it unaided. We continued downward to the Bridgehead and out of entry control. It was at this point we were told that the male we were tasked to rescue, had been evacuated.

We were quite prepared for a 3rd wear (BA deployment) if required. I met my manager WM Andy McKAY from Wimbledon and gave him a situation report; he told us to get some food and a drink. We sought to replenish our sets, many cylinders were spent and not available for use or were dirty, so we were unlikely to make a 3rd wear.

A decision had been made that the fire was not burning as fiercely, and a relief process was underway, this was about 10am. There was also the continuing concern that the building was unstable and potentially, could collapse. There was a backlog of machines at the scene, many were blocked in, due to the sheer number compressed in that area. I think we were able to move our machine and eventually got back to Paddington for debrief and some counselling. I must have lost track of the time because it was now about 12 or 1 pm.

I spoke with a Counsellor who observed that I was physically exhausted, it was difficult to remember events it was like being in a bubble. I knew we had to get back to Wimbledon as we were due to work later that day at 8pm.

I recall when I got home my wife was totally unaware of the incident or, my involvement in it. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] and did not see or hear anything about Grenfell at all. We had a debate about whether or not, I should report for work that evening. I felt I must report for work, she had a different view.

I commenced work at 8pm at Wimbledon and spoke with colleagues about the incident. The Grenfell Fire was on all the news, constantly all evening. It was difficult to comprehend watching the media reports after being there. Looking back now, I think this shouldn't happen in England. Really, it shouldn't happen anywhere, it was unreal. This was like nothing I had ever attended in my career.

Signature: M HAROLD
2018

Signature witnessed by:

I recall seeing fire doors being in place at each of the stairways, a number were wedged open due to ongoing firefighting operations, I believe the stairwell fire doors were effective. Similarly, the dry riser was, in my view was effective. I only used a branch hose once in the building which was sufficient for what I was tasked to do. I did not see any evidence of a sprinkler system in place.

I recall seeing fires on the upper floors glowing later into the incident. I was told by colleagues some of whom have experience of working as plumbers, that a number of fires were fuelled by fractured gas mains. I was not aware that a communal gas supply was present in the building. I was unaware of any efforts to shut off the gas supply.

Communications via radio was patchy in the building, this may be due to the number of people using it, rather than any engineering issues. Normally, in my experience at larger incidents, radio communications can be a problem.

My training did not prepare me for this as an incident, normally our response to high rise buildings is contained. My knowledge of Fire Survival Guidance (FSG) calls are rare and usually, involve a small number of people. The sheer number of people making FSG calls was unprecedented in my experience. My knowledge of the 'stay put' policy in relation to FSG in high rise residential buildings, in normal conditions, residents are told to close doors and windows, to prevent the spread of smoke. The operation of a 'box within a box' scenario applies, it is safe. The fire is contained where it is located allowing the Fire Brigade to tackle the fire. I personally have never been directly involved in an FSG call. Being told that I was to effect a rescue as part of a FSG call, involving 7 people was a massive issue for me personally. In many instances other residents may not even know, that a fire was in their building. I work at Wimbledon where FSG calls are not a frequent event. I am part of the FRU and normally attend large scale fires, usually at commercial premises not involving residents or, residential premises.

The cladding in my view, was the problem. It was put on the building to make it look nice for the posh people. The fire should not have behaved as it did, burning from the outside inwards. This event for me is a once in a career incident.

Signature: M HAROLD
2018

Signature witnessed by:

Statement of: HAROLD, MATTHEW

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Form MG11(T)

Page 9 of 9

Signature: M HAROLD
2018

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