

**WITNESS STATEMENT**

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

Statement of: FRANKLIN, NEILL

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

Occupation: FIRE OFFICER

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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: N FRANKLIN

Date: 13/12/2017

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

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This statement is made in relation to my involvement in the Grenfell Tower fire on the night of the 13<sup>th</sup>-14th June 2017.

Throughout the statement I will refer to other members of my crew with whom I worked, namely CM RAMSAY, FF LA MARREC and FF MCARTHUR. Both CM RAMSAY and FF MCARTHUR are based with me at Bexley Fire Station on Red Watch and FF LA MARREC is based normally at Chelsea, but also part of Red Watch.

I joined the London Fire Brigade in September 1998 and completed my initial training at training school to become a qualified fire fighter. I have performed numerous roles throughout my service and was previously based at Lewisham before moving to Bexley. The roles I have performed as a trainee in development before becoming fully qualified and also as a temporary Crew Manager before laterally developing to work on Fire Rescue Units (FRUs) in April 2004. FRUs are specialist roles and can cover a number of different areas of rescue. For example, being based at Bexley (Red Watch E28) we specialise in water and animal rescue and are equipped with specialist kits such as inflatable boats and rafts, dry suits and equipment for safely detaining escaped large animals such as horses. Different FRUs will have different areas of responsibility. Other areas are responsible for things like 'line rescue' and will rescue people who are trapped high up, or others have specialist culling equipment in the event of attending road traffic collisions. Each and every FRU is equipped with Extended Duration Breathing Apparatus (EDBA). The EDBA works on a similar basis to the Standard Duration Breathing Apparatus (SDBA) but has a twin

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cylinder offering more oxygen and thus affords, in theory, a greater length of time to operate in irrespirable conditions. It roughly equates to an hour's working time but is dependent on external factors such as the task in hand, the fitness level of the individual and outside or external factors such as the ferocity or intensity they are working in. The kit is usually used in protracted incidents and all FRU firefighters are trained to use it. In all, there are 14 FRUs based sporadically around London.

The LFB constantly runs training packages and we are expected to carry out training routinely throughout the year. I have completed numerous training with regards to high rise buildings. The training is both theory and practical. The theory training centres on the completion of computer packages and the reading and understanding of policy notes and the practical side centres on the use of towers which feature in all fire stations. The emphasis on all of the training is around the structure of the buildings, the location of Bridgeheads and BA

Entry Control Boards as well as an understanding search sectors amongst other things. There is high rise training approximately every couple of months which is arranged centrally and put in to our work diaries. The last training I completed was a lecture 6-8 weeks ago and new equipment was unveiled in the form of a new high rise bag. The kit offers different braches to supply water and dividing breaches to assist a single flow in to a double flow as well as new door wedges and marking equipment (chinographs) for searching flats. We also have new straps that allow for carrying hoses rather than having to haul the hoses up stairwells which make life easier. These bags are now stored on ordinary 'pump ladders'.

A lot of crews do use thermal imaging cameras, especially the BA crews. It is a very useful piece of kit. Initially they were used as part of fire investigation but now they are used much more routinely and more extensively for firefighting purposes. To be used effectively, they need to be in a direct line of sight of the area believed to be affected and a heat signature image will be projected - either for people and casualties or for further fires. On the night of the Grenfell fire, however, my crew were not using one.

As well as high rise training, we also complete training on BA. Following the initial input at training school, we complete a one day refresher every year and a two day refresher every two years. The training is carried out by our contractor, Babcocks, as well as internal training to ensure we complete and pass a Best Practice Assessment (BPA). This centres on donning the kit properly and carrying out drills in training and controlled conditions. Training also encompasses familiarisation visits to high rise buildings within our area of operations. These visits allow crews to attend all high rises and ascertain the location of

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hydrants, dry and wet risers and the length of hoses required at each site. Basic information can be found on the Premises Information Plate (PIP) plates and are normally located at the front of buildings.

My experience on high rise buildings is not extensive. I have mainly attended small flat fires within a self-contained unit. I have never experienced anything on the level of Grenfell Tower. Generally flat fires are self-contained and do not spread externally like it did at Grenfell. I am aware that high rises have problems around water supplies and access. These problems can be in the form of vandalism of dry risers or stop cocks being stolen for scrap. Often we find drugs or drug paraphernalia stuffed inside, causing blockages. The state of the water supplies can vary wildly. We did check them when we conducted familiarisation visits, however these checks are now supposed to be conducted by private companies on a yearly basis, although I could not tell you the names of the companies.

Before attending Grenfell Tower on the night of the 14th June, I had no previous knowledge of it nor ever attended previously.

In the early hours of the 14th June I was at my normal work place at Bexley Fire Station during a rest period when we received the order at approximately 0300hrs. When the teleprinter came through and stated that there was a 40 pump fire my initial response was incredulous. As a 4 person crew we began to make our way. My thoughts initially were that a 40 pump fire would be some sort of warehouse; I could not comprehend a 40 pump fire in a high rise block of flats. When the call slip listed the attending address as LANCASTER WEST ESTATE it dawned on me that it was a high rise - a dreadful feeling. Whilst en route I checked my phone for the news and social media as well as 'Googling' the address so I had prior awareness of what we would eventually be attending. As well as looking at the news, the appliance was equipped with a Mobile Data Terminal (MDT) which offers the same information as the call slip as well as the location and other relevant information such as any previously known risk (i.e known chemicals, cylinders or explosives at the location). To my knowledge there was no known risk at the location.

Lots of imagery was quickly available to us through news apps and Googling the location, but not much information other than 'a large fire in London'. I had looked at it out of natural curiosity and to get a greater understanding for what we would be dealing with and I understood that by the time we were being mobilised the fire had been raging for about 2 hours already. I remember we had been given a rendezvous point but I cannot remember it now. I believe we tried to make our way towards LADBROOKE GROVE but the entrance was blocked so we had to circumnavigate over an elevated section of the A40. It was at that point that I first saw the building. I was totally and utterly shocked. I had never seen that level of fire

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spread. I wondered if it was a building still under construction because no completed building should ever react in such a manner. Concrete buildings are supposed to combat spread exactly like that and generally speaking, concrete buildings do not burn.

When we eventually came off the elevated section, we were immediately met by road works and quite surprisingly, people who had stopped in the fast lane to take pictures. I found that rather surprising and strange. The holdup meant it took us a little while longer to get to the RVP and we had to go back towards HOLLAND PARK AVENUE when we saw a guy called 'Chris', a Watch Manager who was from a Command Unit at my old station in Lewisham. He said that there was no way through and that we would need to park up and make our way on foot. Chris was specifically placed on the road by two junctions to inform other crews of exactly that. I cannot remember the junction now, but he was definitely placed there for that purpose because he was wearing a tabard and had a clip board. Thankfully we had no problems as we approached Grenfell Tower from the south, and we parked some distance away but cut through a series of flats around where I believe to be BARRINDON WALK. I remember that it was getting light at the point of our arrival, certainly dawn. Maybe around 4am-4.30am and we had been told to take our EDBA sets and report to a Command Unit.

The Command Unit at GRENFELL RD was chiefly responsible for arranging and managing the logistics to best support the Officer in Charge, whom I believe was AC Andy ROE. Their role centred on the managing of personnel, equipment, mapping and the meeting point for all officers in attendance. The Command Unit is equipped with computer screens that can give overviews of the scene along with RVPs, size of cordons and allow for effective role calls.

We made ourselves known to the Command Unit on GRENFELL RD who instructed us to head to the leisure centre at the east of the tower. We walked from the grass verge from the southern face of the tower and under the tower itself to west side where the forward staging point was located. When we attended as a crew we handed our 'nominal role board' to the CU so that they knew we were in attendance. I was aware that there would be more than one CU at the scene owing to the nature of a 40 pump fire and I had already seen Chris from Lewisham which was a further indication that there was more than one CU. I did not, however, have much communication with the CU - that was managed by the CM Karl RAMSAY. In a situation like that you let the CM do the communicating because it facilitates a more controlled environment for everyone and the officer not having to explain everything to everyone.

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We made sure we had all of our kit; PPE, radios, flash hoods and anything else we may have needed, had some water and made our way. We did not rush because it is important to stay composed in such situations. Initially on the walk, I could not see the tower but after a little while it came in to view. I was utterly shocked at the nature of the fire spread and very worried at the thought of people still being inside. We were directed to nearer the scene by a police officer who told us which roads to go down and how to get to the leisure centre which was our muster area. We arrived at the muster point which was by BA Control - having walked passed the 'Chief' (Dany COTTON) I remember there was a big grass bank covered with fire fighters - some were busily servicing their sets; what we call the Fire Ground A Test, where fire fighters cool down, service their sets, clean them, change any cylinders and prepare to be recommitted. I cannot remember how long we waited there. Eventually we were directed to the forward muster point which was under some sort of walkway alongside a block of flats. I remember seeing a little caged area which may have been a children's playground. At that point a feeling of dread came over me. I was very close to the building and could see the level of devastation and the falling debris. I thought to myself, 'there are people in there...' There had been rumours circling of people jumping out of windows but thankfully I had not seen any of that. We were told we were on standby, ready to be committed in to the building. There was so much debris I could not believe it. Our entry point was the south west corner through a door. I could not help but look up at the tower and saw the fire spread. The whole building was enveloped. Normal fire spread goes out in a 'V' shape out of the window. The fact that all four faces were engulfed utterly shocked me. It was not normal in any way. The debris that fell was an enormous amount. It was not solid pieces and it appeared that whatever it previously was, its very structure had been altered and made it hard to guess what it was - just lumps of blackened stuff. I had not been particularly focussed on looking out for fire safety measures but I did notice a dry riser inlet on the south side of the building. I would assume that standard safety measures would have been present such as staircases, fire doors in the lobby area and a fire lift but I cannot confirm that. I had not noticed any vents or alarms.

The area around the entrance was like a junk yard, so much had fallen coupled with all of our kit, hoses for dry risers, water and so forth. We were given an escort by police with riot shields all the way to the entrance but footing was very difficult with trip hazards everywhere. The shields were really helpful though and allowed us to actually see where we were putting our feet so as not to trip up. The police escorted us in and at the same time were escorting others out. It worked really well.

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Once we got in to the building we sat by the lift/lobby area by the main staircase, having reported to BA Entry at the bottom of the stairs before carrying out final kit checks and then we were sent in. The lobby area was utterly chaotic - a lot of people were inside, fire fighters waiting to be committed. We were kind of in a transition period it felt for me and things were escalating and getting much bigger. There were IEC packs (first aid packs) strewn around with oxygen cylinders and then I noticed the officers stood at the bottom of the stairs by the BA board and communications board. They were using chinographs and improvised by writing on the walls to log the fire fighters committed inside. Normally the BA boards would be sufficient in a controlled environment but this job was just so massive they could not do that. Radio communications throughout the incident were minimal. This is not unusual and we frequently have radio problems. Personally I feel that the BA radio headsets we wear are not very practical and quite cumbersome. Although I did not happen to wear a set on the night, my colleagues told me that there was a lot of radio traffic but the radios did not function properly and in some cases the BA radio sets fell off.

When it was our turn we were spoken to by Pat GOLDBOURNE, I believe. He told us to get to floors 10 and 11 and try and establish the use of dry risers on every other floor and fight the fire. The use of dry risers on every other floor is a safety measure more than anything else and is designed to protect fire fighters. I remember making my way up and I saw another EDBA team who happened to be a CBRN (Chemical, Biological, Radioactive, Nuclear) team

- all wearing white helmets, all Watch Managers. I knew them and thought to myself, if they are all committed then this is a seriously unusual job. In conjunction with us making our way up, there were SDBA wearers ferrying the kit up for us. Once that had dropped the kit off, they would make their way back down giving us greater space to work in what was a very confined area. I thought this was a great idea because it meant that we, as the team designated to fight the fire, would not be expending too much air and would give us a greater length of time before returning. In essence we would not be tired from having carried all the kit upstairs. We had been made aware that there was someone lying dead, in situ, on the stairs by the 10th floor, which we eventually came across. I have since been told it was the body of a woman. The body was very large and we were told to leave her where she was which was on the stairs adjoining the lobby. The stair case was not big by any means. A solid concrete structure but not wide, made for chaotic scenes with water rushing down together with people trying to get out - lots of people. I remember seeing a dead dog on stairs and then more people. I distinctly remember seeing a man running down the stairs wearing 'Speedo' goggles and thinking, 'did I just imagine that?' We remained calm on

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the stairs both going up and coming down and it was important to stick together. CM RAMSAY was very calm and measured throughout the process.

I am aware of the stay put policy and my understanding of it is that it is used in buildings of multi occupancy. The policy says that residents should stay put unless a fire has a direct impact on their flat, the principle is that fire doors will hold the fire in place and stop it getting to communal areas like stairs and lobbies. I was aware that there were a number of Fire Survival Guidance calls on the night but had not heard it from any official source, but I know there were still a large number of people in the building when I got there.

Each floor had a landing with fire doors. None of the doors or the walls had markings on them so in the midst and the adrenaline of everything going on, with carrying our own kit and getting tired, proved difficult to know where we were. We were told that someone would mark each floor but I do not know if that was actually done. It sounds rather morbid, but quite cleverly CM Karl RAMSAY, said that we could use the body on the 10th as a landmark from which we could work out what floor we needed to be on and where we were. Once on to the 11th we tried to establish a water supply. We unfurled a length of 45mm hose and put in to the dry riser to establish a water supply. It took a while to set up because we had to go up and down the stairs with the hose. Once established we tested it and could not believe it when we had minimal water - nowhere near enough to fight a fire. We checked for blockages and checked the hose which was fine and snaked down the stairs, but still no water. On the landing we discussed what to do and agreed that standing there was of no use so we should go back down stairs and establish what the problem was with the water supply. Sometimes low water pressure can be down to a length of hose having burst or issues with the dry risers. However, on this occasion we checked all of that and still there was low pressure. We had no idea what the cause of the problem was. We assumed that it was based on demand but we did not actually know. Our discussion centred on water supply and the minimum pressure we were getting coming through. Without the fire being fought we were not in a position to begin search and rescue. Therefore without water we were useless. We could not attack it without any charged media so we decided to head back to the entry control point and relay all the information we had and the problems encountered. We still had some air in our cylinders but not enough to recommit which was very frustrating. The crew before us had tried to do the same thing on the floor below but had been unsuccessful. We tried to communicate with them but it was very hard. We did not know who was who. Some crews had written their call signs and names on the back of their helmets which was a good

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ideaperhaps something the Brigade could look at in the future. Radio communications were also extremely poor. The environment was extremely noisy and wearing 'comms' and a BA set is not ideal and does not generally work particularly well. I also remember that the smoke was thick. There was not much light which made visibility very difficult. There were lights on but they seemed rather dim. I do not know if that is because that is what they were normally like or down to the smoke but either way it posed problems. We tried to clean our masks but being in such an environment we were smearing more than cleaning. The situation was also getting very warm - either due to our environment or because we were working so hard.

We headed back to the BA Control area to carry out a Fire Ground A Test, conduct a kit check, rehydrate and await to be recommitted. CM RAMSAY relayed the information to the Officer in Charge whom I believe was Pat GOLDBOURNE, a Group Manager I believe. There was certainly a lot of frustration felt because although we had been in the building and up the stairs and tried to set up the hoses to fight the fire we had not done much. We got some fresh cylinders and having rehydrated, went back to the forward muster point. Having met the officer at the muster point, we were told to stay put. I cannot remember who it was but I understand why he told us to stay there. In a situation like that it is not practical to have crews self-mobilising because you need to have command and control. We mustered at the west point of the tower and remained there for seemed quite a while before later recommitting, again under police shields.

Once in the lobby for a second time, we were surrounded by predominantly other EDBA wearers. I think we were there for about an hour which is a long time to be stationary carrying the kit which weighs about 17-18kgs, so we started to take them off until we were required to use them. I remember seeing a lot of water around the area and some sort of generator. I am not sure what the generator was for, may be to power lights but I would be speculating. I remember however, that it gave off a lot of fumes which made it quite unpleasant. By that point my understanding was that the Bridgehead, the last point before we are committed, had moved to the 4th floor and we were put in to a flat to await deployment. I found waiting, sat on someone's sofa in a flat, a very bizarre experience. By that point it was the early afternoon and our shift should have finished at 9.30am that morning. I was aware that fresh crews were being bussed in but we were in the flat a long time. The flat itself was quite small with a couple of bedrooms, a living room and kitchenette. I remember it was us and a Lewisham crew and we joked a little about who was going to make tea. Trying to lighten the mood of a very solemn and frustrating situation. Cannot remember what flat we were in but it was untouched from the fire and the sofa had a floral design. I cannot remember

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anything else about the flat, nor colours but I think there were some family photos on display but I did not pay much attention to them.

After quite a while it was decided that we would be stood down and replaced by a day shift. We removed ourselves to the staging area to rehydrate again and take on some food. At some point I remember going to a church which was supplying food and drink as well as toilets after which we went back to our truck. As we left some members of the public and local residents asked if we were Ok which was really nice and a couple of kids said, "The fire's that way..." in a sarcastic tone. That was not particularly helpful I must admit. By that point it was mid-afternoon and quite sunny. I looked at the tower again and again was shocked at the fire spread. It was still massive, especially around the floors and windows. I can honestly say in all of my service, I have never seen anything quite like it. The flames were still going higher and higher with a distinctive orange glow. I remember when I looked up there were a lot of windows open. It was mid-June however so that cannot have been too unusual. We were instructed to go back to our truck and make our way to Paddington to make notes, pick up fresh t-shirts and see a counsellor if we needed.

On reflection, there are a few things which I think could help us in the future. The idea of people's call signs on the back of their helmets would be a great safety measure and a way of knowing where people are and assist with teams staying together. We certainly need better BA radio communications on our BA sets and a generally better ID system. A lot of what has been said post incident was about the poor communications.

I heard of incidents where fire fighters took off their masks and gave them to the casualty. Policy wise it is a big 'no no', however I understand why. It was an incredibly emotive decision and perhaps it could lead to a change in policy and kits. For example, divers use small oxygen canisters for when rescuing casualties. Perhaps this is something that could be looked into.

The support from the Brigade has been very good. Fortunately I did not need counselling either post incident or afterwards. We have received numerous letters from the Commissioner regarding the upkeep of our mental health and this is a big leap forward from a few years ago. I was on duty during the 7/7 attacks and was sent to Aldgate. After that incident there was nothing with regards to note taking or counselling, we just kept working. The result of that was my memory became a collective memory. Writing notes straight after the incident at Grenfell was like a decompression chamber for me and I found it very useful. There is a much more concerted effort to maintain fire fight 'welfare' than ever before.

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Form MG11(T)

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I exhibit my contemporaneous notes as NPF/1.

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