

**WITNESS STATEMENT**

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

Statement of: FERGUSON, NICHOLAS

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: NICHOLAS FERGUSON

Date: 21/05/2018

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

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My name is Nicholas FERGUSON and I am a member of Red Watch at Chelsea Fire Station. The fire station is located at 264 King's Road Chelsea, London SW3 5UF. I joined the Fire Service in 1997. I have 20 years' service. I have spent all my service at Red Watch at Chelsea.

Throughout my service I have gained most of my experience from old-school type firefighters. I have undertaken yearly and four yearly competency tests throughout my service, being assessed by my peers and Senior Officers.

I went to my first fatal fire scene when I had about 6 months service. It was a six pump basement fire. It was at this call that I got my first pat on the back by Senior Management for doing a good job. I have acted up doing temporary roles as a leading hand riding in the front of the machine. I have also become a driver. I am Fire and Rescue Unit (FRU) trained and I have acted up on the FRU covering Road Traffic Accidents (RTA's), people under trains, people jumping from buildings etc.

On 13<sup>th</sup> June 2017 I was on a night shift which started at 8pm. There were nine or ten people on roll call on that shift. On the pump ladder (Call sign G341) there was Watch Manager Lou DESILVO, Fire Fighter BUTLER, Fire Fighter PETTY, myself and the driver Fire Fighter REPAS. The other vehicle was a Fire and Rescue Unit. On this vehicle was Crew Manager CODD, Fire Fighter UPTON, Fire Fighter

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SIMM and Fire Fighter REDDINGTON. I can't recall if Fire Fighter OKOH was on the other vehicle as well. I have written a list of the names that I recall on a sheet of paper which I produce as my exhibit NXF/1. Normally all Fire Fighters who are on our watch would attend roll call. Sometimes some Fire Fighters would attend roll call at other stations if they were on standby at that station.

The Watch Manager is in charge of the station and the pump ladder, and any incident on our ground.

I was assigned as initial BA Crew on Pump ladder Call Sign G341. I had a Standard Duration Breathing Apparatus (SDBA) that night. I am trained and qualified to use Extended Duration Breathing Apparatus (EDBA) but was assigned SDBA on that shift. The duration of the air intake on an SDBA can vary depending on circumstances and how hard you are working, but would normally be approximately 25 to 30 minutes.

We had our roll call in full fire gear. I was wearing fire boots, leggings, tunic, radio lamps, gloves and helmet. After roll call I took off my fire gear and placed it in the appliance on my assigned seat.

I then performed an inventory check to ensure that the appliance had all the equipment on it that was listed on the inventory.

I can't recall exactly how many calls we attended before the call to Grenfell but I think it was around three or four.

We were on a fire call when we heard the Grenfell incident occurring. My recollection of it was that it was a call to a fire in a flat and it was "makes pump 6". This means that the crew on the ground were requesting additional resources. We were attending an Automatic Fire Alarm (AFA) call just off Gloucester Road. I think we got to this sometime between 1215 and 1230. By the time we got out of our AFA call we heard on the radio that they had made the Grenfell call pumps 8 and then immediately pumps 10. We booked status 6 which meant we were available for deployment. We then got a call on the radio to attend. I remember the Mobile Data Terminal (MDT) in the vehicle was playing up and not working correctly. I think I recall The Watch Manager receiving the call to attend Grenfell on her pager.

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I had no previous knowledge of Grenfell Tower and had never undertaken a Section 7(2) familiarisation visit. These are normally carried out by the station that are on that ground. They do the 7(2) visits to premises in their area. It is very rare that other stations would do 7(2) visits to premises not on their ground.

As we were on the road we attended straight from the call, didn't go back to station first. We approached Grenfell Tower from the south, via Latimer Road. We encountered some roadworks near the tower and I recall we had to turn the appliance around. In front of us we saw a lad on what looked like a Pizza delivery motorcycle and I recall he indicated to us to follow him. We told the driver to follow him.

On route we listened to the radio, listening to Fire Survival Guidance calls (FSG's) coming in. We realised amongst ourselves that this was a major fire but we didn't really know what to expect. It was only when we got there we realised it was a high rise and saw the extent of it.

I have been to other large 6 and 8 pump fires and sometimes you don't get used, you are just placed on standby, but as we were listening to the calls on the radio we knew we would be used.

As we got there we could see it was more than the initial call, which I believe was a fire in a flat. We could see the fire was coming out of a window and up the side of the building. There were flames coming out of the building on the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> floor and lots of smoke. It looked like a fully developed fire with flames punching out of the windows. The fire was on the right hand side of the building as we approached it. We parked about 200 metres from the building but I don't recall the name of the road. I got out of the vehicle with the rest of the crew and started towards the building. We didn't take hoses or BA initially.

We went up to the front of Grenfell Tower and someone told us we would need BA. I don't know who it was that told us this. We went back to the pump, got our BA and went back with hoses. It was absolute mayhem but with some semblance of co-ordination. There was a lot of commotion with people going in, people going out and hoses everywhere. Fire Fighters were being committed at the entrance to the stairs and people were being evacuated. I think on the Control was Hammersmith's Paul WATSON.

We went up to the Entry Control Point (ECP) which was on the mezzanine floor. I was told that our BA

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sets were needed to assist in getting people out of the building. I had a Standard Duration Breathing Apparatus (SDBA) set and I gave it to a crew that were going in. A crew that were going up the stairs took it and that was the last time I saw it that night. At the ECP there is normally Control Boards where Fire Fighters hand in their tallies so the ECP know who has been deployed. There were boards but these were full up so the people on the ECP started writing on the walls. There were two Officers at the ECP who I think were called DOWDELL and O'KEEFE.

The members of the public coming out were in a state of distress and various stages of undress. There was no smoke at the ECP.

I made a decision to go into the building and assist in helping the evacuation. I wasn't wearing a SDBA but assessed that as the stairwells weren't full of smoke I would be OK. I was with Fire Fighter Anna REPAS, who also wasn't wearing a SDBA or EDBA. I went into the building past the entry control and indicated to Paul WATSON that I was going up to assist in the evacuation. I went up to the 6<sup>th</sup> floor via the stairwell. As I was going up firemen and members of the public were coming down the stairs past me. As I was going up the stairs I was risk assessing as I went and I continued to assess it as being safe due to the lack of fire and smoke.

I could smell smoke in the stairwell but didn't see any. It was dark and wet in the stairwell but there was no smoke. As we were going up I saw there were 4 children coming down the stairs with some adults. I told the adults to pick up the kids and carry them down.

When I got to the 6<sup>th</sup> floor, I came across a fire crew trying to get a woman out of her flat. The flat was to the right of the lift lobby. The woman was disabled and in a wheelchair. I can't remember much about her but she was light skinned, possibly Asian, and in her 30's or 40's. I can't remember what she was wearing but she had dark hair and glasses with thick lenses. She was conscious and breathing and hadn't been compromised by any smoke.

I saw that she had a mobility scooter in the hallway outside her flat door and she was sitting in an ordinary wheelchair. Anna and I got either side of her and she put her arms around our shoulders. Anna and I carried her down to the ground floor and someone else came behind her with her wheelchair.

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It was a squeeze getting her down the stairs. There was water coming down the stairs when we were making our way down and it was dark. Smoke had started to come into the stairwell from the lift lobbies where people were opening the doors. We carried her outside to a London Ambulance Service (LAS) muster station. I spoke to a member of the LAS who pointed and told me to take her somewhere else. I told him that I wasn't going to, and told him to take her.

I went to go back into the Tower and again went up to the 6<sup>th</sup> floor. I now saw that the disabled woman's flat was fully alight, so I came back down to the ground floor and went outside.

Anna and I went to get a hose from the nearest appliance which was G271 or G272. The appliance was parked under a walkway. There were two appliances parked under the walkway.

I noticed an aerial ladder was up and deployed and they were trying to stop the fire spreading to the upper floors. There was a Fire Fighter in the cage at the top of the ladder. I think it was FF Dan HARRIMAN from Paddington (A21). They were getting bombarded with debris falling from the building as the fire had gone higher. I grabbed a hose and started putting up a covering jet up, and then started putting out debris that had fallen to the floor that was still alight. Anna was behind me, spotting for me. She would shout to me when debris was falling from the building close to us to enable us to get out of the way.

We made a decision to withdraw the aerial ladder as it was too dangerous. I continued to put out debris falling from the building that was on fire. I then asked someone else from G27 (North Kensington), I can't remember who, to grab the hose and take over doing what I was doing.

I went around the side of the building and saw that the flames were up to around the 15<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> floors. At this stage I was around 40 feet from the building in an area that had trees on it, with Anna still behind me spotting. I saw an appliance from Soho that was set back even further on the grassed area. There was no members of the public there just London Fire Brigade personnel.

I assessed that Anna and I were getting too close so we fell back to the vicinity of the Soho appliance. There were 3 or 4 LFB people around the appliance. I asked them why they weren't putting up a jet of

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water. They told me that they had a problem with their monitor. A monitor is a piece of equipment that connects to the end of a hose and increases the spray that comes out. It has 2 70mm hoses attached to it and it can project a high volume of water. I asked why it was down and the firefighters stated that the water pressure was too low.

I went to the aerial ladder and grabbed another hose reel from one of the new appliances. The hose reel had a bigger diameter and a better water supply. With the help of other firefighters and the crew of the aerial ladder we lashed the hose reel to the cage of the aerial ladder and got it back up and running. The crew started to put up a spray and I started looking up at the building trying to see people at the windows of the flats.

We identified someone at the window of a flat on the 11<sup>th</sup> floor and passed on the information. I can't recall how I passed it on but we got the message back that the Control were already aware of this person. I can't recall who I passed the information to. I wondered why the person hadn't got out of their flat on the 11<sup>th</sup> as it was obvious that the fire had taken hold, and I think I found out later on that he was probably blind.

We managed to cover up to around the 11<sup>th</sup> floor with the spray coming from the hose. We concentrated on the 11<sup>th</sup> floor as this was practically the highest floor we could reach.

My attention then turned to my colleagues.

I saw a couple of members of the public in close proximity to the building, inside the cordon. I thought they were too close so tried to get them to move away for their own safety, to avoid the falling debris. I also noticed that one of my colleagues, Fire Fighter Chris BATCHELOR was talking to someone on a mobile phone. The member of the public refused to move away and pointed to the Chris on the phone as if to indicate that he was with him.

There was a lot of confusion, and a lot of separate areas were set up for example an area for crews dealing with Fire Survival Guidance (FSG) Calls. Some crews were turning up to specifically deal with FSG calls.

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During all this time there were a lot of other machines and crews arriving. Lots of crews were going into the Tower and lots were coming out.

I saw that Chris was still on the phone. I asked him if he was alright. He indicated he had somebody on the phone who was in the Tower. He was on the phone for a long time, at least 45 minutes. I continued to see people coming out of the building and also seeing a lot of distressed firefighters. There were a lot of really experienced firefighters that I knew were coming out and breaking down and crying.

There was loads of debris still falling from the building. Chris BATCHELOR was just outside the main entrance. The member of the public was hovering near him. I spoke with the member of the public again and told him he wasn't safe. He again said he was with Chris. I turned Chris who told me he was speaking to somebody in the Tower who was connected to the man beside him.

All around there were firefighters breaking down literally. These were the sort of people who had been there, seen it and done it. I was really concerned for these men and did what I could to console them. I was expressing concern, hugging them. I knew something had to be put in place to help them. I was really concerned for them.

There were two Command vehicles that I remember. The first was dealing with Fire Safety Guidance (FSG) calls. They were dealing with all the appliances coming onto the fire ground. All units coming onto the fire ground were being assigned to go to specific flats on specific floors.

I went to the second Command vehicle which had a lot of Senior Officers inside talking. I asked to speak to the Officer in charge. I saw our Commissioner Dany COTTON and told her about all the Officers breaking down. I told her that they would need help and welfare after the incident and she told me that she was aware and was on it.

I came away from the Command vehicle and saw that the aerial appliance was still trying to get water up to the upper floors. Looking at the way the fire was spreading, and the colour of the flames, I strongly suspected that the gas was still on.

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I spoke with a Police Officer who was standing nearby the aerial unit if the gas had been turned off to the building. He said that he didn't know, but would try to find out. I then went back to the Command vehicle and asked if the gas had been turned off.

I went back to where the pump appliance was putting up the stream of water and suddenly realised that it had been running for a long time. I realised it may be low on fuel so went and checked and it was running very low. I then went to the Operational Support Unit (OSU) which was another vehicle and asked them if we had any derv (diesel fuel) on the fire ground. They said no.

I went back to the Command Unit as I was trying not to block the radio channels with unnecessary messages. I spoke to the Officer in Charge of the Command Unit who I think was Mark KENTFIELD. I spoke with him about the derv situation and he looked surprised and said something along the lines of "Oh, I didn't think about that". I knew that other OSU's had been bringing other bits of equipment like SDBA and EDBA sets, so I asked Mark if any of the other OSU's had brought any Derv. He said no. I told him it needed to be sorted as all the appliances would be running low. I then saw Watch Manager Sean COLTRESS and between us we took on the task of going to get derv to replenish the appliances.

The first suggestion was to get the OSU to bring derv from a base at Finchley. The other suggestion was to purchase it locally. With this in mind we tried to get access to a vehicle to go to a garage and purchase it. As we were doing this, the derv did arrive from Finchley in jerry cans. We initially filled up the nearest appliance and pump and then we went around and filled up all the appliances that were pumping water.

I went around to the front of the Tower and eventually found Chris BATCHELOR who said that he had been speaking to the wife or girlfriend of the member of the public who he was with. She was on the 18<sup>th</sup> floor with their child. He came across with the phone in his hand and he told me he listened to them dying up on the 18<sup>th</sup> floor. He was devastated and I was likewise.

I went back to the Command van and again saw the Commissioner Dany COTTON. I spoke with her and told her specifically what had happened to various fire fighters. She was as good as gold and came out of the vehicle and was comforting the firefighters and telling them that some help would be put in place for

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them after the incident had finished.

I don't know specific timescales but at some stage it got light. After that I did various jobs, took on water and was going backwards and forward carrying kit and helping people in and out of the main entrance. I saw bits of body lying on the ground near the front. Specifically I saw a leg in the main entrance area. It had been moved under a covered area and had been bagged. I don't know how it got there. I saw a body that had been moved under cover.

There was so much burning debris coming down that Police Officers were helping the Fire Fighters to get in and out of the building using their riot shields for cover.

I was doing loads of jobs, anything that I thought would be useful. I did hose management. I found a lightweight portable pump at the main entrance. It burst one of the main hoses and I can remember I assisted in repairing this and getting it back up and running as quickly as possible.

I can't recall what time it was but eventually some additional BA arrived outside the main entrance. All the equipment was being delivered to a grassed area in front of the leisure centre. I was sitting there with members of my watch. I put one on with my colleague Fire Fighter Bob PETTY and we did a fire ground A test on the sets.

We wrote our names on the tallies and went to the Control Point where we were held whilst they moved the bridgehead higher. It was originally on the ground floor then it was moved up, I think to somewhere around the 6<sup>th</sup> floor. On the way up we assisted in hose management and getting the equipment up to the bridgehead. The idea around moving the bridgehead up is that you don't use as much air after being committed before reaching the fire. The stairs were fully laden with hoses and it was extremely wet and dark.

Bob and I eventually got to the bridgehead and got committed to either the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> floors or the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> floors to fight fire, I can't really remember. I remember going to the entry control point and the officers were inundated with information. They had given up using boards to write on and were now writing on the walls. Our task was to fight the fire. We had received no comeback on whether the gas had

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been turned off but it was plain to see it hadn't been. I asked if there was any firefighting media up on these floors, like hoses, branches etc. Control told us they didn't know. We handed in our tallies and started up the stairs. I can't really be sure of the time but I think it was probably around 2pm. There were four of us sent to fight the fires but I can't recall who the other two were.

I knew there were other fire crews in the building but at times it felt like we were the only people in the building.

We went up, I think initially to the 9<sup>th</sup> floor. It was dark and the stairwells were now full of smoke and extremely hot. We looked for firefighting equipment but couldn't find any anywhere. We went up and down the stairs looking for equipment and eventually found a hose but I can't remember on which floor. We went back down to around the 9<sup>th</sup> floor and we broke into a number of flats but I can't remember which ones.

There were fires raging in all the flats and I was still concerned that the gas may not have been turned off. In one of the flats there was fire licking around a gas meter and we managed to extinguish that. It was frustrating in that you would put out one fire, move onto the second and put that out, only to return and find out that the first fire had reignited

The water pressure was sporadic. It kept going on and off and came in spurts. To manage the hose we kept having to go up and down the stairs to keep the pressure. Whilst doing this we came across the body of a large individual in the stairwell. I can't remember where exactly but somewhere around floors 9, 10 or 11. I think a crew did try to move the body earlier but was unable to because of their size and weight. I do recall that the body was climbed over on many occasions.

We searched a number of flats. Some were completely burnt out with no windows. We searched but didn't find anyone.

When our air started to run out from our BA sets we returned to the entry control point and passed on the information that we had gathered on the upper floors like what flats had been opened and searched, what flats weren't open as specialist equipment was needed. I can't recall any of this information now.

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We exited the building at around 3 or 4pm and met up with our other watch members on the grassed area outside. I was absolutely shattered. That was the only time I felt depleted. I think the adrenaline had kept me going and all through the night I was trying to be constructive.

At one stage during the night I assisted in pulling up a ladder but I can't recall exactly when. It was a 135 ladder which is the largest that the London Fire Brigade carry on front line appliances. I remember we got it up to the 1<sup>st</sup> level from the outside so it could reach higher. I know the crews on it were able to effect some rescues.

We gathered our crews together and eventually all left on our appliances and went to Paddington fire station. By this time Blue watch were on duty and some of them weren't being committed. When at Paddington we were asked to complete notes of what we had done at the scene. I started to do some but I was drained and every time I started to do some I was zoning out and falling asleep so I never completed them. I produce a copy of the notes that I did complete as my Exhibit NXF/2.

My overall thoughts on the event was that it felt like whatever we were doing as Fire Fighters it was having no effect. The flames weren't going out. Whatever we did it was just getting worse. Everybody was doing as much as they could but it was having very little effect. I thought the rescues and lifesaving efforts were spot on, but the fire kept saying "I'm not going out". We coped, but the fire won.

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