

WITNESS STATEMENT

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

Statement of: WHITING, NICHOLAS

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

Occupation: FIRE OFFICER

This statement (consisting of 11 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.

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Date: 19/03/2018

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

This statement is about my involvement in the fire at Grenfell Tower which occurred on Wednesday 14th June 2017.

I am a serving Fire Fighter, which I have been for five years. I am based at Brixton Fire Station. My pay number is [REDACTED]OP. I am part of Red Watch, call sign H241. I joined the London Fire Service in February 2012. I have no specialist skills, but I have skills and knowledge of dealing with high rise residential buildings as there are several high rise buildings on our ground which I have visited. After conducting my initial training and drills at the Fire Fighter Training centre, I have conducted many drills and training sessions in the tower which is in the rear yard of Brixton Fire Station. We do real fire drills. When we do the drills, we also discuss the theory around dealing with high rise buildings, which includes identifying roles within the drill and what we have to do in these roles. We then talk about how much ladder and hose we will need at certain high rise building fires. We also train on the Dry Risers. This training is very regular. The training also includes going out to local high rise buildings and speaking with residents about fire safety.

When we left Brixton Fire station to go to Grenfell Tower I was with my crew which consisted of the Watch Manager John - Paul STEVENS and three other Fire Fighters Methusael SONSON, Kylei HOLMES - LEWIS, and Nick KALIRAI. I was driving the fire engine with the Watch Manager next to me at the front. The three other Fire Fighters were at the back.

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Before the fire at the Grenfell Tower, I had never been there before. When I was made aware of the address, I recognised the postcode of W11. I know this area to be North Kensington as I have visited there before in a non-professional capacity.

On Tuesday 13th June 2017 I arrived at Brixton Fire Station at 1800hrs with the shift commencing at 2000hrs. Before the shift started I went to the gym at the Fire Station. Once I had finished in the gym I went to check the fire truck, as I am the driver. I checked my equipment and my Breathing Apparatus (BA) set and made sure everything was ready. Once this was all completed I went to the kitchen to start on dinner for the crew. Once the food was all consumed I went for a lie down.

At approximately 0145hrs the alarm sounded to indicate that a call was coming through. The call slip goes through to a person who is assigned to being in the Watch Room. The slip gets torn off and I then get given the information, being the driver. This is because the call slip has the address on it. The call slip also has what type of fire it is and how many trucks are needed. I remember when I was reading the slip for the Grenfell Tower fire, it said that it was a forty pump fire in an address with the postcode of W11. It stood out because it was not local to our ground of Brixton. I looked up the address on an 'App' my phone, as it was not a place I had heard of, but I knew that it was in the West Kensington area. I also believed that it was going to be a major incident due to the number of trucks required. This size of incident would normally be on the same scale as going to a large power plant fire or something similar. I had never heard of Grenfell Tower until I got there. I did not think it was going to be a high rise residential block. If it was going to be a high rise tower block, then it would be empty and not have people living in it.

We all got into the truck and I headed off on blue lights and two tones. I went over Chelsea Bridge and as I got towards central London, I could see more trucks and crews also making their way. It was at this point that I believed that it was going to be a major incident. The Watch Manager was listening to the radio as I was concentrating on the driving, but I could hear that it sounded very busy with a lot of radio traffic. The only things I could hear were where the RV Points (rendezvous-vu) were, that people were trapped on the floor around the tower, and that it had been declared a major incident. At approximately 0155hrs we arrived at the Grenfell Tower. I had driven down Blenheim Crescent, W11 and this was when I first saw the Grenfell Tower. The whole building was ablaze and all I remember thinking and saying was "What the fuck!" It was a sight that was hard to comprehend because I had never seen or encountered anything like this before. It should never be, that a large high rise block of flats should ever be this much on fire. When we were on Blenheim Crescent, W11 there were a lot of people everywhere, but mainly

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standing in the road looking at the tower. They were all in a state of distress and panic. It was at this point that I understood that this was going to be a big incident with a big effort needed to save people from the tower. I eventually turned the fire engine and went to park on Dulford Street, W11 via Clarendon Road, W11. As I was getting out of the fire truck, I could hear one woman, who was standing by our fire truck, saying "Even people from Brixton are here". I then heard someone else say "How many fire engines are here" to which I instinctively said "forty". I took my uniform from the driver's locker which is inside the fire engine cab and also my Breathing Apparatus (BA). My colleagues took their uniforms, which were where they were sitting and proceeded to put it on. They also took their Breathing Apparatus (BA). The Breathing Apparatus is equipment which allows fire fighters to breathe whilst in an oxygen deficient atmosphere, such as if going in smoke. The Breathing Apparatus consists of a full face mask, a cylinder containing compressed air with associated air tubes and a pressure gauge, body harness straps, a hand lamp, radio communications, a Body Guard Distress Signal Unit (DSU), which monitors the breathing rate of the wearer and the time the set was first 'activated', and a personal guide line. There are two types of Breathing Apparatus. There is a Standard and an Extended Duration Breathing Apparatus. The Extended Duration Breathing Apparatus requires specialist training to become a wearer. I have not yet completed this training. I am a standard Breathing Apparatus wearer. The PSS 7000 Standard Duration Breathing Apparatus (SDBA) set will give a working duration of approximately thirty-one minutes when applying a consumption rate of fifty litres per minute (LPM). The safety margin is twelve minutes with the electronic low pressure warning device (LPWD) activating at eighty four bar. I also took with me a sledgehammer and an axe. The crew then ran to Grenfell Tower to assist with the rescue. This took about ten seconds.

I had run past the Kensington Leisure centre and headed to the bottom of Grenfell Tower with my Fire Fighter crew. As I was getting closer, I could clearly see that the building was a light and engulfed in flames. It seemed that the fire was travelling in a diagonal manner. From my experience of these type of tower fires, the fire always wants to travel up. The fire, it seemed was heading up the tower very quickly. If there were people still at the top of the tower, there would be little chance of survival as it would have been like an oven or when bodies are burnt in a crematorium. This will be due to the smoke inside the flats, the heat inside the flats, and the fire consumption of the flats happening so quickly.

As I stood next to the building I could hear people shouting and screaming and also the roar of the fire. People were waving white bed sheets and towels out of the windows to attract attention. Some other people were signalling with the flash lights on their mobile phones 'SOS'. The fire was omitting a lot of

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smoke, which I thought could make the rescue harder. I was standing next to one of my fellow Fire Fighter friends, who I have known for five years. He said that he believed that the tower was going to collapse. Other Fire Fighters who were near to me, were wanting to make phone calls to love ones, just in case they never came out. This was not a deterrent for us not going into the tower. I wanted to go in and help rescue people. One thing which did catch my attention was that there was so much debris falling from the Grenfell Tower. This confirmed my colleagues and my feeling that the tower was going to collapse. From approximately the fourth floor to about the tenth or fifteenth floor debris was falling down like rain. Most of it were metal sheets, which seemed to be aluminium. They were falling from all sides of the building. Some of the debris was still alight when it hit the ground. There were firefighters who were extinguishing them along with fire fighters being spotters, to make sure no-one got hit by any of it. There were a lot of Fire Fighters around the Grenfell Tower. This was the biggest fire that I had dealt with since becoming a Fire Fighter. I went to the south side of the Grenfell Tower and entered into a large lobby room. There was a toilet on the right hand side. When I walked into the room I could see the stairs. There were loads of people coming down the stairs. There were families, children and people being helped by Fire Fighters. Some of the people looked dead. There was one young boy who had been rescued by a Fire Fighter, who when asked if he had any other brothers or sisters still in the tower, he replied that his brother was dead. The Fire Fighters who were coming down after rescuing people looked very disorientated and were so exhausted that they were walking sideways out of the main entrance/exit point.

When I was standing with my fellow Fire Fighters in the holding area there were two BA Boards running. A BA Board is a board with a list of Fire Fighter numbers and the times they entered the tower. The BA Board is run at the Bridgehead, which is the strategic location located at least two floors below the fire floor. The Bridgehead started on the third floor of the tower when the fire first started. This was then moved down to the ground floor a short time after. This is also where the Breathing Apparatus Entry Control Point (BAECP) was located. For most residential fires, we normally have just one Bridgehead and one BA Board. At the Grenfell Tower fire there were two BA Boards running at the beginning and then a third one. This was due to the size of the fire and the amount of fire fighters at the Tower. When we were waiting to be deployed inside the Grenfell Tower, the Watch Manager was helping a member of the public to safety to which a piece of debris fell from the tower and hit him on the back of the neck. He got burnt because to this, but carried on with his job. This is where we handed in our BA Tally. The BA Tally is a yellow plastic oblong tally which carries a key to activate and deactivate the Body Guard

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Distress Signal Unit that belongs to the Breathing Apparatus (BA) set. The BA Tally bears the BA set's individual number. The Tally also records the name of the wearer, the pressure of the set when entry to the incident is made and the time at which the wearer ought to report back to the Breathing Apparatus (BA) Entry Control Officer.

The holding room would best be described as controlled chaos. Whilst I was waiting to be committed into the Grenfell Tower, there was a demand for equipment to be brought off fire trucks, so fellow Fire Fighters could use them when inside. Alongside other Fire Fighters I went to the local fire trucks and took off what I could, which are needed to open doors. There were door enforcers and metal claws which were brought along with other equipment. I had to do this with all my Fire Fighters kit on, which weighs approximately 16kg.

When it was my time to enter the Tower, I along with three other Fire Fighters were instructed to go to the fifth floor and conduct a search and rescue. The senior Fire Fighter, I believe Patrick GOULBOURNE instructed us where to go also said that we cannot lose the stairs to the fire. The instruction was very clear and understandable. I was with one of my colleagues from Brixton, Nick KALIRAI and two other Fire Fighters from Peckham fire station Tom and Dwayne. We all headed up the stairs to the fifth floor. The stairway was very narrow, with the width of the stairs just accommodating two Fire Fighters on them. The visibility was poor due to the smoke. I could see my colleagues who were in front of me but not much else. There was water coming down the stairs at quite a fast rate. There were also large drips of water coming through the ceiling. This water was very hot when it landed on me. I could feel the heat coming through my uniform.

When we got to the fifth floor, it was really hot. Any water falling felt like having a boiling kettle on the back of my neck. The smoke was black and white and the visibility on the floor was not very good. We conducted a search and rescue of the fifth floor. When we entered the floor landing the closed lift doors was directly in front of us. Nick KALIRAI and myself headed to the right and searched the two flats to the right of the lift and then we searched the flat behind the lift. The two fire fighters from Peckham searched the two flats on the left hand side. Nick KALIRAI and I stayed together throughout the duration of our time on the fifth floor. We did not leave each other's side and could talk to each other. We all had radios with us, but as there was so much radio traffic the communication just became noise, which I could not hear clearly.

Nick KALIRAI had a Thermal Imaging Camera (TIC) which made seeing in the dark easier. This aided our search of the flats. In every flat there were pockets of fires. I then proceeded to use the dry Riser

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which was present on the right hand side wall to extinguish some of the fire present on the fifth floor. A Dry Riser is a fixed steel pipe, normally approximately four inches in diameter that runs vertically up a building. It will have inlets at the fire service access level normally on the ground floor, and outlets on designated floors to provide water to hoses carried up by Fire Fighters. The inlets and outlets are normally protected within locked cabinets. I got hold of the Dry Riser branch and got it going. A branch is the nozzle at the end of the hose, which is used to direct and control the water flow onto a fire. The water pressure was very weak and it was really hard to get any form of water pressure out of it. The Dry Riser in the end did its job but it was not very effective with this large scale fire. There was no sprinkler system on the floors and no lighting. I also thought that there was gas present, but I wasn't sure if there was. Several colleagues said that they believed there was gas present near to the top of the building. When we entered the fifth floor, I could not hear any fire alarms going off. It seemed that there was only one way out for residents which was to use the stairs. The front doors to the flats didn't seem that they would protect residents for a long time from the fire. This is due to them being pretty thin. The stairway was very narrow, with Fire Fighters going up and panicked people coming down. This did not allow us to conduct a controlled evacuation. The longer the fire went on, the smokier the stairway became with reduced visibility. There was no lighting down the stairway. There seemed that there were no other fire escapes in the Tower.

We all stayed on the fifth floor until our Breathing Apparatus went down to really low. This was for approximately twenty-five minutes. Once this was activated we stopped with the Dry Riser and made our way back down to the Bridgehead on the ground floor. We then proceeded to exit the Tower. Police Officers were there with their riot shields to protect us from the falling debris. They put them up above our heads and we made our way over to the road on the south side of the Grenfell Tower which is under cover.

The other three fire fighters and I made our way to the west of the Grenfell Tower and the Breathing Apparatus (BA) holding area. This is based on the other side of the play area. I exchanged my cylinder and obtained a new one. Nearby were London Ambulance Service (LAS) ambulances where paramedics were assisting survivors. There were also people in body bags.

When I was outside having a break and having a drink of water, it seemed that the London Fire Brigade had sent every available Fire Fighter to Grenfell Tower. When I was in the Breathing Apparatus (BA) Holding Area, I could hear shouting and swearing coming from people who were above us on the balconies of other blocks of flats. Some of the calls were of panic and hoping that love ones and friends

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had got out safely. The other calls were very aggressive and directed at us, the fire brigade. I heard someone shout "Why are they standing outside. Why are they just standing there watching people die". These type of comments made me feel very pissed off and wound me up a little. All of the Fire Fighters went in to Grenfell Tower with the knowledge that we could all die. Comments like these are upsetting as it devalues the rescue and the effort put in by all the Fire Fighters. We are all working and sticking together to achieve the best results of people being rescued alive. When this comment was being made, I was with other Fire Fighters from my Watch at Brixton.

After I got a new fully inflated oxygen cylinder I, along with my colleagues from Brixton, went back into the Grenfell Tower. There was a call from the Bridgehead that they wanted four standard Breathing Apparatus (BA) wearers. Senior Officer Andy ROWE was the Fire Fighter who was now co-ordinating operations at the Bridgehead. When we re-entered the ground floor lobby, it was a lot smokier than the previous time. There was now loads of water on the floor of the lobby and more Fire Fighters present. A glass electronic door which linked the lobby to the stairs had been smashed through, which was causing it to be smoky. The Bridgehead had been moved into a smaller office off the lobby. We received an instruction to move a person who was on the tenth floor because they were hindering people coming down the stairway and also other Fire Fighters conducting search and rescues. Because we had all been in the Grenfell Tower before we did not think that we could go up to the tenth floor and move a body and come back down in approximately thirty minutes. We all made the unofficial decision that we would not go under air until we got closer to the tenth floor. We proceeded up through the mezzanine level and up the stairway to the tenth floor. On the stairway there was lots of water. It was like a waterfall. The stairway was also full of smoke. We got up to the ninth floor where we placed our Breathing Apparatus (BA) on. Due to the smoke I could not see, so one of my colleagues Richard KNIGHT plugged me in. The stairway was very hot. We got to the tenth floor and we found the body. At first I could not tell what sex it was. The body was of a very large/big person. The person was black. The body must have weighed approximately twenty stone. The body was lying on its front and I could see a big burn mark on its back. The four of us then turned the body over onto its back. The body was clearly lifeless and rigid and when I touched it was cold to the touch. There was also a deep wound on its head, which looked like someone had stood on its head. I then realised that it was a female. The person's feet were hanging over the stairs. Due to the size and weight of the person we decided to move the person down to the ninth floor. We did not want to move her into the tenth floor because the floor was fully alight. If we opened the fire doors linking the landing to the stairway, the stairway would have become extremely hot. We had not brought

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any fire media with us, so we could not extinguish any fires. We had with us a salvage sheet which we tried to place under the person. The person was wearing a black T-shirt and black leggings, so it was quite hard to lift the person up onto the salvage sheet. The person was a dead weight when we lifted it. We tried several times to lift the person but it was becoming very exhausting. In the end we had to pull her down one flight of stairs by her arm. When the person fell down the stairs and hit the wall at the end, I heard some noises which sounded like bones breaking. To move her down to the ninth floor, two of my colleagues pulled her legs and then another colleague and I pushed her shoulders so that she fell down the next flight of stairs and onto the ninth floor. We then moved the person into the doorway of the ninth floor, so the stairway was not being blocked anymore. As I was helping to move the person I could hear my air pressure going. This was indicating that I was running out of oxygen. I then left the three other fire fighters as I was at the bear minimal capacity to stay there. I then ran my way down the stairway and got to the first floor. It must have been approximately forty five seconds later I was joined by the other three fire fighters. We then made our way to the ground floor and into the main lobby. This was still very busy and full of water and people. There were now loads of Police Officers outside the main entrance assisting with riot shields to protect us from the falling debris.

We made our way back to the Bridgehead which was now outside in the playground. I checked in with 'Paul' who was the Fire Fighter in charge of the BA Area. As we were walking back I saw a human leg which it seemed had been put up against a wall. We left the human leg where it was and headed to the Brixton fire truck. I felt knackered and physically shattered but mentally I was alright. I was then chattering to other Fire Fighters who were near to the fire truck about what they had and I experienced. I then helped a crew from Surrey with setting up their aerial ladder platform fire truck. Once the crew had finished we headed to Paddington Fire Station. We got there at approximately 1200-1230hrs on Thursday 15th June 2017. We all had food and a shower. There was a Councillor there if anyone needed to speak to them. It was here when I wrote my notes, which I exhibit as NGW/05. Once we had finished at Paddington Fire Station we headed back to Brixton Fire Station. We got there at approximately 1630hrs. I did not go home as I was back on duty the same evening. We all went out for food as a crew and started the shift at 2000hrs. During the shift we only had two calls. One was to a fire alarm which had gone off and the other was to assist someone who had been locked in their property. After this shift I had four days off. During the four days off I really found it hard to get back to normality. During the days off I met up with another fire fighter friend, who works at Lambeth Fire Station to share stories about what happened at the Grenfell Tower. The next few calls to large fires we had on our ground, I couldn't get excited

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about. We got called to a large fire in Peckham and I felt the same. Within the Fire Station, the more experienced Fire Fighters say that the Grenfell Tower was bad. We all talk about the Grenfell Tower and what we all did. As a fire station we raised money for the Grenfell Tower survivors and I drove down with a few other Fire Fighters from Brixton and put a T-shirt down to remember the people who were not found. When I was there I saw some pictures of people who I recognised when I was in the Tower. The large person I was trying to rescue, I did do research to see who she was. I searched social media and found mostly positive responses. There were a few negative comments that I read.

I found the Grenfell Tower to be in quite a difficult position for access for Fire Fighters and fire trucks. With all the fire trucks parked around the perimeter it was quite hard to get close to the tower with the aerial fire trucks. During the fire, Fire Fighters managed to get an ariel fire appliance up on one side. This was only on the east side. When the ladder was elevated, it was a very dangerous position to be at the top. This was because of all the metal and debris falling from the tower. This fire truck would have been very useful from the start as the fire spread very quickly. What would have been better is for all the Fire Fighters to have longer Breathing Apparatus (BA) sets. This would allow the Fire Fighters longer time in the tower to conduct longer search and rescues. I don't think anything could legislate for another similar type of fire like Grenfell Tower. All the emergency services did their best to save people and keep people safe. I am aware of the London Fire Brigade's 'Stay Put Policy'. This is aimed at people who are involved in high rise buildings when there is a fire. The main aim of the policy is for people who are not affected by a fire in a high rise building, to stay put and someone will come and get you. The then hope that that someone will be a Fire Fighter. The plan is also for the fire control to talk to the people on the phone about fire survival guidance. I think this is an effective policy. I have been to fires prior to the fire at Grenfell Tower, notably in Shepherd's Bush last year where this policy has been in effect and it worked very well. I feel that it was the building which defeated the 'Stay Put Policy' than the other way around. The fire at the Grenfell Tower acted in way not normally seen in other high rise residential buildings. If the policy had changed and all the residents just making their way out, it would have made Fire Fighters jobs harder to conduct search and rescue because as there was only one way in and one way out.

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