

WITNESS STATEMENT

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

Statement of: GODBER, PAUL

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

Occupation: FIRE OFFICER

This statement (consisting of 9 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: 21/12/2017

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

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

I will mention a number of people, all of whom are in the London Fire Brigade (LFB). Borough Commander (BC) GOULEBOURNE, Crew Manager (C/M) MCGHEE, Fire Fighter (FF) HANLON, FF ALDRIDGE and FF BENAICHA,

I will mention Grenfell Tower and the internal layout of the ground floor, and describe some of the 4th floor.

I joined the London Fire Brigade (LFB) in 1990 as a Fire Fighter. I was initially posted to Northolt Fire Station and in 1992 transferred to Belsize. In 2000, I gained my 1st promotion to Crew Manager (C/M) and was posted to Manchester Square. I stayed there for 5 years when I move to Soho. I stayed there for 2 years and then moved to Euston.

In January 2017 I was promoted to Watch Manager (W/M) and moved to Whitechapel. I am what is called "in development" as a Watch Manager. I was at Whitechapel as a Watch Manager at the time of Grenfell and still am. There is a big training programme where we train daily at the station. The programs are organised centrally and fall into three categories; pumps and ladders, rescue equipment and Breathing Apparatus (BA).

We run exercises with other stations, which simulate high-rise fires, perhaps every two or three months. All of my crew know about and have been trained in high-rise procedures, including Fire Survival Guidance procedures. I have twice been on a supervisor's management refresher course, the last one being in January 2017. I am up to date with all of my mandatory training.

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On Tuesday 13th June 2017, I came on duty at Whitechapel at 8.00pm to start my 1st night shift of 2. We checked our equipment and appliance and I completed some administrative tasks. We had some training until about midnight when we got some rest. It was a quiet night and I was at the station when at around 2.05am, we received a call to go to a 40 pump fire at Grenfell Tower. That means that crews at the scene were requesting 40 pumping appliances to deal with the incident. The call is detailed on a Tele printer in the station and gives you important information such as what the nature of the call is, the address with a grid reference, and who else is attending.

I remember the message telling us that it was at Grenfell Tower. I've never been to that tower, it has never been my ground and so I've had no reason to have been there before. At that stage, I didn't know what type of premises it was, but I was aware that there were persons reported. That means that there are people involved, probably trapped and in need of rescue.

When a call is labelled as persons reported, it attracts an enhanced attendance with ambulances, Fire Investigation Unit (FRU) and senior officers.

A 40-pump fire is unprecedented. In 27 years service, I never been to nor heard of a 40-pump fire. The only fires that I've ever heard of being that big were in the blitz. I knew that even though they were asking for 40 fire fighting appliances, if you added all of the ancillary vehicles such as specialist machines, seniors officers and so on, they'd be loads more actual vehicles at the scene.

I didn't know Grenfell Tower but my crew did and knew how to get there. On my appliance were C/M MCGHEE, FF HANLON, FF ALDRIDGE and FF BENAICHA, who was driving, and myself. I was sitting next to the driver and the other three were in the back behind us. It took us just 80/90 seconds from receiving the call to getting mobilised and as I listened to the radio, which is fitted to the appliance, the radio traffic was such that I just knew that we were going to a momentous incident.

Our route took us along City Road, Shoreditch, Kings Cross, Euston and along the A506 which becomes the West Way. The radio traffic was between control and the fire ground. I remember passing Euston Fire Station, and hearing make "FRU10" meaning the crews on the ground were requesting 10 Fire Rescue Units.

Some stations are equipped with Fire Rescue Units, which are equipped with all sorts of specialist equipment and specially trained fire fighters. Part of that equipment is EDBA. Crews have two types of BA. Standard (SDBA) and extended (EDBA). The standard cylinders have one tank and last for around 25 minutes in normal conditions. Under stressful conditions, as Grenfell Tower turned out to be, the tanks will last for less time depending on the work rate of the fire fighter. The extra sets are exactly the same

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except have two tanks. These last for a longer period of time. But again it depends on the conditions and work rate of the crews. I am FRU and EDBA trained so as soon as I heard that, that loads of sets of EDBA were being asked for, it just confirmed to me the size of what we were travelling to. I remember saying "THEY WANT THAT FOR EDBA". I think all of us had a sense of trepidation.

I didn't hear an informative message on the radio. An informative message is where the officer in charge on the ground supplies more detailed information of the incident. I didn't hear that, so the sense of the scale of the incident was gained just through the information that we had. Being an officer, having been in charge of incidents myself, I know that sometimes the incident is so dynamic that to send an informative message to control over the radio may take some time. We came to the elevated section of the A40 West Way and were around 2 and a half miles from Grenfell when took my first look at the tower.

It was about 2.15am and it took a moment for my eyes to convince my brain that what I was seeing was for real. I could see that the building was on fire. There were flames rising above the skyline, maybe 200 feet tall and in a distinctive "V" shape. The "V" was going up the outside of the West side of the building, on the corner and then across the top of the North side. The North side of the tower appeared largely alight from the lower floors upwards. 50% of the West side was alight and the entire North West corner of the building had flames across the top of it. The flames were travelling across the top of the Northern side of the building.

It was like something from a disaster movie. If I was a director of a film and wanted to give the impression of a building alight, then this was it. I could barely believe what I was seeing and I remember us saying to each other 'HOW HAS THAT POSSIBLE?'

We came off the West Way and took a road that ran along the west of the building. I remember that a road that we were being directed down by the mobilising message, was blocked off by road works. I thought that I should tell control so that other appliances would know but I can't remember if I requested to talk to control but we found another route. It probably didn't add to our journey time, and we parked up as near to the tower as we could, perhaps about 400 metres from it. We couldn't park up right close to the tower because of the other parked emergency service vehicles.

That didn't surprise me. I knew that with fire engines, ancillary LFB vehicles, FRUs, ambulances and police, there were likely to be up to a hundred vehicles there. In my experience of dealing with large incidents, it is normal not to be able to get right up close to the scene for exactly this reason. Just from looking at the tower, and knowing that there had been 10 FRUs requested, I knew that it was a job for fire fighters in BA equipment so I told my crew to get their sets on. It was about 2.30am by now.

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We walked to the tower from the South, I think along Grenfell Road, so I could see the South East corner of the tower. Although at that stage, I couldn't see much debris falling, I could see flames engulfing the top of the tower and was actually descending downwards along the East side. It seemed that the fire had spread even in the short space of time between us approaching the scene and now. I made sure that my crew stayed with me, as I didn't want to get separated. I could see that the fire was running up the side of the building, and as it did, breaking into the flats through the windows. My first thoughts were that the fire was being fuelled by the exterior cladding. That's what I thought straight away,

I found the Command Unit and handed in my Nominal Role Board (NRB). The NRB is carried by each appliance and tells control who we are and how many crew we have and who that crew are. So with that, the Command unit knows what appliances and what crew members are at the scene. The Command Unit weren't ready to task us as they were setting up so I was told to make my way to the fire ground and find someone who was in command of the incident to task us. There was an intense atmosphere with people milling around. The closer we got to the tower, the more intense the atmosphere became.

We went round to the South side of the building and on the South West corner the scene appeared chaotic. Total pandemonium. There were fire fighters running around, clearly doing the best they could but I sensed that the management structure of the scene hadn't fully kicked in at that stage. There was a loud racket coming from Grenfell Tower of fire and debris, which had begun to fall from the building. There were people screaming, but I couldn't tell who or where the noise was coming from.

The air was full of people shouting and screaming, including fire fighters asking about access, command units and tasking. I could see casualties being either carried or led out of the building. I saw about 20 other BA wearers and a Senior Officer who told me to send my crew to the south side underneath a ground floor covered area where other wearers were. I left my crew there and I wasn't to see them again until around midday.

I am an officer and was wearing a white helmet so I knew that I was going to have a management task. Before I could find an officer to task me, I saw things to do there and then. Immediately I saw 2 or 3 Fire Fighters holding a sheet which was being used as a make shift stretcher. They were struggling carrying a casualty in it and so I grabbed hold of a corner of the sheet and helped them about 30 metres to a safe area where there was an ambulance crew.

One of the Fire Fighters said to the LAS crew that they thought that the casualty had fallen from height. I looked at the casualty, his eyes were open, and so I formed the opinion that at that stage he was maybe still alive. But I knew then that there may have been people jumping from the tower. I saw the mans face

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and I've since seen the man in the media, on the television. Having seen the man at the time, and seen him since on the TV, I'm confident that the man was called Mohamed NEDA, who died from the fall, just by looking at his face. It was about this stage where I acknowledged to myself that there was no way that we, the LFB, were going to be able to put this fire out. It was just too big. I suspect that most of us, including the commanders, would have been feeling the same.

I was still not tasked but saw that there was plenty to do. I saw that there was an Aerial Ladder Platform (ALP) parked in a fantastic position on a grass area to the East of the tower, which wasn't at work, it was neither elevated nor delivering water. This equipment is able to deliver water with a 40 metre reach. I went to it and spoke to the operator who said that it wasn't working. I thought that he meant that there were problems with the water supply but he told me that that wasn't the issue.

There was water but it simply wasn't working. There was some kind of other issue, I got the impression that it was mechanical and neither he nor I could fix it. The operator had the palms of his hands open and looked full of despair. So all of this was in the 1st 10 minutes of me arriving at the scene.

I went back to the South side and spoke to a Safety Officer. There was debris falling from the building and the BA crews were struggling getting from the covered holding area the three metres into the building because the falling debris was so dangerous. It was only about a three metre run into the building but the debris was beginning to get so heavy that it was presenting a real hazard.

I have not seen debris falling in that way before. There were massive, car bonnet size, chunks of twisted burning aluminium falling down. As they fell, they planed in the air, changing direction as they fell. I remember kicking one that had landed to gauge its weight and it was so heavy that I couldn't move it. The chunks of cladding had a kind of backing material to them, which was alight as it fell to, and then hit, the ground. There was also glass raining down onto the floor along with the cladding.

So the Safety Officer tasked me with helping crews get into and out of the building safely. Up until then, I hadn't been tasked, I knew that this was an important role as it was so dangerous for the crews. The first thing I did was to get two fire fighters, who weren't wearing BA, with a water hose. The debris was not only crashing to the ground but was also alight. So I got them to hose down the debris once it had landed to put it out and at least make it a bit safer once it had rested on the ground. I remember asking them also to protect a turn table ladder which was parked and housed on the South East corner of the building. It occurred to me that that machine was in danger of being hit by debris and catching on fire.

I spent around an hour on the south side of the building watching the debris fall and then giving the BA crews the OK to move into the building when there was a gap and it was safe to do so. If no one looked

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out for them, they had more chance of being hit than not, so I knew I had an important role. During this time, I could see that the fire had reached the top of the building and was then descending down the building. The fire was actually travelling downwards. After an hour or so, the West side of the building had become the main mustering area for the BA crews. The LAS had set up a casualty area around there as well.

So for the next 3 hours, from say 3.30am until 6.30am, my role was to help crews get in and out of the building without getting hit by one of these pieces of burning metal from the West side of the building. The debris on this side was becoming more intense, like the south side, and we were 20 metres or so away from the entrance. I must have made the journey to and from the building more than 20 times. During my time there, the East, West and South sides of the building were fully alight with the fire actually spreading downwards from the top. At some stage, some full length police riot shields appeared. They were of great help and initially, LFB crews and myself used them above our heads to protect crews going into and crews and casualties going out of the building. Those riot shields were absolutely fantastic for the job. A lot of people would have sustained a lot of injuries if it hadn't been for them. We still had spotters, led by a Watch Manager, as the shields wouldn't have protected us from the large pieces of debris but they did the job for the smaller ones.

The debris built up to such an extent that eventually you couldn't see the ground. I remember one of the casualties, a black male, maybe North African in his 30s having lost his pregnant wife. He was distraught until we found her and reunited them. At some stage, maybe at around 300am, a senior officer asked me to go to the control vehicle to establish whether FF Hill had come out of the building. He was missing. I saw a different officer who was from the control vehicle and asked him. He told me to tell the chief. At that stage I saw Dany COTON, the Commissioner for the LFB. I told her that there was a FF missing, but as I did, another officer overheard FF HILL'S name and was able to tell us that he was safe.

I remember questioning to myself the structure of the building. People could be forgiven for thinking that it might collapse such was the intensity of the fire, but all of us carried on anyway.

Whilst protecting crews on the West side, I saw that there was a crew who were operating a hand held 70mm water jet on the North West side of the building, trying to fight the fire. It was reaching around the 7/8 floors but I noticed that they weren't supervised.

I couldn't see a white helmet so I went to them to check if they needed anything. It was around 4.00am, it was still dark, and I saw a person waving a white T shirt or something similar from the window of a flat on the 9th floor on the West side near to the south west corner. I couldn't see if it was a male or female

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although I felt at the time that it was a woman. I also saw a light being waved out of another window on the 12th floor. It was maybe from a mobile phone light or something similar. Both were clearly trapped and in need of help. I memorised carefully exactly where the two flats were, as I knew that I was going have to explain where they were to someone else.

I ran around and using a shield, went inside the building for the first time to tell a senior officer on entry control what I had seen. I was very precise as to the locations as I knew it would be important. They checked and said to me that they were aware of them and were trying to rescue them. I returned to the outside to the South West corner where there were now Met Police Officers in riot gear who were now operating the shields. They slipped under our command and did a fantastic job providing cover for crews. Not only did they help in providing cover, but it released fire fighters to do other tasks.

By now the main entrance to the building had so much heavy debris on the ground that it was becoming even more difficult to gain access. LFB hoses were on the ground and some had been punctured by the debris so weren't operating to full capacity. I saw that the doorway at the west side was tight for crews entering and exiting so I tasked a crew to get some cutting gear and remove the door and frame. This made access much easier. By 6.30am, maybe 7.00am, it was light. I went round and could see that the people on the 9th and 12th floors were still there, waving. Fire was still coming down the building towards them and I remember the fire had reached the flat above the 9th floor. So by now, I'd spent around 4 hours ensuring the safety for people getting in and out of the building. Around this time, 6.30/7.00am, I was asked by a Borough Commander to go inside the building to take over BA control. Both the Commander and myself spoke to the W/M who I was working with and told him that I was leaving him.

At this stage, the fire had taken hold of virtually the whole building. It was at it's height of intensity and unstoppable, but the falling debris had lessened. I guess that it had all fallen off and there was less debris left to fall. I went inside to the ground floor Bridgehead and was given the brief of assisting the FSG call handler. It took about 30 minutes whilst I waited for the handover to take place. I'll explain FSG shortly. Borough Commander GOULEBOURNE was in charge of the Bridgehead.

The Bridgehead is where, at a fire at a high-rise block, entry into the floors of the building for fire fighters is controlled. You can brief and commit your BA crews, and you can plug into to the water outlets between the bridgehead and fire floor. You need that safe area to ensure the control of fire fighters going in and out. Without it, you will have no control over numbers and no idea as to who is where. It is normally set up two floors below the fire, so in a safe location. Fire usually travels upwards and so normally the bridgehead is in a safe position 2 floors underneath it. I don't know why the Bridgehead was

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on the ground floor. I waited around 45 minutes to relieve the person that I was taking over from. I saw that there was a kind of mezzanine above the ground floor, a kind of balcony which overlooked it. The floor was swimming in water but the air was clear. When I went in, the Bridgehead was crowded with BA wearers but I was impressed as there appeared to be structured system with organised management. I relieved someone, I don't know who, and I was briefed to be assistant to the FSG officer.

FSG is when someone is in a flat and is unable to leave it through either fire or smoke. They will call 999. The phone operator will stay on the phone to the resident in order to get information from them such as their location, their conditions how many people are trapped. As much information as they can. A command unit is mobilised specifically to deal with FSG and will collate the information, which is sent to them from Control by way of a dedicated phone line. From there the information will be given to the Bridgehead and then to fire fighters at the scene who will attempt to rescue the occupants

But by then, it was now around 7.30am, there were no FSG calls coming in. Those calls were coming in throughout the earlier hours of the morning. At this stage of the incident they had stopped. Crews were being deployed to search specific areas for people rather than respond to their calls. I saw that one of the walls of the building had loads of writing on with a map and areas which had been searched and where people had been. I never wrote on the wall but it was being used to record FSG calls and the results of them. I saw that the 9th floor hadn't been crossed off as being clear so I told the committing officer about the trapped person that I had seen. So we sent a crew specifically to the North West side of the 9th floor to search for them.

When the crew returned, somewhere around 8.00am, they were appeared hot and were exhausted. They told me that they had got to the 9th floor lobby, but even though they had a jet of water, the fire and heat was so intense that they could not cross the lobby. They needed another crew to go back with them with an additional jet to help them get past the lobby area on that floor. There was a debriefing officer to whom returning crews went to and told him if they had completed their task or otherwise. So the debriefing officer was told about the 9th floor issue.

I understand that there was a deceased lady, a large lady who was on the 9th floor stairwell/ lobby area who was causing access problems for crews. I'm sure that she wasn't the person who I had seen as she'd been there for some while and I remember hearing about her when I was outside. Another crew was tasked to move her, which they did, to the 8th floor lobby. I later heard that another crew had successfully cleared the 9th floor and there had been a rescue from that floor. I hope that person I saw was saved although to this day, I really don't know.

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At around 9am we moved the Bridgehead from the ground floor to the 4th floor. Borough Manager GOULEBOURNE was relieved. By then the fire on the lower floors was extinguished so there was safe air there. By moving it upwards, the crews had less floors to climb so that they would use less air. Once there, we began to draw up a new chart on a wall. I think someone took a picture of the ground floor wall and we were going to transfer that information onto the new chart. I remember looking for, and finding, a straight edge so that we could draw the chart on the wall. I didn't write anything on it but it was going to be used to record exactly what floors and flats had been searched and were clear.

I've been shown a photo of the chart that was on the 4th floor wall. I didn't write on it and most of it was drawn after I was relieved. However, looking at it, the grids on the left of the photo are individual flat numbers. The first column on the right hand side is the station where the crew is from. The second column is the type of BA that the crew have, either EDBA or SDBA. The third column is the time that the crew went in and the column is which floor the crews were tasked to go to.

During my time inside, I remember some people saying that there were problems with the channel 6 radio channel. Channel 6 is used to communicate between entry control and the BA crews. I didn't actually witness those problems. I think I was relieved from the Bridgehead on the 4th floor around 9.15am. I went outside, looked up and saw that the flats on the 9th and 12th floors, which I had been looking at, had been completely destroyed by fire. The debris had largely stopped falling by then.

I found my crew who were sitting on some grass on the South East side of the building. They'd been into the building and were exhausted. I went back to our fire engine feeling exhausted at around midday from where we went back to Paddington where I wrote some notes and was offered the service of a councillor. I declined. One of my crew did, the rest of us didn't. From there we went back to Whitechapel, getting there at around 3.30pm, and were back on duty at 8.00pm that night.

Looking back, when I arrived there, the whole incident was beyond fire fighting and was a rescue operation. I've been asked about the stay put policy which I know about and understand. The policy has worked in the past. Up until Grenfell, my own view is that the policy is a sensible one. There will be people alive today who are so due to that policy.

I've been to plenty of fires where there has been heavy smoke logging in flats which have been compartmentalised and there's been no danger of the fire or smoke getting through to the residents who have stayed put. If they had been told to evacuate, the thick black smoke could have killed them. The policy over the decades that it has been around has saved many lives. The fire should have been contained within the flat where it 1st started. It should have stayed in the concrete box that was the flat.

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In my view, having seen it coming down on fire, it was the cladding that caused the building to fail. I produce the notes that I wrote at Paddington as exhibit PAG/1.

I have referred to a map of the area on which I have written. I've marked on it where the BA crews were held, where I helped Mr NEDA, the ALP and where the crews got the cutting gear from.

I produce the map as exhibit PAG/2.

I produce the photo of the 4th floor drawing on the wall as exhibit PAG/3.

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