

**WITNESS STATEMENT**

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

Statement of: HOWARD, PAUL

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

Occupation: FIRE OFFICER

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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.

Signature: P HOWARD

Date: 18/11/2017

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

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My name is Paul Howard. I am a firefighter based at East Ham fire station. This statement is about the night I attended the Grenfell Tower fire.

I have been a firefighter for the last 27 years. I joined the fire service in October 1990. For the first three years I was based at Silvertown fire station, before transferring to East Ham where I have been ever since.

My qualifications and Experience

I am qualified in the following areas. Fire Rescue Unit (FRU), Urban Search and Rescue, a Motor Driver (MD) for specific appliances (vehicles) for which I am trained, and I am an EDBA (Extended Duration Breathing Apparatus) wearer.

I am part of a Fire Rescue Unit (FRU) which means I'm trained for Water Rescue, Line Rescue and Urban Search and Rescue. There are several FRU bases, including East Ham and Bethnal Green.

FRU officers mainly go on more involved or unusual incidents for example we assist on large road traffic accidents, train incidents, anything a little bit unusual that the normal fire appliances may need assistance with. We attend and give them assistance; we are not there to take over. We have certain capabilities and carry certain additional equipment, such as extra cutting equipment, extended duration breathing apparatus, we also have an inflatable boat on board for floods, and mud paths to free people stuck in mud.

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We have Line work capability, which means if someone is trapped above ground, we can set up a safe system to rescue someone from a building or a tree, or any precarious position which may need line work to get them to the ground in a safe manner. We can also set up safe working systems for firefighters who may be working in precarious positions.

A number of Technical Rescue Stations offer Urban Search and Rescue. East Ham is one, and this means that we have extra resources available which can be deployed for protracted incidents, such as collapsed structures. We have additional equipment to enable us to carry out search and rescue operations anywhere it is deemed to be necessary.

The Extended Duration Breathing Apparatus set (EDBA) is breathing apparatus we wear which extends the duration we are able to work in an irrespirable atmosphere. It consists of a twin cylinder and provides longer working operations. The length of duration provided depends on how arduous the work being done, but on average it will last about 45 minutes to an hour. This is compared to about 35 minutes with normal breathing apparatus. You wouldn't go in to an irrespirable atmosphere before donning and starting your set and you would start your set when you check in to an incident at BA control.

The EDBA is used on incidents where travel time might be longer to get to the scene of operations due to the size of the incident or where it is deemed that you need to be wearing the set before you get to the point of operations or just where the conditions are arduous enough to require the use of the EDBA.

BA Control is the focal point where every BA team member passes through when entering an incident. It is controlled by the BA Control Officer and is located wherever it is deemed necessary at a safe entry point. It has to be within line of site from the entry and exit to the building, in a respirable atmosphere, basically with clean normal air. Once you go beyond BA you are entering into the hazard zone.

When you reach BA Control the BA Control Officer will brief you on what you will be doing once you enter the incident. You will then turn on your breathing apparatus set and start it up. You would do a 'buddy check' to make sure your team are ok. So your Buddy is whoever you're entering the incident with, it could be a team of two or more. You need to look out for each other. You need to make sure you are all aware of what you're being tasked to do. You also need to make sure your PPE, Personal Protection Equipment, is correct and in full working order.

If you have Comms Communications you will make sure it is working with the BA Control Comms Operator. Your ADSU would make sure that your tally corresponds with the air pressure that's in your

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BA set. You will then remove your BA tally, offer it the BA Control Officer who can check that the tally corresponds with the air in the set and he can then enter you into the BA board and at that point you can proceed.

Once a firefighter goes beyond the Bridge Head they can communicate with BA control and the Bridge Head via that radio.

Over the 27 years I've seen a lot of traumatic events. I've dealt with the deceased in house fires, road traffic accidents, people under trains, but I would say I've never dealt with a major incident.

I have been to high rise fires before but they were all contained within a flat on a floor, not multiple floors or multiple flats. I've never experienced anything like Grenfell.

#### High Rise Fires

In the case of a high rise fires a Bridge Head would be set up, which is a controlled safe area which is the scene of operations, below the fire. It functions at the point in which the firefighters are committed to carry out whatever they are tasked to do. There will be an Officer in Charge, probably with a Comms Operator and one or more firefighters to assist, be it to control the firefighter lift which should be under our control or be it taking charge of equipment or looking after the welfare of personnel.

During a fire we can take control of the Firefighter lift by using a drop key on the outside of the lift, basically we put the key in and the lift should return to the ground floor, and whilst in operation we have control of that lift and it's not until we release the key that the lift goes back to normal use.

The officer in charge of the Bridge Head is responsible for detailing what is going on and has overall control at that point. The Bridge Head is located at a safe place to establish a control point which, in an ideal situation, is usually kept at two floors below the fire floor. Obviously that has to be flexible depending on how the incident progresses, and the Bridge Head can be moved during the incident.

During high rise fires we use fixed installations, dry risers, which would be charged with water from the ground floor and the equipment would be carried to the floor below the fire to set it in the fixed installation, and then you can progress with the hose, so you have firefighting media equipment with you.

The Dry riser would be augmented from the fire appliance which would be supplemented from a hydrant. The dry riser at ground floor would be charged, with water, and each floor or every other floor would

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have a dry riser outlet and a wheel which we can plug our hose into to charge the hose, fill it full of pressurised water delivered from the fire appliance. Depending on which floor you are working at will dictate what pressure you need delivered from the pump and appliance to give you a suitable firefighting jet, for example 7 bars of pressure.

### TRAINING

We receive training on high rise buildings which is within the protocol of BA procedures. A lot would be gained from local knowledge of high rises buildings in your area, obviously as Grenfell Tower is the other side of London I had no knowledge of the building itself. The guidelines that are set out in our high rise procedures dictate how we deal with them.

Training is an ongoing thing at station level. Each year we are given a training package and periodically high rise procedures are covered, according to when it was due to be delivered. Every couple of years we have BA refresher course at the training centre. Procedures are discussed and we are informed of any changes to procedures. We are periodically trained on high rise fires, I cannot recall the exact date I last received training on that area but it was within the last 12 months.

Any high rise building is subject to a periodic inspection. The inspection involves visiting a certain building and making sure the firefighting lift works correctly, that all the doors close properly and protect the stairwell, that any signage is correct and in place, that the inlet and the outlet to dry risers all function properly and haven't been tampered with or vandalised, and generally making sure the layout of the building hasn't changed since the last inspection.

Familiarisation visits are conducted on building, where you would visit high rise buildings within the area covered by your particular station. Within our ground we have between 6 and 10 high rise buildings, but the number will vary hugely for each area depending on the density of the population of that area.

I had never heard of Grenfell Tower before the night of the fire and because it is not within the normal area we cover, I had never conducted a familiarisation visit there.

### The Fire at Grenfell Tower

On the night of the fire, the 13th June 2017 I was on an Out Duty that evening to Islington fire station, another Fire Rescue Unit, not a standard unit, and I was driving the Fire Rescue Unit there. "Out duty" means there is insufficient riders at a certain station, and if we have firefighters over we can be ordered to

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work at another station to supplement their crew for the evening and that's what I was doing for Islington station that night.

I believe we received an order, requesting our attendance at the fire between 01:40 and 02:30 but I'm not too sure of the exact time. When you receive an order to attend a fire, the order is received by our teleprinter, the lights in the station come on and an audible mobilisation signals that a Fire Rescue Unit is required for a fire call.

When we received the order it was on a 'make pumps 20' and 'FRUs 8'. From that information you can tell that it is a major incident straight away, 'make pumps 20' orders are very rare. I thought it must have been going for a while and a big fire. I knew earlier that night that there was a large fire in place because I was aware that the Command Unit based at Islington had received a call earlier mobilising them to the incident so I had an idea that we might get used too, but I had no other indication of what we were going to at that point. Our call sign was A306. We left the station, I'm not sure of the exact time, we turned down Islington High Street, on to Upper Islington High Street, Upper Street Islington High Street, we turned right onto Kings Cross Road, on to Euston Road, the Euston undercroft, Marylebone Road and on to the West Way. As we drove along the elevated section of the West Way we could see the fire. I knew at that point it was going to be like no other incident I had ever been to. We came off at West Cross route, which is as if you were going to West Field, down to Holland Park roundabout, left onto Holland Park Avenue, left into Royal Crescent, and then on to St Ann's Road and on to Bramley road. We proceeded up Bramley Road and our progress was halted by full scale road works with no way of passing, we were a little bit short of Grenfell Tower, so we turned around and went back down St Ann's Road, Royal Crescent, Holland Park Avenue and then came up Ladbroke Grove, I think we came up Silchester Road, and basically just parked the appliance on the north side of the road works on Bramley Road. I think the journey took about 15 minutes in total. When we arrived there were appliances everywhere. We didn't wait to be told what we needed to do, we just grabbed out BA sets. I'm sure there was information coming through on the radio as we made our way there but I can't remember what was said.

We made our made to Grenfell which was about a five minute walk. I can't tell you the roads we used or the route we took to get to the tower, as I don't know that area, but we were led by instinct, by looking up and following the tower and by people shouting directions to us "go down that way".

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We didn't make our way directly to BA Control because at this stage the building was sectorised.

Wherever we made our way to, every corner of the building, we were met by senior officers and then shown the way to enter the building. We were on the south side of the building and we were met by an officer who showed us where our physical route into the building would be at the point we would be committed. I can't remember who the officer was. We were kept waiting, not for long, just whilst crews were coming and going. The officer then guided us to the area where we could make access into the building.

He led us to an access point via some sort of undercroft but we had to do the journey in sections due to falling debris from the tower. With each manoeuvre, we would move on a bit, regroup and then move on a bit again because it wouldn't have been safe for us all to move at the same time, we would stop at a place of safety, whilst someone was looking up making sure no debris was coming down. We stopped at the undercroft because that was a safe area; next we had to cross an open area directly in front of the tower but there was falling debris everywhere, mainly fire damaged cladding and glass. The cladding was burnt and black. It wasn't falling with massive force but it was coming down on every side of the building, moving with the wind and reaching a circumference of around 15 to 20 metres around the tower.

So we waited under the undercroft to be escorted to the building by the police. It was very dynamic event. The fire at this stage had literally engulfed the building and there was a lot of debris falling down from the building. I could see people at windows waiting to be rescued. Some rooms were full of smoke, others weren't. Some people were clicking lights on and off in their flats. The building was well alight, at least two-thirds of the way down from the top, on all sides, though some not quite as high as others. There was debris everywhere. Casualties were coming out all the time. There were distressed people everywhere. I saw one Firefighter giving Fire Survival over the telephone after a distressed member of public had handed them their mobile phone, he was trying to reassure them and give them guidance. I don't recall exactly what he said to them. Fire survival guidance is when you are giving instruction to a person in need of fire survival guidance, they are in a fire situation within a dwelling and they can take actions to prevent the situation deteriorating and help them cope with the situation to the best their ability, to offer support. For example closing doors, telling them that the brigade are doing everything they can, do whatever necessary to comfort them in the situation they are in, info gather, find out as much info from them as possible, is there anyone else with them, what they are experiencing, tell them to block out as much smoke as they can.

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From the outside it just looked like a Hollywood movie, you know, tower inferno. Thoughts definitely went through my mind of how concerned I was about the structural stability of the building, because of the intensity of the fire, you could see it was a very very intense fire and with not a lot of fire extinguishing media, water, on it at that time.

The police officers were on a continuous loop, back and forth between the undercroft and the tower and I wanted for the officer to take me. The police officers were in full riot gear and were using their shields to protect us from the falling hazards. There was one police officer to every firefighter, we'd put our hands on his shoulders and he provided cover with the riot shield over our heads for the dash to the next place of safety, which was probably about 15 metres away, to where we accessed the building.

I'm 100% sure we entered via a window in to the foyer of Grenfell. It couldn't have been a door. I remember that because it was such a squeeze to get through and we had to be manhandled, physically pulled in through the window due to the width of us and our sets making it a tight squeeze. I think the window would have been a double glazed unit which had been smashed out. I think it was probably no wider than half a metre and probably about 2 to 3 metres high. I think the window was on the north side of the building, near the playground area.

I have drawn a map of the area surrounding Grenfell Tower as I remember it, which I exhibit as PH/02.

Once inside the building our crews had to change and I formed up with Bethnal Green crew because there had been an incident with their crew leader, I believe that something or someone had hit his BA set. So I formed a crew of four with Bethnal Green FIU crew, all of whom I knew. We reported to the BA Control which was on the ground floor.

We formed up at the foot of the stairwell where the BA Control was. Initially the Bridge Head and BA control were both on ground floor. Not a lot of time had passed from when we arrived at the scene to actually entering the building, I'd say 15 to 20 minutes.

There was a lot going on, there was a continuous stream of casualties being escorted from the building and I could hear "casualty coming out" continuously being shouted. We were held there for approx, 5 or 10 minutes before being committed as other teams were coming through.

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We received a Search and Rescue brief from the BA Controller, an officer called Pat Goldborn. We were told that crews had reached as far as the 10<sup>th</sup> floor, so we were to head for the 10<sup>th</sup> floor, if we could progress any further we should, but we were just do what we could basically and carry out any search and rescue that we were able to.

We were told to use the stairwell, so we then started our EDBA sets and progressed up the stairwell. From arriving on scene, we were heading up the stairwell within 30 minutes.

It was fairly arduous conditions in the stairwell at that time, and it quite smoke logged. The stairwell was concrete and blackened with smoke. There was a hose travelling up the stairwell. It was no wider than 4 or 5 feet. As I was going up the stairs I was thinking to myself that this really isn't good.

I could hear BA teams in contact with each other on our Comms Communication, trying to brief each other of what they had done, there were quite a lot of firefighters up there and the conversations were intense, some shouting, because everyone was quite hyped up.

Each flight of stairs had approx 10 or 12 steps and then a return, I think the stairwell turned to the right, but I can't really remember now. As I was making my way up the stairs I was concentrating on getting as far as I could, and making sure that our crew were safe and that we stayed together, we weren't the youngest of crews. We progressed a few flights and then we would close up again, although we hadn't really strayed that far apart and we had stayed in contact with each other, counting the floors as we went. I couldn't tell you how many crews came down whilst we were on our way up, I believe we passed a couple of crews. They confirmed there wasn't any extinguishing media and they hadn't got further than the 10<sup>th</sup> floor, but I couldn't say if they were wearing extended breathing apparatus or normal breathing apparatus.

As our crew were not all that young, we did have a rest after on the 8th floor to recompose and gather ourselves. The visibility was poor at this stage due to the smoke, you couldn't see very much, I could see a hose. We didn't leave the stairwell; we remained in the stair well and then continued up to 10th It was around here that we came across a deceased victim on the stairwell, a female. She was lying face down, down the stairs, at the top of the stairs, and not on the tread of the stairs. She was a large lady. I couldn't see her very well because of the smoke cover in that area. I checked for signs of life but there were no signs of life. I checked the carotid pulse, I couldn't detect a pulse and I could tell that she was starting to

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stiffen up. I knew we couldn't save her. I thought about the people who were still in the building who we could still save. We made a collective decision to carry on.

We got into the next return on the stairwell and a crew were on their way down and they told us that there was no firefighting media any higher, beyond the 10<sup>th</sup> floor where we now were. So we made a decision at that point to go up another two flights, because we knew Islington's crew were up in front of us.

We carried on up to the 12th where we moved out of the stairwell area into the lobby area, and the visibility at this stage was none. I followed the right-hand wall into the lobby corridor area. We knew Islington crew were on that floor too, as we could hear them banging but I couldn't see anything due to the smoke. I would say it was a narrow corridor maybe four or five feet wide. I followed along the right-hand wall until I came to a door. I opened that door and went inside, and I could see that my immediate search area was a rubbish chute room, a square room, probably about 6 foot by 6 foot, so that didn't take me very long. The visibility was better in that room and I could see that the room was empty.

I left that room and moved back along the corridor a bit more, again following the right-hand wall. I could still hear the Islington crew, eventually we found the Islington crew. They had been trying to gain access to one of the flats, it was either flat number 94 or 96, I'm not sure. They handed me a sledge hammer and asked if I could carry on whilst they moved on to flat number 95. So I took the sledge hammer and forced the door open, it was either flat number 94 or 95. As the door opened I noticed the transaction of heat, the heat barrier was immense. I could feel the heat straight away forcing me down on to my hands and knees. I couldn't hear or see anything inside the flat, visibility was zero. I crawled in to the flat on all fours, and even on all fours on the floor I couldn't see anything which could help guide us into the flat. All I knew was I could feel the hallway wall and I tried to stay close to it as I slid in, I went in about 10 feet but after about 2 or 3 minutes the heat was immense. I could feel the change of temperature on my skin, we are fully protective clothing but after a certain degree the heat starts to have an effect on your skin and that was a pretty good indication that I knew I was on dodgy grounds. Knowing that we were in a fire situation with no extinguishing media I thought we could get in trouble here really and I didn't feel that I could go any further without compromising my own safety and that of my crew. I decided to exit and I started to shuffle backwards and the rest of my crew started to shuffle backwards too. We then decided to withdraw back to the stairwell and check the contents of our air pressure gauge to see how much air we had. We had probably spent about 15 minutes on the 12<sup>th</sup> floor.

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So we withdrew to the stairwell and checked our air pressure gauge, we still had a bit left before we had to withdraw totally, but we decided to pull back a bit, we were using quite a bit of air, so we made a decision to drop down and try and pull some of the hose on the stairwell up a bit more.

The hose was a 45 m hose, it wasn't charged at that stage so it didn't have any water in it, and in a haphazard manner it was lying around. It was quite easy to pull up because it wasn't charged but we still had to negotiate the stairwell so it still meant one of us on each flight pulling at the hose. We managed to haul it up a bit higher, probably only one or two floors, to in between the 11<sup>th</sup> and the 12<sup>th</sup> floors. The hose would have either been used as a firefighting hose once water had been secured or extended to progress it. I think the hose would probably have been charged from the dry riser outlet on the 8th or 9th floor, but I'm not sure.

It took us about another 10 minutes to move the hose and by this stage we had reached the time to withdraw, there wasn't a lot left in my tank, and I mean I had reached my physical limit, we had reached the limit of our capabilities and we made the collective decision to withdraw. There were two or three crews in the area near us, one was Islington who I think withdrew just before us. Once we had made the decision, we pressed our 'Body Guard', which alerts BA that we are on our way out. The Body Guard is on the Distress Signal Unit, you just press a button and that indicates that you've reached a decision to withdraw and you're on your way out, so we pressed that and made our way down.

Even just coming down the stairs was still quite an arduous task, and we did it all in one stint. It was hard and I felt exhausted. When I got to the bottom it took me a few minutes to just compose myself. I was feeling light headed; I went down to my knees. I wanted to just rip my facemask off but resisted. Our training has taught us to recognise signs that we have reached the limits of our capabilities and I had reached my limit.

We reported back to BA control and closed down our sets. We then briefed the officer in charge of BA Control what actions we had taken, what we had accomplished, what we had seen. I informed them about the victim on the 10th floor, I told them that we had progressed to the 12<sup>th</sup> floor w/o firefighting media, and had gained access to the flat but were unable to conduct a thorough search just due to the intensity of the fire.

We were told to exit and instructed to get to the safe place which had been set up for rehydration. We left the building under the protection of the police riot shields, exiting the same way we had entered. I think

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we were inside the building for approximately 1 hour. We had been in the building for about 10 minutes prior to reaching the stairs, I would say I spent about 40 to 50 minutes of that up the tower. At the point we exited the building, the building was still well alight and similar to when we went in, it was a very intense fire, still lots of falling debris and still a chaotic scene.

One of the lads from my crew was feeling worse than I was and he needed some attention from the London Ambulance Service (LAS). He was looking a bit off colour. They removed him to the LAS triage area whilst the rest of our crew stayed in the holding area, we were probably there for about an hour or so, before we then went to the other side of the tower where the main breakout/rest area was, on the north side by the playground, and we remained for a couple of hours to rehydrate and be assessed by LAS staff who were located in the same area.

I think we remained there for approx. half an hour before we were moved to the BA main holding area which was outside Kensington Sports centre and then we remained there for a good few hours.

We were regularly being briefed by senior officers during the day informing us what was going on. It was daylight then and from what I could see, the building was still alight, not with the same ferocity or intensity. The Hydraulic Packs had been exchanged for the Shire brigade ones because ours was not proving too effective. The Shire crew arrived and they had been got to work, I'm not sure which county they were from.

It was such a dynamic and progressive incident, and crews were turning up all the time and I expect the tactics were changing too. By this time it around mid-afternoon, probably about 3pm, I hadn't been given any more specific tasks, but then we were all asked if there were any volunteers for recommittal, it wasn't forced on us, it was a voluntary thing. So we all agreed and got our sets on again and made our way back to the Bridge Head. We were taken back inside the building to either the 1st or 2nd floor where we were held in a flat, I don't know which one, we then waited in there for another hour or so, being held there whilst crews were doing whatever they were doing, just waiting to be recommitted. By this time blue watch were turning up and Blue Watch had been rolling relief during the day. It was getting towards 5pm or 6pm and we still had to go to Paddington to give our statements so although we did report back to the BA control they decided not to use us because we were a red watch crew. We then went back to Paddington and wrote our statements. I have provided the police with a copy of that statement, which I exhibit as PH/01.

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After the fire

The incident developed over the evening and a structure was put in place as the evening progressed. I was aware that the building was sectorised and there were officers in charge of each sector. The BA main control was set up, I don't know where the Command Unit was located, but I know one was set up. I knew the chief officer was around all day, but the most senior officer I was in contact with Pat Goldbourn who was in charge of BA control who gave us our brief.

All the other doors were fire chip doors, designed to withstand fire penetration, should form a seal around the door frame and hold back the fire for 30 minutes to an hour depending on the standard of the door. The doors on the stairwell from what I saw were all in tack, opening and closing with the self-closures, they were all doing their job. The door I forced open on the 12<sup>th</sup> floor was UPVC I think, that was doing its job too as the fire hadn't spread to the lobby.

Regarding the stay put policy, as far as I am aware we advise people to stay in the relative safety of where they are, as opposed to telling them to exit, unless we know it is absolutely safe to do so. That did provoke some thought for me after that night. Who would tell the victims when to get out? Who makes that call because we are not going to get there? That is something that plays on my mind a little bit, wondering whether more people would have survived if they had made a dash for it earlier. It's a terrible decision for anyone to have to make and it's not until this happens, on reflections we think, could we have saved 20 people who had collapsed in a stairwell, than searching for them in a flat on the 15<sup>th</sup> floor?

The fire was escalating through the outside of the building, it wasn't a breach from floor to floor internally; it was breach from floor to floor externally. That's what I saw. I didn't see any fire travel internally from floor to floor, it was all externally. It was such an unusual fire, so high up, just the vastness of it, the physical effort to just get to the fire, and then engaging in physical tasks once up there, it was really quite tough, just something like pulling up a hose is extremely difficult if you've been physically exerting yourself already, on reflection it was just too tough. I know that sounds a bit wimpy really.

Looking at the intensity of the fire, I did think of the twin towers, I had that image in my head because we were struggling to make any inroads in regards to putting the fire out. I did worry about the integrity of the structure of the building. We weren't getting enough water on the fire to eliminate the heat source to the structure, which I was worried might compromise the building.

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I don't consider myself as unfit, in my view it was a very individual incident which was beyond our physical capabilities. I don't think any amount of equipment would have influenced the outcome of that incident a great deal. It was so physically tough, even if someone had given me a BA kit which could have lasted three hours, I wouldn't have lasted three hours. That's my personal view on it.

On reflection we always ask ourselves if there was anything we would or could have done differently. I can honestly say I don't think from what we were faced with that we could have done any different. It was such an evolving event and it happened so quickly that it was just impossible to make any changes to how that fire developed. I don't think there is anything I could have done which would have changed the outcome of that night.

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