

**WITNESS STATEMENT**

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

Statement of: KNIGHT, RICHARD

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

Occupation: FIRE OFFICER

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This statement (consisting of 6 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: R KNIGHT

Date: 27/11/2017

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

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On Monday 27th November 2017 I was interviewed by Investigators Kevin SHANAHAN and John PAYNE at Brixton Fire Station. Also present was union representative Greg EDWARDSON. I referred to my notes I wrote on 4th June 2017 and exhibit a copy as RIK/1.

I will mention a number of people, all of whom are in the London Fire Brigade (LFB) Firefighters DEAN, WOODS, LAWRENCE, HOLMES-LEWIS, WHITING, KALARAI. Watch Manager John STEVENS and Patrick GOULBORNE.

I joined the London Fire Brigade in 2003, so I have been a Firefighter for 14 years. I have served all of my time at Brixton Fire Station, call sign H24 and my current role is as a firefighter on red watch. We regularly have high rise building training, it's quite a common thing that we train for. We do things a little different in a high rise building, there is a bit more planning involved. We set up the equipment before we go in there generally. The Bridgehead is usually a floor or two below the fire. That's where everything starts from. Usually everyone will go to that floor by the stairs or the fire lift if it's available. The hoses all start from that floor or the floor above it.

It's a safe system that we work with and it means that we can get ready in clean air and then we are more focused so we know where we are going and exactly what we've got to do. Lambeth has got quite a lot of high rise blocks so we've had a few fires here and there that we have been to. I would say that we are quite comfortable dealing with those sort of things.

Although we have had shouts in the area of Grenfell Tower I have never actually been to Grenfell Tower itself previously.

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The 13th June 2017 was our first night shift. When the bells went off I was just getting my bedding out to rest. I was pretty tired at that time. When the bells went off it was for both machines, the pump and the pump ladder. I'm not sure what the time was. Usually when we get down to the bay someone will shout out what the call is and the officer in charge will look at the computer and tell you what it is, where we are going and whether it's a fire, an alarm or whatever.

On this night someone shouted it's a 40 pump fire and everyone thought that it was a wind up because sometimes somebody will say something silly to wind you up. For a couple of minutes I remember thinking, yeah really, they will tell us what we've really got in a couple of minutes but they didn't. The call slip was huge as it had the list of all the machines on it and it then became evident that it was a 40 pump fire. That's something that I've never been to in my career, I've been to a few 30 pump fires but never a 40 pump. So straight away you knew that it was something a bit different, something a bit more serious.

Firefighter DEAN was our driver with Crew Manager JOHNSON in the front. I was in the back with Firefighter WOODS and Firefighter LAWRENCE. The station call sign is H24 and our appliance call sign was H242.

Because of the time, the early hours, the roads were quite clear. The people on our wagon started speculating wondering what it was. I think the call slip said something about Fire Survival, we heard something like that on the radio. The call slip doesn't really tell you much. In fact there's very few details on it.

I'm also a black cab driver so my function was as the main man to make sure that we got there. I knew exactly where to go. Also on the slip was a rendezvous point and I think that I heard it on the radio as well. It was to enter by a certain road but I can't remember which one it was. I remember thinking at the time that it wasn't the way that I would have gone.

We travelled up Park Lane, along Bayswater road. One of the boys saw a flash between some houses and said "Holy Fuck. Did you see that? I'm not sure but if I'm right, I've just seen a Whole tower block alight"

Again we all thought that he was having us on because usually it is just one flight that is alight and you would see a lot of smoke but only a little bit of orange. We could see that this was no normal fire so everyone was then making sure that all our gear was together so we were ready to roll when we got there. We started heading the way that the RVP message had told us to go.

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When we arrived at the Rendezvous Point it was terrible, there were cars blocking the road, Fire Engines and ambulances stopped in the middle of the road and at this point we were still quite a way from it, about three quarters of a mile or so. We stopped at some point and as the roads were so jammed I said to the lads that we could either run from that point or go back the way that I was going to go originally. We decided to turn the machine around and take another route that took us in on Lancaster Road. I estimate that it took us about 15 minutes to get there and as we got the call at about ten past one it was now close to 1.30.

When we got there we were literally right next to the fire, on the North side and we were one of the only machines that side. Half of the building was alight. It was surreal and I still wasn't sure what was going on. I couldn't hear the noise of the fire, just people screaming.

The fire itself was like a sail shape on one side of the building and spreading in all directions, eventually it wrapped itself around the whole building. The side that was alight was unbelievable. I saw the fire being fought with an aerial appliance but there was so much debris coming down that to be honest I don't know how they could have done anything. They can only go so high and a lot of the casualties were higher than they could reach.

Everyone then got their BA sets on and the officer in charge went to check into the command unit. The four of us went to the BA queue just before the holding area. The whole of Brixton was in the queue together. People were coming out of the tower that were young, old, some clothed, some naked. It was horrific and when you see them trying to get back up to their families it reinforces the fact that you want to help them. There was a lot of debris coming down from the tower and the firefighters were under a little ledge to protect them. Again at this stage we still didn't know exactly what was happening, there was no official word about what was going on.

There were a lot of casualties coming out, people with injuries, burns, bleeding and firefighters coming out in all kind of states. You don't see Firefighters coming out in that sort of state very often, almost crying, covered in smoke, some without their tunics, some without their helmets, others with their sets hanging off and the BA whistles sounding. I remember thinking then how serious this was.

It then became too dangerous at this location because of the amount of debris that was coming down so they moved all the crews around to the side of the building. We had people looking out for us and when it was clear they would tell us to run to the tower. We got into a door around the back of the tower. There was a lot of firefighters going in and out.

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We almost got to the front of the queue and was just about to go up to the first floor and get briefed on what to do when the next thing I knew was all the crews coming back down to our level. They told us that the Bridgehead was being moved down to the ground floor as it was too smokey and not safe at the upper level. I was thinking that you need a Bridgehead as high as is possible. We've only got standard duration BA so it was going to be quite hard to get high up, do something and then get back down again. Anyway we were there and ready to do whatever we were told to do.

We waited there for ages and I could see people coming out, crying that members of their family were upstairs or were dead. We were in a room on the ground floor that was gradually filling up with smoke. The Firefighters that were waiting with us were coughing and passing around the water. I think that we then got moved outside as the air in the building was so bad. I'm not exactly sure but we must have been waiting there for about an hour, possibly longer.

I heard people calling for EDBA's but there's not many of those guys. We didn't have any in attendance. Eventually they told us that firefighters were needed so myself and Firefighter HOLMES-LEWIS who was with me in the queue together got briefed by Patrick GOULBORNE, I don't know his rank. He told us that it was terrible up there. This is worse than anything you've seen before. He told us to get up to the 5th floor, there's water everywhere, fire everywhere and equipment everywhere. Just get up there and make sure the fire doesn't spread and if there's any doors locked, see if we can get in. We took a couple of axes with us as we were told that there was a load of gear up there.

We were escorted in by the Police with riot shields because of the amount of debris that was falling. At one time when we walked around to get some water we saw a leg on the floor. I can't remember if it was an arm or a leg but it looked as if someone had jumped.

On our way up the stairs it was like a waterfall, I've never seen anything like it. We were soaking wet straight away, which isn't really ideal. We got to the 5th floor, passing casualties that were being brought out on the stairs. Hoses were everywhere with no one on them, they were all tangled around each other.

On the floor was fire gear, gloves, tunics, helmets.

It took us a while to untangle the hose. We spent about 10 minutes just untangling hose.

We saw a flat on fire with smoke coming out of the door so we knocked the door down and went in. Anything that we could knock down there would prevent the fire going above. We then found another flat with the door open, so I think that firefighters had been in previously. Everything was ignited and we stayed there for a while firefighting. It was pretty bad in there and all the windows had gone so that you

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could see straight outside. Just prior to this flat we had put in the door to another flat because it obviously hadn't been searched. It seemed Okay in there and then we found a flat that was on fire and put that one out as best as we could.

Then another crew from Brixton turned up, I could tell by their voices as they came up behind us. We had been there for quite a while at this stage. We handed on the branch to them and they carried on firefighting on that floor. When we came out I think that we went up to the 6<sup>th</sup> floor where we knocked down a few doors just to double check things. We didn't find anyone in those flats. It was done for our piece of mind just to make sure that everything was okay. We made our way down and on the way went into the 4th floor, again just to double check everything was okay. By now our whistles were going because we were low on air. We then went to the control to tell them what we had done.

We took our sets off and changed the cylinder straight away, just in case we had to go back in. At this stage most of the Brixton firefighters had been in or were waiting to go in.

Whilst we in the tower I don't recall hearing any fire alarms or if there were any sprinklers there.

Sprinklers would definitely have made a difference.

Probably another hour passed by and we could still see people at the windows with torches and lots of casualties still coming out. The people with torches were hanging out of their windows and one by one the flats were getting filled with smoke and you could see the torches disappearing. We knew at this stage that the firefighters could not get high enough.

They still kept calling out for EDBA wearers. It was obvious that you were not going to get very high up from the ground in a normal set. At some stage they stopped sending firefighters in with normal BA sets. At some stage I saw my guvnor John STEVENS get hit with some molten stuff and the back of his neck was on fire. He ran into the room and a couple of the boys poured water down his neck. Subsequently he did have quite bad burns on his neck.

We thought that they could not keep holding back the SDBA wearers and eventually we were told that a team of 4 was needed. There was 6 of us together and 4 of the boys stepped forward and we went back in again under the riot shields. We were then held in what looked like a basement area for a little while, I don't know what the time was but it was getting light.

We were told by the control room that we needed to get to the 11<sup>th</sup> floor as there was a casualty on the stairway that was hampering efforts to bring people down. The casualty was very big so 3 or 4 people would be required. We were to try and get the casualty out of the way into a doorway or as far down as we could go. Enough to enable people to get up and down the stairway. We grabbed a salvage sheet,

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which is a big plastic sheet as we thought that this was the only thing we could really use to slide under her and move out of the way.

There was myself and 3 others, Firefighter WOODS, Firefighter WHITING and Firefighter KALARAI from Brixton. We all agreed that this was going to be very hard work to move the casualty. We took our demand valves out of our face masks, which means that your face mask is on but no air going into it. We decided to do this ourselves because it's not really procedure but everything had gone out the window that day as far as procedure was concerned. We got as high as we could until the atmosphere started getting bad again and then plugged them back in. By doing this we would then be using our air when we needed it. We got up to about the 6th floor and started to get a bit of condensation, a lot of steam and visibility was starting to get poor but we could still just about breathe it in. It was maybe on the 7<sup>th</sup> floor that we couldn't really see so I put my face mask back in. We checked each other out to make sure that we were all together. I was leading and was counting the floors as we went up. I noticed that somebody had actually marked on the walls at this stage but you had to be very close to see it. There was a couple of burst hoses and the water was just flooding down the stairs, it was unbelievable. It was very difficult to get past the hoses as they were spraying jets of water everywhere. You couldn't get past without getting annihilated by water jets.

We kept going, calling out the floors as we went until we got to the 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> floor. Pretty much from the 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> floor it was black smoke so you could tell that there was a lot of fires still on these floors. Couldn't see a thing because of the heat, the wet and the smoke.

We came across the casualty between what could have been between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> floors. I got to the casualty first. We had previously been told by several different crews that the body was deceased. I imagine that a lot of people had already checked but I checked it straight away anyway. I took my gloves off and checked for a pulse. The body was lifeless, burnt and a lot of the clothing ripped. I got Firefighter WOODS to double check with me. We were one hundred percent sure that it was lifeless. We then tried to move the casualty.

Initially I thought that if we could move it down one part of a flight then we could move it into a stairwell door. The body was very big and the stairwell was very narrow. You couldn't get 2 firefighters together on the stairs which is what we needed to get a good purchase. We did what we could to get the salvage sheet underneath and eventually tried sliding it down the stairs. It was very hard with all the hoses going down the stairs and nothing was moving like it should have. After a great deal of effort we eventually managed to move the casualty down and I found a door into a corridor. I checked the door and found that

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the heat that was coming out of it was unbelievable. You could not spend more than a few seconds near the door. Plan A was to move the casualty there but we couldn't and decided then to go down another floor and put it in the next one. As a team we tried different methods like holding the legs and holding the arms under the sheet.

We managed to get down another flight of stairs. At this stage one or two of the boys had their whistles going off. They were really low on air but they stuck with it so we could at least get the casualty to a good place. Just before all this happened another casualty came down the stairs so we knew that we had to move the body as people were still coming out.

We managed eventually to get down another flight of stairs and slightly out of the way. The boys whistles were going off and we started to get worried because they probably only had about 50 bar left and 10 flights of stairs to get down. As a crew we decided that we had done as much as we could possibly do. There was an EDBA crew either behind or in front of us so we let them know what we had done and then carried on down. We got our tallies, put our sets away and then just helped out with general things before the Police escorted us back out under the riot shields.

We had more of a realisation when we came out the final time that anybody above the floors that we had been to were not going to get out. We were then on the green by the Salvation Army just doing bits and pieces like moving cylinders and sets around. We saw an aerial appliance from another brigade and we helped them set up their stuff at some stage.

It was whilst we were here that we were told that we had to go to Paddington fire station for a debrief and counselling so we returned to our appliance which was in the same position that we had left it and went to Paddington. I'm not sure what the time was at this stage, probably between 12 midday and 1. It must have taken an hour or so to get there because of the traffic. After we had completed our notes and every one had seen the counsellor we left at about 3 o'clock and got back to Brixton sometime between 4 and 5.

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