

WITNESS STATEMENT

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

Statement of: WYBROW, RICHARD

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

Occupation: FIRE OFFICER

This statement (consisting of 7 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: RICHARD WHYBROW

Date: 25/01/2018

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

This statement refers to the time I attended the Grenfell Tower fire on WEDNESDAY 14th JUNE 2017 during the early hours.

During this interview I referred to my contemporaneous notes that I made after the incident and exhibit as REW/1. I also referred to an A3 colour map which I used for directions and that I drew on which I exhibit as REW/2.

I have been a fire fighter (FF) for 2 years and 4 months and I am classed as competent, currently based at EAST GREENWICH Fire Station E23 Red Watch. At the time of the incident I was still in my development stage and EAST GREENWICH Fire Station has been my only posting. I have been on familiarisation visits to tower blocks, warehouses, high rises, buildings of interest, things like that in our area which we do throughout the year as standard. If there is a new place built then we will go and check it over and take notes of it all and if it is one that we already have details on then we will just visit it during a certain time frame to make sure all the details are still correct. I can't remember how many I have done before Grenfell Tower but they are meant to be a regular thing, every month or so. I haven't been to a fire in a high rise building before. There is a policy on high rise procedure which details where to set up a Bridgehead, where the fire and search sector is and how you should charge a high riser for

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firefighting which is kept on our intranet called 'Hot Wire'. The building layout and information of the building is kept on what is known as an Electronic Premises Information Plate (ePIP), which can be found on the Operational Risk Database on the MDT. The Stay Put Policy is if there is a fire then the residents should stay put in their flat and close the doors, stay on the phone to control and let them know what they are doing, do an FSG with them and basically block themselves off from the fire. Staying put until the Fire Brigade come and get them.

I will be referring to a number of people in my statement who are: Crew Manager (CM) Chris JENKINS, Firefighter (FF) Sean OAKLEY, Firefighter (FF) Calvin WILSON, and Firefighter (FF) Isidro (Sid) GORDIJK. I will also mention the large casualty I moved on the 9th floor with my colleagues.

I have no previous knowledge of Grenfell Tower.

On TUESDAY 13 JUNE 2017 I was on my first night shift and I think it was about 1-1:30am when I was having my stand down time and listening to LBC on the radio which is when I heard them talking about a big fire that had broken out in SOUTH WEST LONDON and mention a huge number of firefighters, I thought it said 200 which was much more than I had heard of before. I remember wondering if we were going to get called to the fire before drifting off to sleep. When the call came in I heard the message over the tannoy that it was a multiple relief ordering and knew that it was the fire I heard on the radio, and a big one, so I raced to the Watch Room to see which appliance it was calling as it was a relief and does not say over the tannoy. I saw on the call slip that it was a 40 pump fire and a lot of people thought it was a mistake. At that point I was already assigned as riding the pump ladder and it was the pump that had been ordered to it but I was quite keen to go as it is something you want to be involved in as a firefighter so I approached Sid who I thought would be most likely to stand-down and swap with me on my machine, (the pump ladder) which he did so I could attend on the pump, call sign E232. (CM) Chris JENKINS was sat in the front of the fire engine by (FF) Calvin WILSON who was driving with me sat in the back behind Calvin and (FF) Sean OAKLEY who was the other BA wearer next to me. I can't remember the route but we then made our way to the incident not on blue lights. I was checking 'Twitter' en-route to keep updated but the others didn't believe it was that big when I was explaining it to them so I showed them a picture of it. Calvin was coming to the end of his black cab training so knew the way. I don't know how long it took to get to Grenfell Tower but it was a straight route as there was no traffic

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and you could see the smoke as you approached from the incident ground. As we were arriving we heard over the radio that all relief appliances were to start coming over on blue lights which is when we started thinking that things are picking up, it's getting worse.

It was daylight when we arrived about 4-4:30am and we parked quite far away, coming from the EAST I think and it was easy to park, about a 5-10 minute walk away but couldn't see the tower until walking up to it as it is quite built up around there, but you could see the smoke in the air. We received a message for a rendezvous point and what road to come in via but I don't know what it was as I don't know the area at all. When we got there we were directed where to park which was on the corner of a road and told where to walk to and to bring cylinders with us on top of our BA sets and they told all members of the appliance to take a BA set with them including the IC. There are 5 spare cylinders on the appliance so we took one each. There was not a lot of people around as they had been dispersed by the police, but there was a lot of fire engines. We then walked to the incident which I can't remember but think I was speculating what it was going to be like and getting pumped up for it.

My first view of the tower looked like a war zone. It looked like something you see on the news in Syria. I wasn't actually phased by it. It was only when I looked at (CM) Chris JENKINS- he had quite a worried look on his face and he has done over 20 years. I asked him if he was alright and he said, "I've got a bad feeling about this. This thing could come down." It made it more real for me then to hear someone who has done over 20 years to look concerned. Then I started feeling more concerned about it. I couldn't see any residents but there was a lot of debris falling off, burnt-up large sheets falling off, no brickwork, and bits of ash. There was quite a lot of fire still. Every now and then, more so on the other side of the building you could suddenly see another flat light up where more oxygen had been introduced. It was popping up all over the place. It was still pretty bad when we got there but I don't recall how the fire was and how it was behaving. In the original videos you can see the fire going up in a streak all the way up the building, but when we were there you didn't see so much of that, it was all blackened and still a lot of fire. I remember the tower being very blackened in a diagonal way going up the building. I don't remember what side it was but it looked like the fire had started lower down and had travelled up. I didn't hear any screaming/shouting.

We then sat down outside the gym of the leisure centre which I think was called 'Better Leisure Centre'.

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We did take the Nominal Roll Board (NRB) with us but (CM) JENKINS would have dealt with that as it was his job and I don't know who he gave it to on the particular day, but it would have been the Command Unit. From where I was the tower was in front of you, on the left hand side is a grassy area, and on the right is the gym/Leisure Centre and firefighters were lined up alongside the gym and scattered everywhere. There were loads of oxygen cylinders being trolleyed around and everyone was waiting to go in. Every now and then you would get a few people come out that said they had been in there and saying that it was really bad and that they have worked really hard in there, looking sweaty and tired. We then got brought forward in our group of 4 under the walkway and told by someone to go through, walking in single file. Originally they were asking for Extended Duration Breathing Apparatus (EDBA) wearers but when they couldn't find anyone else then they would say something like, 'we need 10/15/4 people Standard Duration Breathing Apparatus SDBA' and every time they called we thought that was us and we would be going in now but then you get to another holding area and there are a lot of firefighters there. We then move to the next holding area, walking EAST to WEST by the under walk and bridge near the train Station which was right above us and there was a sign that I think said LATIMER HOUSE, next to the playground by the front of the tower by the ramp. Undercover, police then walked us to the second staging area where we waited for 2-3 hours. Most of the firefighters were SDBA and from what we heard EDBA wearers had gone in a few times. I can't remember what side but looking at the tower I think there were less flames the other side and it looked like it was burnt more on one side, the right hand side I think. I remember seeing an old oriental man brought out from the tower who might have been the last survivor, he looked alive but pretty beaten by smoke. It was around this time that I saw salvage sheets down by the walkway/path on the WEST side that had tape going across it, cordoned off by police with paramedics in there, which looked like they were covering deceased.

Whilst I was in this holding area I needed to go to the toilet so went with Calvin to the pub near LATIMER ROAD Station and saw a couple of people inside being treated for shock by paramedics. On the way into the pub and on the way out, members of the public were coming up to us and asking for information if people were still inside or had been brought out but we said that we didn't know anything. We then WENT back to the second staging area where we continued to wait. I was still wearing my BA which I had done for the whole time because I didn't want to miss it when it was our turn, but our backs were broken at the end of it. There were about 20-40 firefighters in the area but I don't know who the Station Manager (SM) was looking after the area. Firefighters kept advancing forward but the (SM) kept

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pushing them back as that was where you would go to move on to the next holding area. People were getting tired and fed-up, feeling like we were just sitting there not doing anything and wondering why we weren't being brought in. There were EDBA wearers who had longer time on their sets who were all getting exhausted and we were all fresh and ready to go. We felt like we were being wasted a bit and were a bit frustrated.

From there we moved next to a wall on the WEST side where there was another (SM) which was the third area where the riot police were and we were run in one by one. I can't remember how it went but it was one at a time and I don't recall anything dropping. There was a single door on the WEST side which we entered I believe and there was only one means of escape from the fire as far as I know. As a group I think we were just inside the doorway for a bit on the ground floor before being moved to the main entrance where the stairwell is by the stairwell. There was about 1ft of water in there from the water that had been spent upstairs and quite a lot of firefighters, and writing on the wall that was from people making notes about Fire Survival Guidance (FSG) calls and how many might be in there/what levels- I couldn't make much sense of it really. There was a portable pump which acts like the back of a fire engine and pulls the water in and which couldn't be moved outside because all the hose was connected to it but it was kicking out all the fumes in the area where we were in. We then got moved back from there into the bit in-between where you first walk into the tower. The stairwell area is where there were 2 officers in charge keeping people at bay and telling us who they wanted to come up and where there is a small corridor with a toilet in it which is where we stood for a bit. We then got moved back to our original place when we first walked into the tower and where we just sat around, I was sat on a worktop in the kitchenette where we waited for what seemed like a long time. We thought we weren't going to get pulled forward and would be sent back but then someone came in and told us they needed people so all of my crew went into the stairwell area where we were lining up on the left hand side as you come out into the stairwell area up against the wall ready to go. There was an officer there that was telling us that we needed to make our way to the 4th floor where the Bridgehead is. The stairs were in front of us and we were told to take some hose with us so I think we took one of those each and then made our way up the stairs until we saw everyone gathered on the 4th floor. The Bridgehead was quite busy with officers and there was writing on the wall. The Entry Control Board (ECB) which works off telemetry was there where you can put 10 breathing apparatus Tallies into the board so they can keep track of your air pressure and time you have been in. I can't remember where it was or who was on it and can only

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remember one board.

I can't remember the atmosphere at the Bridgehead but the air quality seemed alright and I don't recall seeing any smoke. As you come out from the stairwell entrance on the 4th floor you are immediately in the Bridgehead. It was a bit chaotic and it would have been too congested for us to be just waiting around on the Bridgehead which is why we were then directed into the first flat on the 4th floor where we waited until called up by the Committing Officer. The flat was the first left as you come out of the 4 floor stair shaft and didn't seem too damaged by fire or smoke. The 4 of us were standing in the kitchen area which was open plan into the living room and in the corridor was a (CM) and female firefighter from HOLLOWAY that I later went up the tower with. We waited in the flat for less than 10 minutes before Watch Manager BROOKS (WM) appeared at the entrance to the flat and told us that we were going to be committed and telling us that he didn't have a very nice brief for us. He said that there was a large person on the 9th floor on top of all the hose that we needed to move out of the way, and once we had done that, then go up as there is reports of a child a few floors above and to try and find them, Search and Rescue (S&R) on those floors. I don't know how the (CM) and female firefighter became part of our crew and not (CM) JENKINS and (FF) WILSON who remained in the flat, but it was just me and (FF) OAKLEY with the 2 from HOLLOWAY who went up. (WM) BROOKS decided that a crew of 4 was needed because it was such a large person and I think because the 2 from HOLLOWAY were just standing in the hallway so they got picked.

We then confirmed the brief with (WM) BROOKS and put our BA sets on, checking each other over to make sure that everything was tucked in and secure. We had no other equipment with us. I can't remember doing it but I would have handed in my Tally to Entry Control and giving them our brief, which was between the stairwell and the flat we were in, approx. 2 metres away and the stairwell is about 2 steps away from Entry Control. Sean had a BARIE Set which is a radio connected to his BA set and he said it was just distortion. Every crew should have one 'comms' set on them that you should use during a fire and not your personal radio. I didn't even try and use my personal radio but I had heard that none of them were working. We then went under air and made our way up the stairwell to the 9th floor walking around a lot of hose and debris on the floor and I remember there was what looked like a dead cat in the stairwell and other things you had to negotiate around. It was very dark and very wet. You could see but it was quite dim and on a scale of 1-10 with 1 being light and 10 pitch black, on the 4th floor I would say 3-

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4 but on way up to the 9 it was 6-7. The stairs going up were concrete and not very wide and covered in hose. We followed Safe Movement Procedure which is when we test the integrity of the materials used in the stairwell by sweeping and stamping which is what we are taught in training school and using our hands to make sure there are no wires hanging down and there is a safe passage up. I did see other firefighters but don't know what floors or know who they were because they were wearing BA masks, but whatever floor they were on you could hear them shouting out that they had cleared the floor. I was feeling alright at this time. I can't remember if we were counting or just because someone said we were on floor 9 but someone had written numbers on the wall, not on every floor in Chinograph pencil. I don't know how long it took for us to get to the 9th floor but I had used quite a bit of air because of moving around the hose and the BA set on your back so by the time I got there I was breathing quite heavily. With SDBA you get 31 minutes of air as standard when breathing normally but it decreases when you are working harder. It wasn't until I got to the 12th floor in the stairwell that I could feel the heat above me. Sean was a bit ahead of me and he said that it was too hot to go up there with no firefighting media.

As we got to the 9th floor I saw the body which was a very large black person with corn row type hair and wearing a maroon/red T-shirt coming about three quarters down the arm. I don't remember anything else being worn. The head was almost beneath the chest, the arms were bent round with one behind and it was in a bad way. There may have been a foot on the last step of the staircase coming down to the 9th floor and the body was right in the small square landing area where one staircase leads into the next. The body was face down and the way it was angled looked as if the person had been running down the stairs and fallen. The hose was charged with water so it was heavy and hard to move out of the way, maybe 3-4 lengths, some on top of the body around the arms and legs and some underneath. I think the 9TH floor door was being kept open by a Halligan Bar. The air quality was alright, a little bit smokey and dark but you could still see though, 6 on the scale of 1-10. When we all got to the body no one really went to do anything because I think we were all thinking how we were going to do it so I thought I would just grab an arm and do it myself which was just not possible. I think it was the right arm I grabbed around the elbow and went to pull towards where the flats were but couldn't move it and ended up pulling the skin up the arm to the wrist. I then said to Sean to grab the other arm round the hand which is what I did on the other side and on the count of 3 we heaved the body across the stairwell and into the area outside of the flats and covered the body with a salvage sheet that was already there. I don't think the other 2 from HOLLOWAY touched the body as they must have been holding the hose up. As you come out of the stairwell and look

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immediately left the body was put against the wall in the communal area where the flats are by the first door on the right, It took about 3-5 minutes to move the body and the hose was left where it was.

The 4 of us then checked our air and I had used quite a lot of mine, more than Sean but we agreed to go up and have a look, having just enough to look around. I can't remember how we walked up but we were scanning for bodies, the visibility 6-7 on the scale. We got to the 12th floor and around the charged hose, (3-4 lengths that were wrapped around the stairs and still going up) there were rags/clothes, some sort of material, so Sean and I started to pull it out of the way and look under to see if that was the child, pressing on it to see if there was anything under it but couldn't feel anything and it was quite dark. There was also a length of hose that didn't have a branch or anything else on it and it was gushing water but there was a branch next to it so I tried even though I didn't think I would be able to, to force the branch into the hose to try and stop the water gushing down the stairwell but Sean and I couldn't do it. Because of the child Sean and I then went to have a look on the 13th floor but we didn't go all the way up. The 2 colleagues from HOLLOWAY stayed in the stairwell. I think Sean said that he was going to have a quick look and nearly got all the way up but turned around and said it was getting too hot. It was like having a radiator above you.

All 4 of us then made our way back down to the 4th floor without going into any of the communal areas. The conditions were the same as before, no different or worse. There was still a lot of water and fairly dark and I don't remember seeing anyone else. I don't really remember, but we got back to the ECP and Bridgehead where I told someone that we were back and where we started to get undressed. When we got our BA Tallies back we went to a different part of the Bridgehead to a communal area which is where you come out of the stairwell and turn immediately right, along that wall is where things were being written down, plans and observations and where an officer, (I don't know the rank) was writing on the wall or a board. We were then thanked and made our way back downstairs where there was an officer handing out water bottles at the door to the stairwell, then we walked to the bottom and the entrance to where we first came in where the police with riot shields were taking us back to the wall where we first lined up, exiting the same way as we came in. I don't know where the 2 firefighters from HOLLOWAY went as we didn't know them, doing what we had to with them in there and then parting ways. We then walked back to where the playground is and that is when I took my BA set off and put it on the floor, taking my tunic off and wrapping it so it was inside out because it was contaminated. My gloves had skin from the body on

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them as did the sleeves of my tunic because I had to put my arms under the body. I didn't want to touch anything so I got some alcohol wipes from the fire engine that was next to us and tried to wipe myself down a bit while I waited for Chris and Calvin to come out. I was paranoid that the water had been around the dead bodies that I had drank so I spat it out and was scraping my tongue, then looking for a bag to put my uniform in.

I have no idea of the time but it was a pretty sunny day I think, fairly warm and didn't notice anything different about the tower from the first time I saw it. We waited for about 15-20 minutes next to the playground before Calvin and Chris met us and we all then made our way back to the leisure centre where we sat on the grass for a bit until told to leave by an officer and to go down into the basement of the leisure centre by the basketball court for refreshments. There was only about 10 people down there and we stayed for about 20 minutes before being told to go back up remember what we did from there but it was pretty much time to go home and we were trying to find out if we were going home or back to PADDINGTON. There were officers talking amongst themselves and I'm sure it was a Borough Commander (BC) with ginger hair that said we could go. Our CM gets told what to do and then he tells us what to do, but I don't remember how it happened.

The 4 of us then walked back through an alleyway and once we got out of the perimeter the press were coming up trying to video us and asking questions. There were a couple of 'Civvies', local residents/people asking about individual people but I don't think I answered anyone. Our appliance was where we had left it so we then made our way to PADDINGTON but the roads were busy by now and we arrived somewhere between 12-2pm. We parked up outside PADDINGTON Fire Station on the road and everyone was tired. We then went in and did our reports and if you wanted to you could have a chat with a councillor which some people did. From PADDINGTON we then made our way back to EAST GREENWICH.

I think everyone should have EDBA training so they would have had fresh resources with EDBA to go in on a conveyer belt sort of thing instead of using the same people and putting us aside for so long. There is only a limited number in LONDON and I don't know if they mobilised all EDBA wearers from LONDON but that would obviously expose other parts of LONDON if there was a fire. The 'Comms'

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were terrible in general and the BARIE Sets are notorious for being really poor communication. They are hard to wire up, they dangle and are uncomfortable, never really working properly and nine times out of ten they expose a gap in your mask which makes air pour out.

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