

**WITNESS STATEMENT**

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

Statement of: GENTRY, ROBBIE

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

Occupation: FIRE OFFICER

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This statement (consisting of 8 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 GENTRY

Date: 10/08/2018

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

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This statement is my account of my involvement in the fire at Grenfell Tower, which happened in the early hours of Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> June 2017.

I will mention the following people.

- Crew Manager (C/M) Ian BARRETT
- Fire Fighter (FF) David D'COSTA - driver.
- FF Donovan REID - On a standby to Lewisham for the shift.

These three people were posted with me, travelled to and worked with me, at the incident.

I joined the London Fire Brigade (LFB) in 2002 when I underwent 16 weeks of initial training at Southwark.

From there I was posted to Lewisham fire station where I have remained ever since. So at the time of Grenfell fire, I was a fire fighter based at Lewisham fire station.

After my initial training, I completed my 1 year probation when I became a substantive fire fighter.

Lewisham is a Fire Rescue Unit (FRU) station and so around 2004 I was able to complete a 4 week FRU course.

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The FRU carry Extended Duration Breathing Apparatus (EDBA) which enables fire fighters to remain under air for longer periods than standard apparatus. It also carries specialist cutting gear for Road Traffic Collisions and covers chemical incidents and water rescue.

Throughout my service, I have refreshed my FRU training and so I am trained in all FRU skills. In addition, I am Urban Search And Rescue (USAR) trained and I am qualified in the shoring of unstable buildings.

In terms of high rise training and experience, I have been to a few high rise fires but nothing on the scale of Grenfell.

I'd never been to Grenfell before the fire but I regularly attended high rise buildings for 7 (2) (D) visits on Lewisham's ground.

These visits are to enable us to familiarise ourselves with particular high rise buildings so if there is an incident, we have a previous understanding of the layout of the place, how many people are inside and where key things are such as dry risers. It gives us an in depth understanding of the building should we be called there to an incident.

The information of such visits are recorded and are entered into the system.

I'd never attended such a visit to Grenfell Tower as it is not on Lewisham's ground.

I can't remember doing any high rise training which involved live fires, they were mainly dry drills where we practice procedures. I have done many classroom, lecture based lessons around high rise incidents.

On Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> June 2017, I came on duty at 8.00pm at Lewisham.

I was due to perform an 8.00pm to 9.30am shift.

My role was to be a fire fighter on the FRU and I was posted with the colleagues that I've mentioned at the top of this statement.

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We did our equipment test and it was a quiet evening. I can't remember having a call prior to Grenfell and the first I knew of it was at 2.20am when the station bells sounded and we were called to the scene. It was now Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> June 2017.

The protocol is that if an incident requires 8 or more appliances, then an FRU must also attend the scene.

C/M BARRETT took the call and told us that there was a high rise fire with multiple calls to it. That's the first that any of us knew about Grenfell.

FF D'COSTA was driving and I sat behind him on the truck. We left Lewisham and travelled to Grenfell on blue lights and two tones. I heard on the radio that the incident had been made up to 20 pumps meaning that the person in charge on the ground had request 20 appliances to attend the scene.

I don't know what route we took. I was in the back and others were navigating us. There came a point when we were on a fly over of some kind where I looked and had a reasonable view of the tower.

There were a good few floors on fire with flames spreading up on the outside. Normally a fire should be contained within one flat but I could tell by the ferocity of the fire that this wasn't a normal fire. It was incredible and so and my first thoughts were that it may be a terrorist incident.

As I saw the tower, I knew that it was a large scale incident and I was thinking about my training, building collapse and thought that there must have already been an evacuation of the residents.

We arrived at the scene at around 2.50am and parked in either Bramley Road or Lockton Street. I have marked a map with different locations on it (RJG/2) and have marked one of the two places where I think we parked.

I got off from the truck and saw that there were loads of members of the public about telling us to hurry up.

We didn't take all of our equipment from the truck, but did take a Thermal Imaging Camera (TIC), and made our way on foot towards the tower. It was a 4-5 minute brisk walk and we arrived at a staging area to the east of the tower near to the leisure centre.

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It was quite an open area and there was initial confusion as to where we were going.

We were met by an LFB officer and told to make our way to the entrance of the tower. I've marked on the map where we met him. We made our way to the tower and as we approached an undercover walkway to the south of the tower I remember seeing a body fall to the ground from the tower.

I don't know from how high he had fallen but he landed maybe 40 feet from me. I remember that he was quite a large man and had a limb missing.

There was so much going on. I saw a turntable ladder, a fire truck and there was debris falling all over from the building. The debris was a variety of sizes of plastic and metal, along with smashing glass everywhere.

Once it had fallen the debris carried on burning, letting off toxic smelling fumes.

So I only glanced at the fallen person but a very short while later I asked my crew whether they had seen it. They hadn't.

We carried on and were held for 10-15 minutes under the walkway to the west of the building just 2 or 3 metres from it. I've marked on the map where that was as "held first time in".

Although we were wearing our EDBA sets, we were not using the air from them, as we were not yet in the building.

I remember that the toxic fumes coming from the debris and building were starting to concern all of us. It was really uncomfortable and I remember FF D'COSTA complaining about the conditions in which we were being held.

We then entered the building with an LFB officer directing us in when it was safest to do so. At this stage the police hadn't arrived with their riot shields which were subsequently used to protect us above our heads from the debris.

Once inside, there was water and hose everywhere. It was busy and I saw officers and BA boards. It was here, on the ground floor that the bridgehead had been set up. Throughout my time in the tower, the bridgehead remained there.

Conditions at the bridgehead weren't too bad. They were better than they were outside.

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I saw casualties being brought out by Fire Fighters and whilst in the ground floor lobby area, we were verbally briefed to go up to the 9<sup>th</sup> floor of the tower to search for and rescue residents.

We were told that there was water and fire fighting media already on the floor which we could use.

The four of us, still C/M BARRETT, FF D'COSTA, FF Reid and myself, made our way up under EDBA air, taking with us a Thermal Imaging Camera (TIC).

As we did, the initial open staircase on the mezzanine floor changed to a narrow and dark one.

I was quite surprised as to how narrow it was. You could only get two people abreast at any one time. I remember there being a handrail.

The stairwell quickly became smoked logged as we climbed. I led the team up and saw that there was water cascading down the stairs, which had loads of hose lying on.

There were fire fighters coming down the other way and normally you would stop and speak to them to gather any information that you could.

But it was clear that most of them were distressed, low on air, and just needed to get out of the tower.

Around the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> floor, we came across a body lying in the stairwell which obstructed our route. It was a large person and I knelt down to check their condition.

I couldn't feel for a pulse as I had heavy duty gloves on which, because of the conditions, I couldn't take off. However, I could tell that the person was deceased. They were face down and so I placed my hand on the back to see if I could feel them breathing.

I didn't feel anything and so I told C/M BARRETT that they were deceased. He needed to make a decision. I was sure that the person was deceased and so C/M BARRETT told us to carry on up the tower.

We came to what we thought was the 9<sup>th</sup> floor but it transpired, after we came back down, that we were actually 12<sup>th</sup>. The floor numbers weren't visible in the smoke and so we had counted as we went up. I've since found out that we miscalculated as the tower has a mezzanine which we hadn't accounted for.

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So we arrived at the 12<sup>th</sup> floor, thinking it was the 9<sup>th</sup> and opened the door from the stairwell to the lobby area. The stairwell which we were in was completely smoke logged and as I opened the door, I could see that the lobby area was the same.

I turned left and used the wall of the building to guide myself to the first flat that I came to. I banged on the door and pushed it open.

Straight away I was surprised to see a lady in the flat. I'll describe her at the end of this statement. I didn't hesitate, grabbed her by the scruff of the neck and pulled her out of the flat, into the lobby area and handed her to my crew. She needed to get out of the building.

I remember her screaming that she couldn't breathe but I thought that she had to get out and that she must have been able to take some air in in order to speak.

I then saw a second person in the flat, a male who didn't say anything. I grabbed him and again pulled him out into the lobby and passed him to my crew near to the stairwell.

I needed to search the flat to make sure it was now empty. The flat was hot and smoky with minimal light but with no flames inside. I searched the bathroom on my right and a bedroom and kitchen. I was in the flat for 2-3 minutes and ensured that it was clear.

I then realised that my crew had taken the two casualties downstairs and that I was now on my own. I guess that my crew hadn't realised that I'd gone back into the flat and had left with the casualties.

To be in a burning building alone is not a good situation to be in and so had to make the decision to leave and go back down.

I made it down to the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, I think on the mezzanine floor, where I met up with my crew and saw the two casualties that I had rescued being handed over to another crew who would take them to safety.

I think now that we had realised that we had been on the 12<sup>th</sup> floor rather than the 9<sup>th</sup>. So we needed to return up the tower to the 9<sup>th</sup> to complete our original task.

We checked that we had enough air and then, as a crew, we all went back up the tower, this time to the 9<sup>th</sup> floor.

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We opened the doors from the staircase to the lobby and again saw that it was completely smoke logged and extremely hot.

Because of the smoke and heat, we had to get onto our hands and knees and, using the TIC, crawled to the right, following some hose that was on the floor.

Not only was there smoke but there were flames everywhere. We found a branch at the end of a hose but quickly realised that there was no water pressure and that the hose was useless.

On our hands and knees, we crawled into the first two rooms of the first flat that we came to, the door of which was already open.

We were on our hands and knees, in a completely smoke logged environment with flames all around us and with no water to fight the fire.

I remember C/M BARRETT getting lost in the flat and ending up in a cupboard. I nudged him and made sure that he came out of the cupboard.

C/M BARRETT said to us that this was too dangerous. We were running low on air, I think down to 110 bar, and C/M BARRETT said that we should withdraw.

He was right, so having fully swept the flat that we were in to check that no one was inside, we reversed, followed the hose back to the stairwell and made our way back down the tower.

We arrived at the bridgehead on the ground floor, handed in our tallies to Entry Control and we were escorted out of the building by the police under riot shields.

C/M BARRETT told a black officer working on the bridgehead what we had found and what we had done both on the 12<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> floors. So a debrief was made to the bridgehead.

We left as our original crew of 4 and made our way back to outside the leisure centre.

We changed our cylinders so that we were ready for another deployment and waited for an hour or so. We were all eager to go back in to help save people. I could see that there were still casualties being brought out to the nearby ambulances.

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From where I was I could see that the tower was completely alight. I've marked on the map as "rest area" where we waited.

As we waited, an Assistant Commissioner came and thanked us for our efforts.

After about an hour or so, C/M BARRETT told us that we were going to be deployed back inside. We put our EDBA sets on and waited at the outside staging area for 15 minutes or so. By now it was daylight.

We returned back inside the building, using the same route as the first time and waited in the ground floor lobby area for another 40 minutes.

There seemed to be more personnel in the lobby area than the first time, perhaps 20-30 fire fighters, 8-12 of whom were wearing EDBA, with a queuing system for fire fighters waiting to be deployed.

As crews came out, the next crews would be briefed and deployed.

There were BA boards which use telemetry and Forward Information Boards which are used to record information on.

I don't know any of the names of personnel who were running the bridgehead but there were Crew Managers, Watch Managers and Station Managers there.

There were glass windows to my right, a cream coloured wall to my left and the stairs and boards in front of me.

We were verbally tasked with going to the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> floor to search and rescue.

We went up the staircase to the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> floor. The conditions there were much better than during our first deployment and because of that, we weren't under air. We searched a flat, which wasn't particularly fire damaged and found no one.

We returned down to the bridgehead where C/M BARRETT debriefed our deployment to the same officer as he had previously. We were again escorted out under shields.

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We went back to the holding area by the leisure centre where we had some food and waited to be redeployed. We waited there for a few hours but then at around 3.00pm, someone decided that as we had been in twice, we were to be released.

Throughout my time at the scene, I can't really comment about our radios. In a team of 4, two of us will have communications. I was one who didn't have them. C/M BARRETT mentioned to me that the communications were poor although I can't say that myself.

After we were released at around 3.00pm, we were taken to Paddington Fire Station for a debrief where I completed some notes (RJG/1). Our truck, sets and equipment were all left at the scene and we were taken in a van.

We got back to Lewisham at around 5-6pm. I went home, made the decision to come in for 8.00pm that evening, and completed a full night shift on the FRU.

I have not been back to Grenfell Tower since the incident.

The lady who I rescued on the 12<sup>th</sup> floor had dark hair, 5'6" tall.

The male who I rescued on the 12<sup>th</sup> floor was a bit taller than the lady.

Since the fire, and because of it, I've had treatment at the Brompton Hospital for scarring of my lungs.

The condition was initially identified after I failed a brigade medical. My lung capacity had dropped and so I was sent for tests. The Brompton is a lung specialist hospital and the condition has developed since the fire.

I produce my notes that I made at Paddington as exhibit RJG/1.

I produce the map of the area as exhibit RJG/2.

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