

**WITNESS STATEMENT**

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

Statement of: BROWN, RUSSELL

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

Occupation: FIRE OFFICER

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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: R BROWN

Date: 06/02/2018

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

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This statement refers to the fire that occurred at Grenfell Tower.

I am above named Fire Fighter attached to Red Watch at Dagenham Fire Station (F41).

I joined the London Fire Brigade in September 2005, posted to the Red Watch at Stratford Fire Station. In June 2016, I moved to the Red Watch at Dagenham Fire Station where I currently work as a Fire Fighter. There are three Appliance attached to Dagenham Fire station: Pump (F412), Pump Ladder (F411) and an Aerial Ladder Platform (F415).

I cannot say when I last received training in a high-rise block of flats but we often go over policy notes and practice drills on the drill tower at Dagenham Fire Station. After this training I was considered competent. I have never done any realistic training in a high-rise block of flats. Throughout my service, I have experienced various calls and attended low-level fires in a block of flats. Prior to the Grenfell Tower, I have never attended a high-rise fire where the flames have fully developed. I am not aware of any pre prepared plan if compartmentation fails, we adapt to how the fire is reacting. After the Lakanal House Fire in 2009, training policies regarding the movement of fire outside compartments was introduced.

Prior to the incident, I have never been to Grenfell Tower before. I am unfamiliar with the layout and surrounding street names.

The Grenfell Tower is residential block that has twenty plus floors. The main entrance is covered by a canopy and is located on the front side of the tower. The front side faces a children's playground.

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Alongside the front of the tower is a walk way than runs under arches. If you face the front of the tower, to the right is a grass area and leisure centre. I do not know what is situated on the rear side.

As you walk through the main entrance, you enter a square room with a corridor on the far side. At the end of corridor are a set of double doors. These doors lead to a lobby that has a staircase positioned on the left and a wall to the right. The staircase ascends to the first floor and leads to set of double doors that accesses the main stairway. The main stairway leads all the way up the tower.

During the incident, I was riding Pump Ladder Appliance F411 with my crew: Watch Manager (WM) Alan FURLONG, Fire Fighter (FF) Claire PAPWORTH, FF Katie JOHNSON and FF Ben BRADLEY. We were equipped with Standard Duration Breathing Apparatus (SDBA).

On Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2017, I was on night duty starting at 8pm with a view to finish the next morning at 930am. My crew and I came in early at 7pm to relieve the day shift. We began the shift as normal: we went through the roll call, were given our postings/roles and conducted various equipment checks.

Night duties are normally quite relaxed. I cannot remember if we attended any calls but at some point during the night, the crew riding F412 went out to a call. On their return, FF Nick WILSON informed me they had heard over the radio of a major incident going on in town. The true scale of the incident became apparent when I saw images of the Grenfell Tower on TV and various social media sites. Having seen the images, my crew and I were half expecting to be called to the incident.

At approximately 330am, the light and bell system came on, alerting a call had come in. Normally, the bell system requests a specific appliance but on this occasion, it was requesting "multiple appliances". As no specific appliance were requested, all of the crews attended to watch room to obtain the call slip. At a normal incident, call slips are brief and can fit on an A5 sheet of paper. The length of this call slip was approximately two A4 sheets. We all had a look at the call slip. From memory, the call slip referred to the Grenfell Tower and was requesting the Pump Ladder Appliance to a twenty pump relief. It also gave a rendezvous point of Blenheim Crescent junction Ladbroke Grove.

My crew and I quickly gathered our kit, boarded F411 and started making our way. I sat at the back as FF PAPWORTH drove out of Dagenham turning left towards Ballards Road and joining the A13 westbound. We were driving without sirens as the roads were clear. WM FURLONG, seated in front, was using the map system on the MDT to guide FF PAPWORTH to Ladbroke Grove. My experiences with the MDT have been okay but the satnav system needs improving.

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We arrived at Blenheim Road junction Ladbroke Grove just after 4am. From where we had parked up, we could not see the tower. As we arrived, there was a large number of appliances parked on either side of the road. WM FURLONG attended the command unit, parked further down.

The Command Unit communicate messages to and from control. They are a point of contact between Fire Fighters and officers in charge of the incident. They have access to staff numbers, maps and building information.

At approximately 5am, WM FURLONG came back and informed us to don our BA sets, bring additional cylinders and to wait at the rendezvous point. We remained on the corner of Blenheim Road waiting to be tasked.

It was now becoming daylight and we had been waiting for a while. WM FURLONG had returned having used the toilet at a florist. He stated he had a view of the tower, down one of the roads near the florist. On hearing this, we all walked to have a look.

We walked approximately fifty metres down the road to a corner by the florist. I have looked to the left and could see the Grenfell Tower approximately one hundred and fifty metres away. The base of the tower was out of view but I could see two of the sides. I do not know what sides these were. There was a "V" shaped scorch mark on the corner of the two sides, starting from the fifth floor to half way up the tower. The section above the scorch mark was completely burnt out with yellow and grey smoke emanating from the tower. There were still small pockets of fire dotted on various floors, suggesting most of the flames had extinguished. After five minutes of staring at the tower in disbelief, we returned back to Blenheim Road.

At approximately 7am, we were briefed by the command unit officer. He instructed us to make our way to the BA main control situated by the leisure centre outside Grenfell Tower. Carrying BA sets and spare cylinders, we started to walk to the BA control. We walked for some time, going through a number of alleyways. As we got closer we could see the front side of the tower.

At approximately 730am we arrived at the BA main control. There were hundreds of Fire Fighters and a number of senior officers. WM FURLONG was given a task by a senior officer whilst the rest of us were instructed to wait.

We now had a closer view of the tower with just the leisure centre side was in view, It was a massively charred building. Various flats were fully ignited from inside with flames coming out of the windows. The flames would go out in one window but then re-ignite in another. An ALP, positioned to the right of the leisure centre side, was spraying water on the upper floors. An appliance was connected to the ALP,

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supplying it with water. A hose reel from the appliance was tied off on the cage. I do not know why the ALP was being supplied water in this way, but it suggested they may have been issues with the rising main.

A senior officer approached the mass of SDBA wearers and started to brief, them six at a time. He instructed them to move to the next holding area situated opposite the front side of the tower. At 1030am, my crew and I got the front of the queue and were drafted to the next holding area. We walked down the pathway approaching the tower from the leisure centre side. We walked passed the appliance supplying the ALP, under the arches and through the walkway to the second BA holding area that was managed by WM FURLONG. He was communicating with someone in the tower via personal radios and then sending Fire Fighters in. Debris was falling from above frequently and Fire Fighters had to be escorted into the tower under shields held by Police.

I was taken back by what I could see. It was a big difference seeing it in person, in comparison to the images we had seen on the news.

We had been waiting at the BA main control for some time and there was now a long queue of SDBA wearers. The ALP had been replaced by a taller ALP from Surrey. It was evident, EDBA (Extended Duration Breathing Apparatus) crews were "re-wearing". They were recharging their cylinders in front of us and going back in. They all looked run down, having been in the tower a number of times. EDBA crews were being dedicated to the upper levels but you could hear some of them could not pass the lower floors. We started to question why SDBA were not being used as these were tasks they could deal with.

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We had a closer view of the front side of the tower and could see the children's playground. The destruction on this side of the tower was similar to that of the leisure centre side. It was apparent more debris had fallen on this side as there was bits of cladding laying on the ground. An appliance was also parked on this side. I do not know what it was being used for.

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After an hour, WM FURLONG gave us the go ahead to enter the tower. FF BRADLEY, FF PAPWORTH, FF JOHNSON and I walked to the main entrance, under shields held by Police. We entered into the square room where EDBA wearers were waiting and moved into the corridor on the other end of the room, joining a queue of SDBA wearers. Managing this queue was a senior officer, standing by the double doors leading to the lobby. I could see the lobby area with the stairway leading to the first floor. Written on the walls to right side of the lobby were notes made by the initial crews. Written in the notes were the floor numbers and the amount of people on the floors.

We remained in the corridor, stood in several inches of water that was pouring down the stairway with bits of debris floating around. Water was leaking from the ceiling above and our kit was getting wet. As we got closer to the front of the queue, an officer informed us the Red Watch were being relieved by the day duty. We informed the officer we had been waiting for over six hours and refused to go back. At approximately 1pm, my crew and I got to the front of the queue. The senior officer received instruction over the radio to send SDBA crews up to the bridgehead. The four of us were lead through the lobby, up the stairway and to the main staircase. As we entered the stairway, I noticed how congested and narrow the conditions were. There was no smoke but it was dark with water was cascading down. We did not come across anyone as we walked up to the bridgehead on the fourth floor.

The bridgehead was busy and congested. Positioned in front of the lifts, was an Entry Control Board (ECB) managed by a Crew Manager who was the Entry Control Officer (ECO). The four of us were put in a flat and split into two teams. I was paired with FF PAPWORTH.

After five minutes, a Watch Manager came in to brief us. We were tasked to search flats on the ninth floor and fire fight any flames we came across. By now, I was eager to get to work and help.

We got BA sets ready, made our way to the ECB and briefed the ECO of our task. The ECO was joined by other senior officers, who did not want us to attend the ninth floor. They reassigned us to search flats on the sixth floor and fire-fight. We were informed flat 35 had a ruptured gas main and a 45mm jet with hose was ready for us to use on the sixth floor. Once the sixth floor had been done, we were to do the same on the floors directly above. We were also told the body of a large male was laying somewhere on the stairway.

FF PAPWORTH and I put our BA masks, handed our tallies to the ECB and entered the staircase. The conditions were the same as we first entered: It was dark with water cascading down. Keeping my torch on, FF PAPWORTH and I ascended the stairs until we got to the sixth floor landing that was marked by a sign.

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On our arrival, a senior officer was waiting and I instantly noticed he was not wearing any BA equipment. He asked what we had been briefed and we informed him of our task. The senior officer remained on the landing as FF PAPWORTH and I entered the sixth floor lobby.

As we stepped into the lobby, the jet and hose was on the floor. Multiple outlets were open on various floors and this had effected the water pressure. The hose was limp, indicating weak water pressure. We picked up the hose with FF PAPWORTH holding the branch and entered Flat 35. The front door was open as we walked into the living room to see, the windows had gone and the entire flat was open to the outside. The internal walls had collapsed and there were pockets of flames underneath it. Despite having weak water pressure, FF PAPWORTH managed to extinguish the flames as I searched every room.

There were no other flames or casualties and no sign of any ruptured gas mains. I then systematically checked all the flats on the sixth floor for any other flames. Some of the flats received more damaged than others. I checked each of the six flats but there were no other flames or ruptured gas mains. I informed FF PAPWORTH and together, we searched through all the flats a second time, ensuring we searched the floor thoroughly. We then walked out the landing to where the senior officer was waiting.

FF PAPWORTH and I were about to go to the seventh floor when the senior officer asked if we had searched through this flat. I cannot remember which flat this was. I informed we had gone through all the flats thoroughly but he was adamant to have this flat searched again. We started to argue until I gave in.

FF PAPWORTH and I went back in the sixth floor lobby and researched the flat. Satisfied nothing significant was found, we informed the senior officer and made out way up the stairs to the seventh floor.

On our arrival, there was a crew fire-fighting so we proceeded up to the next floor. We walked up opening the landing doors to the eighth, ninth and tenth floors all of which already had crews working on them. There was not much smoke but the amount of debris and fire damage worsened the higher we got up.

We continued up to the eleventh floor where there were no crews committed. We were about to start working when I noticed my air supply was getting low. At that point, the ECO contacted me over my personal radio stating I had ten minutes left of air. I informed FF PAPWORTH and we descended down the stairway to the fourth floor.

We were sent into a flat where we debriefed a Watch Manager. FF BRADLEY and FF JOHNSON came in shortly after and the four of us went back down to the ground floor lobby and into the square room where EDBA crews were still gathering. We exited the tower from the main entrance escorted by Police

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under shields to the holding area, still managed by WM FURLONG. We then walked back to the Leisure centre.

On our arrival, we took off our BA sets and tunics to cool ourselves down. At that point, the Borough Manager of Barking and Dagenham, Steve NORMAN approached me. He advised me to get refreshed and prepare to go back in from which I informed him that we were waiting to be relieved. My crew and I remained seated by the leisure centre, waiting to stand down. At some point, we were joined by WM FURLONG who had been relieved from his post. There was a surreal atmosphere, people were helping one another offering food and drink but in the background was this scene of devastation. At approximately 330pm we were stood down. We gathered our stuff and made our way back to our appliance parked on Blenheim Crescent. We then made our way back to Dagenham Fire Station arriving at 630pm. I remained at the fire station, recommencing night duty that evening at 8pm. It was during this night duty that I made my contemporaneous notes.

Dry riser is a tube that runs internally up a high rise building with outlets positioned on each floor. A fire appliance would plug into the dry riser on the ground floor and supply it with water.

The Stay Put Policy apply to high rise buildings and is designed to prevent residents becoming involved with the fire. Normally, the fire is contained within the flat that it originated from. The policy advises residents to remain in their flat as this is the safest place to be. I do not know who implemented the application or withdrawal of the stay put policy during the Grenfell Tower incident.

The only knowledge I received with regards to the gas supply being cut, was at some point during our time waiting. We were made aware people were digging up the road, to cut the gas main but I did not see where this was or if they were successful.

Throughout the incident, I did not suffer any near misses but whilst waiting in the ground floor lobby, a diesel pump was being run in a confined area and the fumes were making a number of us feel sick. This was eventually moved.

The Grenfell Tower fire was the largest incident I have experienced. The sheer scale of the incident will probably the biggest I will experience throughout my career. We did not have the right equipment to deal with a fire of this magnitude. The ALPs had little effect on the fire as they could not reach high enough. Our communication system needs modernising - the BARI radios were not working and our personal radios can be difficult to hear, especially when under BA.

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What was required of EDBA wearers during the incident was immense and worthy of note. They were redeployed a number of times, and despite being physically exhausted, they carried on. Having all Fire Fighters trained to wear EDBA would have eased the strain.

On Monday 29<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2018, I was interviewed by DC LOVEKIN and DC VALDEZ at Dagenham Fire Station. During my interview, a copy of my contemporaneous notes were produced to me. I confirm that these are the notes I made, exhibiting them as RF/1.

During my interview, I made two sketches:

Exhibit RF/2 — Site plan to Grenfell Tower

Exhibit RF/3 — Ground Floor Lobby

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