

**WITNESS STATEMENT**

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

Statement of: HALL, RUSSELL

Age if under 18: OVER 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: RUSSELL HALL

Date: 04/12/2017

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

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This statement relates to the incident at Grenfell Tower on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2017 and covers the actions I took and instructions given on the night. This statement is written from a taped interview conducted by Kevin Shanahan and PC Richard Greengrass.

I am firefighter Russel HALL G38 attached to Red Watch at Heston Fire station, I have been an active firefighter (FF) for 14 years. On occasion I act up a rank as Crew Manager, this means that I'm in charge of a fire engine as opposed to driving it or being in the back. During this time I have acquired various skills listed as follows; I am an aerial platform ladder pump (ALP) driver and operator, mass decon work that deals with public contamination problems where a situation such as a dirty bomb has gone off at a specific location and decontamination is required. I'm qualified in extended duration breathing apparatus (EDBA) as opposed to just standard duration breathing apparatus (SDBA), this enables me to work for a longer period of time and move further inside a building. I am also trained to act as a fire rescue unit (FRU) driver and operator. I'm a boat operator and have been trained in line rescue, this means I can perform rescues at height such as if there was an incident involving a crane operator. I'm water rescue capable so can assist other agencies such as police and ambulance service in a marine environment including body retrieval. I have had training to work on high rise fires, there are operational notes available to us covering the equipment required for each floor if a fire is confirmed and guidance depending which type of truck you

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are on.

In this calendar year there has been a practice drill at Acton fire station on a basic tower covering role playing exercises to refresh our knowledge of these events. We have high rise blocks in our area so keep our hand in and keep up to date with tactics.

In this statement I will refer to the following firefighters I worked with at various times during the incident; FF Paul MARKS (FFPM), FF TUCKER (FFT), FF Les TUCKER (FFLT), FF Ian MOORE (FFIM) and Watch Manager Helen CHRISTMAS (WMHC).

The locations attended and covered in this statement are Chiswick Fire Station, the route taken to the incident from Chiswick fire station and Grenfell Tower itself detailed below. Prior to the incident I have never been to Grenfell Tower or have any knowledge of the layout or building.

On TUESDAY 13<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2017 I reported for night duty at 20:00hrs with Red Watch based at Heston Fire Station where I performed the usual set checks on my equipment ready for any call that we may be sent to. We didn't have any training that night so just settled down for the evening as we had been put on standby. At about 1am a call came through to go on standby at Chiswick fire station as that crew had been deployed. I was the driver of truck call sign G382 which is the station pump appliance. We made our way from Heston to Chiswick down the London road. When we got to the station at Chiswick nobody knew the codes to get in and the crew based there were already out. The radio was absolutely mental and we couldn't get through on there for this information, this level of radio traffic was unusual as it's not normally that busy. I could hear fire survival guides (FSG) coming out over the radio and knew that something was going on. We eventually managed to get into Chiswick and reversed the truck into the bay, I had a look at the TIP sheet which is the tele printer in the office to see where the crew had gone. I saw what the incident was and looked on the map for the location and it was well off their ground in Kensington.

We were settling in at Chiswick when we were mobilised to Grenfell Tower as the incident now required 40 pumps, I think initially there were 25 pumps deployed. I had another look at the map for the location as I have no knowledge of that area and then got in the truck, we still couldn't get through on the radio and no new information had come through on the tele printer. The pager held by the pump manager was

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beeping but not giving any information, we tried again to get onto the radio (RT), but were still unable due to it still being so busy. FF Marks our crew manager finally got through and I drove to the rough area around Grenfell Tower. Members of the crew in the rear of the truck were using their mobile phones to direct me. The mobile data terminal (MDT) in our appliance wasn't working so we weren't getting any information from that either. The time of mobilisation was roughly just after 2am and we were on scene within about 12 minutes driving on blue lights.

The route there was confusing, we came from the Chiswick/ Hammersmith direction and went through Shepherds Bush and up towards Westfield shopping centre, I don't know which road we then took to the incident but as we got closer there was a road blocked off with roadworks, we considered leaving the truck on this road and going on foot as from our position we could see Grenfell tower on fire. The whole southwest corner from the ground floor up to maybe the 20<sup>th</sup> floor was on fire, maybe even to the top. I was driving the truck so wasn't paying a lot of attention to the tower at the time. Initially it was suggested by someone that the fire may be netting attached to scaffolding around the tower as this had been mentioned but once I managed to get nearer it was obvious that it was the actual tower alight.

The roadworks that blocked our route were also affecting other trucks trying to get there, causing more confusion. The conditions were dark due to it being night and cars were parked up in narrow roads. There were other trucks coming from left, right and even ahead coming back towards us. We had no information on the radio about this road closure, eventually we went back the way we came in and up Ladbroke Grove following other trucks including one from our station that arrived just after us. We parked up in BRAMLEY ROAD at about 2:20am and FF MARKS was acting up as Pump Crew Manager that night in charge of the appliance. He went to book us in and get information of what was going on. The rest of us stayed with the truck.

Members of the public were approaching us asking what was going on and why weren't we going in yet. I said we were waiting to find out what we were required to do. FF MARKS returned after roughly 5-8 minutes and we took as much equipment as we could off the truck, we took our standard breathing apparatus on our backs, carried 2 cylinders each and first aid equipment. Pretty much everything we could carry, there was only 4 of us so it did restrict the amount we could take. We were about a 5 minute walk from the tower and knew we had to meet by a college. There was no designated rendezvous point (RVP)

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over the radio at this time. We made our way to the tower through residential streets, there was a visible reflective orange glow of the fire on buildings around us but there was no direct view of Grenfell at this point. It was quite a still night so all the smoke and fumes from the fire were going up, I couldn't smell anything in relation to the fire/smoke during the walk to the tower.

We made our way to the academy that was located on the north side of the tower, passing over a grassed area that had 2 bodies of people who had jumped under blue salvage sheets. We sat by a wall waiting until we were needed. Whilst waiting in that area and were approached by either a crew or watch manager asking us to go off and do certain tasks, I don't remember what he asked but my governor Helen CHRISTMAS said no to this as we were all extended duration breathing apparatus trained (EDBA) and that we might be getting used very soon due to the distance they allow us to travel inside the building.

We were told to dump our standard duration breathing apparatus (SDBA) along with the cylinders we were carrying and went to look for spare EDBA sets, some had arrived from an operational support unit. We just had to service and put our names on them. I was at the back of the queue for these and wasn't able to get one so I waited for another EDBA to become available. FF TUCKER from Wembley then gave me a shout and said they had a spare set and asked if I wanted to go with them. I put my name on it and went to the tower with the Wembley crew via the north side. Here we met up with a governor from Chiswick who was standing under a covered area protecting us from debris, we couldn't get into the front doors as the debris piled was too high so we were sent over to the east side of the building, under a covered area where there was another covered area. We moved across in crews of 2 or 3 when given the all clear from spotters on the ground checking the falling debris. The police were there with riot shields helping us get to the tower, these stopped the debris hitting us as it was falling heavily now. It sounded like small cars were falling and there were explosions all around us, it was quite hairy at this point. There were thin metal sheets floating down about 4 foot square in size, lots of molten metal falling and splashing us when it hit the ground, one firefighter got some in his mouth on the lower gum area. A station manager at the scene gave us an order to pull back to safety within the covered area and wait, the police again used shields to help us move to a safe area.

Once it was safer we again moved back towards the tower with 2 firefighters under the shields escorted by a police officer, the debris was still falling and a crew manager Shawn (CM) who I'd met before, was

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clipped by a person jumping from the tower. They were ahead of me as we moved to the tower. The jumper must have been quite high up, as he's fallen his leg had been ripped off by the covered overhang on the outside of the tower. I believe the crew behind me moved the male who jumped, all I know of him is that he was black afrocaribbean man. The body clipped the shield and knocked the crew manager back towards me and immediately his eyes were spinning, I shouted for someone to grab him before he fell. He was taken out of the danger zone. He was wobbling and just spinning, he was all over the place, there weren't injuries but he just looked in shock.

At the time of the jumper I didn't realise it was a body that fell until FF TUCKER said I had blood on me from how hard the body hit the ground. We were all covered in blood at this point and it wasn't until we got further in that it dawned on me what happened.

We moved around the south side of the tower to the west face of the tower by a childrens playground and had a station manager acting as a debris spotter shouting at us when it was clear to move, he was liaising with the Chiswick Governor telling us when it was clear to go. We were under a metal grill cover that didn't give much protection and made our way to what looked like a window that had been smashed in to gain access. This was a struggle to get through as our EDBA sets are wider than standard ones, I was standing behind FF TUCKER and a firefighter called Nicky Saunders from Wembley. They were under a shield together and a load of liquid aluminium came down, splashing the back of the shield causing it to flip back towards FF TUCKER. There was a big flash of light and then the metal went down the back of FF TUCKER's helmet, fire hood, the back of his tunic to his neck and BA set causing him to have full depth burns. I was about 3 metres away from them when this happened. I know Les TUCKER well, this was a real shock to see. Les TUCKER ran to the front of the queue, into the building for safety and other firefighters put him out as his set was also on fire.

We all squeezed through the makeshift entrance on the west side of the tower and were held in the lift lobby until called forward, there was SDBA and EDBA there. We had a bridgehead set up in the tower, this is a command point usually set up 2 floors below the fire, the initial was on the floor but this had obviously been moved a few times and was now in the lobby on the ground floor, this seemed the safest place for it. There were 3 or 4 station managers running it which is unheard of, they wouldn't normally do that role and that made me realise the severity, they were on the entry control board collating information from the radios and being told to them by firefighters on way down. There were crews coming down and

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other crews waiting to go up the tower, it was mayhem. Probably 20-30 firefighters in that small area and in the lift lobby on the ground there were probably another 20-30 firefighters waiting, it was mayhem. The fire lift wasn't in operation from the ground level but I do remember seeing a key coming from the wall in the lobby, I couldn't hear any alarms sounding at this point. There was a glass door leading to the stairwell that was magnetically locked and had closed, there were a lot of people shouting about a key fob to open it which was ridiculous in the circumstance. FF MOORE used common sense, he got a sledgehammer and smashed the door through to give us access.

We moved forward to the stairwell, my crew from Wembley were a bit displaced at this point, one was injured, another FF called Paul CHARITY who was acting up that night had an injury but I think he was ok. There was only me and Nicky from the Wembley crew left that went in. I linked up with FF Ian MOORE from Bethnal Green who I had never worked with before, he had also been separated from his initial crew so we decided to stay together. We reported to the entry control officer (ECO) and went up as a crew of 5, myself, FF Nicky SAUNDERS, FF MOORE, FF CHARITY and FF TUCKER who was injured but still active. We were detailed to go to the 11th floor and flat 84 for a fire survival guide (FSG), this is when people have called in from a flat within a high rise building and it's confirmed they are there and require assistance, this is part of the stay put policy. The procedure for the stay put policy is that when someone calls from a flat they are trapped in by fire are advised to block up doors, windows with towels and stay in a room not affected by fire and wait for firefighters to come and rescue you. The stay put policy was changed later and people were advised to leave the tower but I'm unsure exactly what time during the incident this was decided or who made that decision.

The stairs had lengths of hose covering them, there was only one set of stairs leading up to all the floors. The fire doors were open on several floors due to hoses and equipment holding them open, this lowered their effectiveness and caused the smoke and heat to come into the stair area making it more difficult to see. There was so much water coming down from the floors above and soaking us, our kit is useless when wet and this turned to steam when we got to a hot area of the block. The temperature of the water on our kit was equivalent to having a hot cup of tea all over you.

The smoke on the stairs was very dense, there were about 4 floors of thick black smoke causing very poor visibility and I was questioning how we would get the people in the flat out as we had all the gear on and

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it was so hot. I didn't think we would get them out alive if they were in the flat. I was team leader so was at the front of the crew with a thermal image camera (TIC), on entering the 11<sup>th</sup> floor my arms went, all my arms tingled, the back of my neck, my ears went. I closed the door to stop the heat coming through, It felt super hot. I looked at the TIC and the temperature was registering 1000°C in the corner of the display. I told the crew it was too hot on the floor. I tried to make out the numbers on the flats but couldn't until I was close, the flat to the left of us I believe was flat 84, there was a flat to the right and another up to the left. The flat on the 11<sup>th</sup> floor was empty when we got there, we smashed the door in and searched the flat. The people were out before we got there and the flat was relatively untouched at this point. Our job was to search the floor and flats once flat 84 was done then move up to the 12<sup>th</sup> when complete. All the doors were white hot, we checked all the doors and they were closed. They were composite doors on the flats so needed entry equipment to get through. We had found some equipment left by other crews on the way up but I made the decision to move from the 11<sup>th</sup> due to the heat. I was steaming up as we had to move up through the layers of heat as we got closer to the fire. I asked if anyone else in the crew wanted to take the TIC and see if they could get closer but we all agreed it was too hot to work in and we couldn't stay on that floor. I was Team Leader at this time so it was my decision and responsibility for the other firefighters so we left the 11<sup>th</sup> and moved up to the 12<sup>th</sup> floor. We had to use the TIC to move around as the smoke was just thick and black on the stairs, visibility was about 1 metre ahead. The TIC was showing us where the heat was through the doors. It didn't pick up any heat from people that could have been saveable on that floor but we had to go and try as there was an active FSG from that flat.

The 12<sup>th</sup> floor was a bit cooler which was strange, even though it was above the fire and heat travels. I don't remember the flat numbers off the top of my head, we went left to where the dry riser was located and broke the doors to 2 flats on the west side of the tower, we went into the flats and when the door was opened there was a gas main that had ruptured and all we had was a giant flame in the middle of the room which stopped us getting round. You could see that the fire had been taking hold for a long time, all the windows were gone, and the walls had collapsed. The rubble was waist high, all that we could make out was a washing machine and some cables. The whole room was just empty looking out over the London skyline, it was bizarre. The fire was on the outside of the building.

Whilst in these flats I had a new experience that I've not had before during my service. Normally heat from a fire would come from inside a building where the fire is but as the fire was on the outside the heat

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was coming inside, it was all back to front from what we are used to. We would usually open a window to let the heat out but this heat was coming in from outside through the window, it wasn't right. I tried to get through on my radio with no luck, there were still no radio communications that high in the tower. We then went to a 3rd flat on the southwest corner. No entry was able for this flat and the crew was running low on air so decided to withdraw back to the entry control point.

Coming down the stairs was difficult as there were crews trying to get up the tower along with bodies of believed deceased people that we had been told to leave in situ. There was a large 30 stone woman face down we passed on the way up that was blocking part of the stairs on the 10<sup>th</sup> floor. I remember this as we use a term called 'landmarking' where you use something as a point of reference for your location. As we passed on the way down the woman was being moved by another crew to either the 9<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> I believe. There were a few dead pets around and later on I heard through hearsay that there was also a baby on the stairs. I didn't see the baby but do remember treading on something soft that wasn't a towel or a coat. I didn't look at the time and I've gone past that now. The centre of the stairwell was just a cascade of water coming down that didn't help with the heat in there.

We reported to the ECO and tried as best we could to tell him that it was just too hot to get near the flats on 11<sup>th</sup> floor. I mentioned about the 2 flats on the 12<sup>th</sup> floor that had a ruptured gas main blocking our entry and that the fire was still going, we didn't put that fire out as there were no people to be saved from that flat and if we did extinguish the flame then the gas could become an exploding element. The flame is burning the gas off when alight but if out then an ember or other flame could ignite a gas build up. Later on there was a rumour that Transco or British Gas were going to dig up the street to cut the supply but there may have been an issue with other estates being affected. This was frustrating to hear as the gas had directly stopped me getting into flats and potentially prevented us getting to people we could save and get out.'

The ECO thanked us and said to go outside and service our sets. We again had to wait for spotters and police with shields to help us move from the tower, the debris was falling but it wasn't as hectic as before. We went straight out towards the childrens playground and along a wall by there to sit, service our sets and take on water. We moved to the academy and spoke with other crews about the incident, at this stage looking at the side of the building I'd say it was about 50% alight. There was some confusion in that area

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as we heard that we weren't using EDBA anymore. This information did change though, we heard over the radio it was still in use and needed so we were required now to go in again.

There was now a clear path to the tower main entrance, on this route I saw burst hoses spraying water everywhere like rainfall and I got soaked on the way back in. This was still a better route than having to avoid the debris. We were again waiting in the lift lobby where the ECB was located, there was a surgery to the rear of the lobby and I could see other crews waiting to be deployed from there, again probably 30 firefighters, by now we were all in ankle deep water that had come down from the higher floors and flooded the ground level.

The bridgehead had now been moved back to the 4<sup>th</sup> floor and was much better organised, there were SDBA sets being stored in one of the flats and EDBA were being directed to another flat used as a holding area, this time information and instructions were being written on the inner walls of the tower instead of on a control board.

I went in first again so was unofficially team leader again with FF MOORE as we'd been together for our first wear along with FF LANG and FF KNAPMAN who are both on Red Watch at Heston with me. We took a 45mm hose and were asked to do hose management and extend the hose from floors 10 to 12 along with fighting the fire where possible. We found extra hose and branches, unfortunately there were holes in the branches so we were getting covered in water that then turned to steam in the heat making it a harder area to work in. We went to the 12th possibly the 13th, set up the hoses and worked in teams of two. We worked on the fires by switching between the hose, I was using the burst hose to direct water to the fire which is unheard of. We were wearing EDBA whilst fighting the fire which you also aren't supposed to do as the time you spend in that heat becomes a problem. We soldiered on and did what we had to do, I was pulling up hose for the other crew and the hose extending became difficult. We had a few issues as they didn't know which hose to turn off, the pressure was too great and we couldn't use the radios to communicate this. This was an arduous task that was physically demanding. We pulled up as much hose as we could and gathered other hose we found rolled up in the hope that the next crew that came up would figure out how to get the water turned off and then just plug and go.

The hoses were in place for the next crew now on the 12<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup>, again we had no radio comms. The

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whistle in our EDBA sets was active indicating that we had a limited supply left for approximately 10 minutes, there is a warning signal of a door that flashes up to alert us so we now had to calculate how long it would take us to get back down to safe air. We moved back to the 4th floor where the bridgehead was. On the way down the 30 stone woman was now on the 7th floor, this again changed our landmark reference. The numbers of the floors were blocked out by the blackening from the smoke and crews were trying to wash them clean so we could see where we were. Someone had used a large road marking crayon we have to write the floor numbers on the walls. We reported to the ECO, I handed in my tally indicating who I am and how much air I had left. This also helped the ECO know where we had been in the building.

Leaving the tower for the 2<sup>nd</sup> time the gauntlet of debris wasn't as bad now and we made our way back to the academy area. I collapsed on the grass area exhausted, I remember crews coming over and helping take our sets off as we were that far gone with nothing left. We weren't asked to do a 3<sup>rd</sup> wear of EDBA, I don't think I could have managed it even if I was asked. Hand on heart that was me done because of the heat exhaustion. It's only normal policy to wear once in a situation but due to the exceptional circumstances firefighters were wearing twice, I've never felt heat like that whilst wearing EDBA. Now we were outside I was looking at the building from the ground, it was all black apart from probably the first 2-3 floors to the bottom. The time frame from when I saw the building after my 1<sup>st</sup> wear to after my 2 was about an hour so I'd guess this was the time it took the fire to spread and completely consume the building.

On the way back to the academy after our 2<sup>nd</sup> wear and having rested for about 20 minutes there were a lot of journalists jumping out taking pictures of us, we didn't say anything to them. There were people offering us water, food, drink, everything. I've never had that before. Members of the public were asking us about people on certain floors but all we could reply was that we didn't go to those floors. They were talking about the higher floors and we knew by that point there was no chance of anyone coming out from there.

Along one of the walls there was a casualty area taped off that had salvage sheets laid out with 3-4 bags that had bodies in zipped up. The police were on guard there, I saw an oriental male being rushed through the area and taken to an ambulance, I don't know what happened to him.

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I have no idea who was initially in command of the incident when we arrived, I think the watch manager from Kensington may have been running it. Later on I heard over the radio it was an old station manager of mine from Wembley years ago that had taken over (Andy Row).

After this incident and looking back on it there are obvious elements that could have made it work better. Firstly the communications could have been a lot better, I was aware that a 'leaky feeder' that was meant to boost the radio signal in the tower was in place but didn't seem to have much if any affect. We did test our radios before each wear entering the building but as soon as we were further up the tower we lost communication. Also for hose management and burst hose water supply could have been better as working out which ones to turn off, isolate and replace was tough. We could have been told on the way up to 84 that the flat we were going to for a FSG was now clear and could have been deployed to another area. I did find out later that someone from flat 84 had got out, this was frustrating and annoying. The roadworks that affected the route in could have been communicated better as all trucks coming in on the A40 would have been better directed to the incident, it would have saved a lot of hassle driving round the streets if someone from control had told us this. We only use two channels and traffic on these was too high although I think the incident was managed well from the ground. I've never gone to a fire that spread as quickly as this from starting with a fridge. The equipment we had held up well, you can't have an impact on how wet you get and the heat from the fire. The fire doors inside the block from the stairwell were ineffective due to the access requirements and most being wedged open. This took away the positive pressure that can be created by keeping them shut to stop the fire or smoke spread.

I left the scene at about 3pm, we were able to collect our SDBA sets from where they were left and a first aid kit, then drove the truck to Paddington station where we were given some clean clothes and food. A list of used equipment and missing kit was made, there were counsellors available for us to speak to and a briefing was given about the next steps. I then wrote my notes while the incident was fresh in my memory.

[REDACTED] I did talk with the counsellor provided and found that it helped discussing the events.

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The things learnt from the Grenfell incident have helped and some procedures have changed. We had lots of members of the public coming to the station in the days after the fire asking for smoke alarms, we have been checking the high rise buildings on our ground for layouts and hydrant locations. We found that one estate was due to have the same cladding as Grenfell fitted so that was stopped as a result of the fire spread.

I provide five exhibits along with this statement, all exhibits have a Metropolitan Police exhibit label on them along with my exhibit numbers. The first is a google map of Grenfell Tower that I printed myself to assist with remembering the incident. This is RVH/1 and has the exhibit label number MPSZ13111724. The second is another google map of the tower, this is a zoomed view again used to remind me of the direct area around the tower. This is RVH/2 and has the label number MPSZ13111723. The third is a printed copy of the initial notification sent to the station showing a forty pump fire. This is RVH/3 and has the exhibit label number MPSZ133134385. The fourth is a printed aerial map that I was shown during the interview and referred to showing the route into and the entrance of the tower. This is RVH/4 and has the label number MPSZ13134386. The fifth exhibit is a typed copy of my notes made after the incident detailing my first account of the role I had at Grenfell Tower. This is RVH/5 and has the exhibit label number MPSZ13134387.

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