

**WITNESS STATEMENT**

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

Statement of: MURPHY, SEAN

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

Occupation: FIRE OFFICER

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This statement (consisting of 6 page(s) each signed by me) is true to the best of my knowledge and belief and I make it knowing that, if it is tendered in evidence, I shall be liable to prosecution if I have wilfully stated in it anything which I know to be false, or do not believe to be true.

Signature: SEAN MURPHY

Date: 19/11/2017

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

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On Sunday 19th November 2017 I was interviewed by DC Rachael O'CONNOR and Investigator John PAYNE at East Ham Fire Station. Also present was union representative Gareth BEETON. The content of this statement is the summary of the interview. I referred to my notes that I wrote on 14th June 2017 and exhibit a copy as SEM/l.

I joined the London Fire Brigade in April 2005. My current role is as Crew Manager on Red Watch at Islington where I have served for the past 3 to 4 years. My call sign there is A30. Prior to that I served at Clerkenwell and Finchley. We have mandatory training 2 or 3 times a year which includes lectures, training on new equipment and high rise building training.

I have never been to Grenfell Tower before.

That evening I was on direct standby at Bethnal Green Fire Station, call sign F26, and I was to be in charge of the Fire Rescue Unit, call sign F266. I turned up for duty as normal starting work at 20:00, did a roll call etc. and began what was a standard night shift. We didn't get any shouts and we had our downtime at roundabout midnight, can't be sure of the exact time that I got my head down. I was awoken at about 02:25 in the morning. I didn't have a watch on at the time. I went into the watch room as we do to find out what the shout was and the watch duty person was there already and said, 'It's a 40 pump fire'

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I said 'Don't be stupid, there's no such thing as a 40 pump fire. It must be a mistake' I thought it must have been a 4 pump fire. He told me that the paper keeps coming out of the teleprinter as a 40 pump fire. I looked at it and it confirmed a 40 pump fire.

I didn't know it was Grenfell Tower to begin with, the address just said W11 , there was no other postcode to begin with as far as I remember. I wondered why we were being sent from Bethnal Green. I grew up in Kilburn so I knew it was way over West London. I knew it was Notting Hill Gate area. We got into the machine and I instructed the driver to head west. CRAIG was the driver I don't know his surname, I was in the front and TONY BARLOW was in the back with another lad called IAN whose surname name I can't remember. It's not a crew that I regularly work with.

I knew the basic area and we would pick the location up on our phones on the way there. My driver took us through East London heading West, I'm pretty sure we went down Oxford Street towards the Edgware Road. I instructed him onto the Westway which is the A40. The location then came up on my phone and I informed my crew that we would soon be coming off the Westway.

We came around a bend on the Westway and then we saw it .We all said 'What the fuck is happening, what is it that's on fire?' We saw it but couldn't compute it. I've never seen anything like it at all. Somebody in the back thought it was scaffolding or something. It literally looked like the whole building was on fire, it was going from top to bottom.

We came off a slip road, I was still following my phone, went up a side road leading to Grenfell, couldn't tell you which one and couldn't get any closer. It was literally packed with machines, cars and people. As far as I could make out we were about 200 yards from the marshalling point which was the green area that was around Grenfell.

I think that we arrived just before 3am. I got off the machine and as I was walking away towards the marshalling point one of the firefighters suggested that we take our sets. I stopped and I thought that in normal circumstances you would just go and find out what's going on because we were a specialist team and they would tell us if and where they would need us. I realised that he was right so we all put our sets on. I told the driver to lock up the machine because I didn't know how long we were going to be and then made our way as a group to the marshalling area. We walked past lots of people and some would say 'please help us' others wished us good luck. The closer we got, the more worried I got. I thought that this is bad. As I looked at the tower it looked like an upside down V shape at the bottom that was clear and

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everything else was engulfed in flames.

We got to the marshalling area and there were loads of firefighter's there that I saw in the middle of this grassed area. There were white helmets as well which are obviously officers. Watch Managers and above wear white helmets. I spoke to one of the officers there, told him who we were and did they need us and if so what did they want us to do. I was told to stay put with my crew and to hand my nominal roll board in. This is a roll board with the crew members on it. I can't remember handing it in but I must have done so, it's a reflex thing you do automatically.

We then waited until we were given our orders. I checked my watch after we had been there a while and it was about 3 o'clock in the morning.

Eventually they picked out my crew and another one, I think there was 10 or 12 of us who then made our way down to the base of Grenfell Tower with an officer. I don't know who he was. We were under cover and there was an open area before you got to safety in the tower itself. There was a firefighter with some other senior officers who were in the safe area and they were looking out at the falling debris to see when it was safe to cross.

We were told to take a riot shield each, put it above our head and when we were told that it was safe to go, run across to the safe area. Tony Barlow from my crew was in front of me, he went and about 5 seconds later I was told to go. I took maybe 2 steps and I was just smashed, literally I was just flattened. I was laid on my back and I thought a big chunk of metal or similar had hit me. I was on my back and looking at myself checking to see if I was all there. I looked to my right and saw a severed leg and just beyond that was a body that I assumed was from the severed leg. The next thing I knew was that I was pulled back my BA set. I didn't know at the time but I was told later that it was Ian from Bethnal Green one of my crew that pulled me back. I felt a bit woozy but I was okay. I was just glad to be in one piece. I was then taken to the ambulance assembly point by Watch Manager CHRIS COOPER who was also in BA.

Before I was taken to the ambulance I was told to my set off as there were bits of body all over it. The set was then impounded and I saw it later with barrier tape around it.

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CHRIS was going to be part of one of the other crews who were going to go into the tower with us. I know CHRIS as he used to work at Clerkenwell with me. He's at Holloway now.

After being examined at the ambulance area I was asked if I wanted to go to hospital. I declined and told them that I had a little bit of a sore neck but was fine. I was instructed to rest up for 15 minutes and then they would come back and check my blood pressure and if it was okay then I could go. Whilst I was waiting a couple of other firefighters came over and sat beside me. They appeared quite distraught and they had obviously been there quite early on by the way they were talking about what had happened when they first got there.

After being told that my blood pressure was fine I went off and did general firefighting duties. I don't know where CHRIS went.

I met up with my old crew manager SEAN COLTRESS who is now an ADO. He's a station manager. He said that he was trying to get some more 45mm hose and told me to organise it and get it down to the other side of Grenfell. It was in a part that I hadn't been to before, under a covered walkway that came out the other side where most of the standard BA wearers were waiting. It was a marshalling area for them. There were 2 marshalling areas, one by the gym and the on the other side of the tower.

I went and organised it with what I believe was a crew from Kentish Town, A43. These guys weren't wearing BA. We organised the 45mm hose, brought it down there and left it in situ.

I then went back to see SEAN and found out that the main pump appliance that was parked close to Grenfell only had half a tank of diesel and obviously this machine runs all the time in order to keep the pumps going. We tried to get it moved out of there and get another in its place with a full tank. The logistics of it made it pretty impossible. There were hoses lying down, the ambulance crews were there and there was a body covered up on the path where the machine would have to go. Sean then went to arrange for diesel to be delivered in Jerry cans of some form.

After that I'm not really sure but I think I went to help try and move an aerial appliance that was too close to the tower on the other side and had lots of debris falling on it. There was another 2 firefighters there. I had to pull one of them away because he was getting too close to the falling debris. I found out that his name was Pat. Again we couldn't even get people onto the machine to reverse it out because it was far too dangerous. We had to leave that machine in situ as well.

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I can't remember what I did next. I'm afraid it's a grey area for me.

Eventually about 6 in the morning I was on the grassed area by the Sally Army van when someone came along with a load of ED sets so I started helping to make them up.

I recall texting my wife at about this time to let her know that I was okay.

We were then told that they needed more crews to go back in so I told them that I would go. I got another set and put it on and eventually, it must have been approximately an hour later they got another 10 of us or so and took us down to the other side, not the original side where I was going to go in before the body fell on me. We went past the body that was now covered up, to the marshalling point where we waited to be called up. We sat there for what must have been another hour. There were crews continually going in and out.

Eventually, it might have been about 8 o'clock we went into the tower. This time we had Police with us. We got into the tower and were put into a little side room on the ground level. This room already had a foot and a half of water in it. There was already 20 plus firefighters in there, virtually up to their knees in water and all wearing their ED sets and fire gear. It was roasting hot, not because of the heat of the fire but because of the amount of people in there with no ventilation. We sat there probably for another hour.

At some stage during that time Group Manager GOLBOURNE came in to talk to us. He said that we are going to ask you to do stuff today that is outside policy. We don't want anybody to put themselves in danger, but it's a dangerous situation. It's a one in a million and never been seen before. Obviously don't put yourselves in too much danger but do what you can. That was the essence of what he said.

After a short time we were moved to what was a boxing gym or something similar. It was a much bigger room with air flowing through it and I wondered why we hadn't been here for the last hour or so. I had been wearing my set all this time and was already exhausted.

After about 10 minutes somebody came in and said that they needed another crew of 4.

3 guys got up who all knew each other, they were a firefighter and 2 crew managers. I hadn't seen any of them before. They needed another one to go with them and as everyone else wanted to stay with their own crews and I had got separated from mine, I said I would go.

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We went in and made our way up the stairs to the Bridgehead which I can't be absolutely sure but I think was on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor. It was packed with people, just a small area on the landing.

We went through the first 3 floors and it was modern, all glass and then we came to this stairwell. It was tiny about 4 feet wide. I thought is this the only stairwell up and down. There were hoses going up the stairs all twisted up. It was all black and dense with water pouring down like a waterfall from the upstairs where the jets were going. When we got to the Bridgehead it was absolutely packed with officers. I recognised Dan ALLEY who used to be at my station Finchley years ago. He had a china graph drawing on the wall. He had a big diagram of the rooms and floors that had been searched. My station manager Jason FRISBY was there, who I didn't even know was on the job. He was giving briefings to crews that were going in and out.

An officer gave us our briefing, I don't know his name. He wanted us to make our way to the 11th floor, search it, 12th floor, search it, basically as far as we could go.

We started up our sets and started making our way up. On the way up we were getting soaked. Fire gear is really heavy, so as well as the BA set we had our helmet and face mask on walking up those stairs.

We made our way up to what I think was the 9<sup>th</sup> floor and we came across a body. It was a large lady who was blocking the whole stairwell. She was facing as if she had got half way down the stairwell and collapsed. Her legs were on the stairs and the rest of her body was on the landing. She was gone. I didn't check her and I don't know if anybody did check her for life but you could see that she was long dead.

We got around her. No one stepped on her, even with all the gear we were carrying.

We carried on up and when we made it somebody said this is the wrong floor. It was hard to tell who was talking when you've got helmets and face masks on. We couldn't see the numbers on the floors so someone rubbed the wall and it said the twelfth so we had gone past the floor that we were originally going to search.

We made our way back down to the 11<sup>th</sup> floor and split into 2 teams. Myself, and I can't remember if it was a crew manager or a firefighter went to one side and the other crew went the other way. We searched all the flats in there but they were devastated. There was literally no walls left. There was still pockets of fire going and there was a gas main still burning away.

We tried to find a hose branch with water in but couldn't find anything. All there was were branches that weren't charged. There was just a trickle coming out because they were so twisted and so high up. We

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just didn't have the water pressure. The branches that were there had no tallies on them. We hang tallies with the number of the fire engine that the hose is connected to so we can radio down and say we need more pressure on a certain hose. As there were no tallies and we didn't have any comms we weren't able to radio down anyway.

I tried getting in touch with people on my personal radio but couldn't get anything at all. I'm sure others tried but could get anything. I didn't have a Barry set. This is connected to some BA set's but not all of them. I never had one on my set.

We found as far as I remember 4 branches, 2 of them on that floor. We tried to drag them up but there was no water in them. We carried on in and went into the flats anyway. I went into a flat that was completely devastated. The bedroom door was closed so I got down on my knees which is the usual procedure because I didn't know if there was still a fire behind the door. I opened the door and the bedroom was intact, badly smoke damaged but intact, bedclothes and everything. I thought that there was a good chance that somebody might be in there so I searched behind the doors, under the bed, the wardrobe, everywhere but there was no one there.

I came out, can't remember if I closed the door. I probably did, it would have been an instinctive thing to do. We then met up with the other firefighters and said to each other that the floor was clear. We then went up to the 12th floor and went through the same procedure. Again I found another bedroom virtually intact and went through the same motions.

We started to make our way up from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> floor and at this stage the heat got really hot. We still had no branch and no water. I think on the 12th myself and another firefighter found another branch but it felt solid. We were dragging and pulling it because it was all twisted around each other. It wouldn't really move, we managed to move it just a few feet. I opened the branch up and it water literally dribbled out of it, no pressure at all.

We then carried on up to the 13<sup>th</sup>. The heat got really bad and I can't be one hundred percent sure but I think that it was between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> floors that we found another body. I thought at the time it was an adult but I was later told by one of the guys that it was a young girl. She was in the same position as the lady down the stairs. We went around her and I got on my hands and knees to get up the last flight of stairs the 13<sup>th</sup> floor. It was pitch black there and really hot. I was getting scolded on the back of my neck and all of my forearms. I was spent, I literally couldn't get any air out of my mask to breath. I was gone and I thought that I was going to collapse. I couldn't go any further.

Because we had no water and couldn't get into the 13<sup>th</sup> floor I tapped the firefighter in front of me and

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said 'I'm done. I can't go anymore. He in turn turned to the firefighter in front of him and said 'it's too hot. Let's go' We turned around and made our way back down to the Bridgehead, stepping over the 2 bodies that we had found earlier on.

When we got to the Bridgehead I couldn't even stand up. I was down on my hands and knees and threw off my face mask helmet and gloves. There was a CM giving a briefing to the officer that was on the Bridgehead. We were stuck at the back and I screamed at them to get us out as I was burning up. We went downstairs and I sat down outside. I don't know where the others went. There was a couple of firefighters from other crews there.

There was also Paramedics who asked us if we were okay.

I sat there for maybe half an hour, 40 minutes or so and someone came along and I had a fag from him even though I gave up smoking years ago.

After a while I got up and made my way over to the original marshalling area where everyone was and there I met up with my crew from Bethnal Green.

After a few minutes or so we were called over by I think Andy Rowe. It was just to say thank you to everyone, how's it going, keep yourselves cool, get plenty of water inside you and stuff like that. As far as I remember we were then moved from there into the gym area. Downstairs it was all air conditioned. I moved about in and out of there with the other firefighters. There were guys from East Ham, Islington and Bethnal Green. I met Albert from Holloway. He had the cigarettes.

About 15minutes later we were told that we were away.

As I was leaving I was approached by a Senior Investigation Officer who had been looking for me. He asked how I was feeling and I told him that I was fine. He advised me to go to hospital and when I told him that I didn't want to go he gave me his card and told me to contact him if anything was wrong with me.

We were instructed to go to Paddington Fire Station where they wanted us to do our contemporaneous notes.

It took us a while to get back, nearly an hour as the traffic was so bad. I think it was about half past twelve in the afternoon. I did check my watch sporadically throughout the night and there are certain times that I do remember.

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As soon as we got to Paddington we were met by other officers, there were loads of firefighters there. I remember talking to Richie on the Red Watch at Soho. I've known him for years and I asked him what he had done when he got there as they were one of the earliest crews to arrive. He said it was terrible, they only managed to get up a few floors. There were loads of dead in the corridors and things like that. A guy named Ian Griffiths came up to me who is from the blue watch at Paddington and gave me a piece of paper with a phone number on and told me that I had to contact that person. I think the name was Emma CARR. She told me that I had to get in contact with a SAI (Senior Accident Investigator) and gave me his number.

I was with Tony Barlow at this time. He was really upset as his phone had died and he was trying to contact his wife to let her know that he was okay. I told Emma to contact Tony's wife and let her know that he was okay and not at Grenfell any more but at Paddington.

I then contacted the SAI and he told me that he wanted me to go to hospital. As he was a much senior rank I agreed to go. He told me that he would arrange for a station manager to take me. I asked him about the counselling that we were supposed to do and he told me that I would be taken to the front of the queue. He did this. There was a senior female officer, I can't remember her name who took me upstairs to do my notes and then straight away to see a counsellor. This took about 10 minutes.

The station manager then took me to Paddington Hospital. The A&E was so busy that they took me to an outpatients department. I waited there with the ADO and general public for about an hour. When I got examined by the doctor he said that was nothing majorly wrong with me, take lots of painkillers and if it persisted to see my GP.

I went from there back to Bethnal Green where he dropped me off. I then got all my gear together and drove back to Islington.

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