

WITNESS STATEMENT

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

Statement of: MILLS, STEVEN

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

Occupation: FIRE OFFICER

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: STEVEN MILLS

Date: 05/01/2018

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

On FRIDAY 3rd NOVEMBER 2017 I was interviewed at my fire station on audio disc by DC PREOU and DC FOLEY. The interview commenced at 1307 hours and concluded at 1519 hours. Also present was Angus HUTCHINSON, fire brigade union. This is my statement I gave during the interview.

I am Mr Steven MILLS and I am a fire fighter at Paddington Fire station, Harrow Road, W2. I make this statement in relation to a fire at Grenfell Tower, Grenfell Road, W11. The incident I will speak about occurred between the TUESDAY 13th JUNE and WEDNESDAY 14th JUNE 2017. On TUESDAY 13th JUNE I paraded for work at 2000 hours on Red watch. I have 8 (eight) years' service.

On TUESDAY 13th JUNE 2017 I paraded at Paddington Fire Station. We carried out our normal routines and checks. This mainly consisted of checking the equipment, the appliances and that the pump was fit for service. I was detailed to drive A211, which is our pump ladder. On that machine that night were Watch Manager (WM) Steve COLLINS (guvnor), Crew Manager (CM) Guy TILITSON, I can't remember who the other two were in the back. We had a full complement that night minus 2, which is quite interesting because normally we get broken down with minimum riders but that night we had 4 riders. Normally a CM would be sent out and other fire fighters. The pump ladder (PL) would be riding four (4), the pump would ride four (4) and the Fire rescue unit (FRU) would ride four (4). That's three (3) different appliances and then you would have the turn table ladder (TL) would always ride two (2).

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Normally in the Summer you wouldn't have that, on the night in question every single machine had a fire fighter in the seat which is very rare. I have been here 8 years at this station and I can't remember the last time this happened. So this is something I noted that night anyway before the incident.

It was at about midnight when pump A212 were sent on a fire call with the (TL), which isn't unusual. We get fire calls all the time. No one knew what they were going to or what it was other than a fire. I'm not sure about timings possibly about 20 minutes later we then got called out with the FRU and this included the TL. The FRU is the fire rescue unit, they have all the other bits of equipment on which we can't carry on our machines. It's also got specialised equipment, we work on abseiling and that sort of work and do line rescues.

The bells in fire station went off so everyone went down to the pump, all drivers go the watch room to get the TIPOUT sheet which is printed through to the printer.

It will tell us the location and what type of incident we have, on that night it said fire. I collected that as driver, I can't remember word for word what it said on the TIPOUT other than there were multiple calls and persons were involved and trapped inside. If you have a TIPOUT sheet like that you pretty much know you got something. This was the only information we received about the call out and didn't know it had spread to the exterior of the building. It's not on our ground Grenfell, it was on North Kensington's ground, I looked at the location on the map for general directions of where we were going. We also have a bit of kit on the machines with maps which shows you the general direction, MDT it's called. We got on our truck and being a PL we were the first ones out and left the station, the FRU followed on. I drove along the Harrow Road turning onto the Great Western Road. I was trying to work out exactly where we were going and then I saw Grenfell. I was in disbelief what I saw. The guvnor was looking down trying to work out where we were going but I told him he didn't need look anymore as I knew exactly where I was going. I told him to look, he said "Oh my god" we both looked at each other and we just carried on down the Great Western. I myself certainly hadn't seen a fire like that before. I looked in wonder. I remember someone in the back saying "It's probably the plastic wrap that goes round scaffolding probably alight" For me it looked like it could have been that, it was just a wall of fire.

The fire had taken from what I thought was the ground floor, but we later knew it was from the 4th floor all the way to the top, it was at the top. I think the time at this point was about 0100 hours. As we drove

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closer to it you could see it wasn't cladding, or there was no scaffolding, it was actually the outside of the building. I think the fire was on the East corner, the fire hadn't spread all the way across, and it had just done a column all the way up to the top and hadn't gone around the corner. When we arrived I didn't know the area so I just followed the roads around and I ended up parking in BOMORE ROAD. There were a few parked cars but it was fine. I remember there being road works there also. There was a Watch Manager (WM) there, I don't know who he was. He spoke to the guvnor (Steve COLLINS) and stated that they needed every single Breathing Apparatus (BA) wearer that we had, every single length of 45 and all your branches. 45 is the diameter of the hose, so we had 4 lengths of hoses, 2 branches, we had a branch we use all the time, the 101 and deluge branch which we would use for fighting fire on the outside. The branch controls the water and the flow. It can adjust the jet, so instead of just getting a jet of water you can actually adjust the branch so you can get a curtain type flow. It has an on/off tap on the end.

Everyone got off the trucks, as driver I don't rig, I just wear normal work wear. I got out and went to the locker and put my fire gear on and made sure I had everything that was supposed to be on there. My whistle, torch, my lamp, radio, flash hood, gloves, just made sure it was all there. I also took a BA (breathing apparatus) set off the back. Once we were set we made our way around the corner. There were about 20-30 members of the public, they were crying, screaming and they were talking about people jumping out of the windows and or people throwing babies out of windows. When I heard this I knew something was going horribly wrong there. I now know, no babies were thrown out of any windows, that didn't happen. Pieces of the outside were falling down, it was dark and sometimes it did look like people coming down. I don't know what the material was falling down, it could have been cladding, it could have been anything, furniture up against windows, if the windows were failing, could have been the plastic, the glass. All I know is there was a lot of debris, it was coming down flaming, on flames. I have never seen anything like that at all, ever.

I saw other crews setting up the hydrants to get water. We made our way to the start of the block of the flats. This is where I met up with the rest of the crews from my watch. Steve COLLINS had started to set up the ground monitor, this is a piece of kit that we use, it's like a branch, but larger and has legs and a handle on the top. It boosts the pressure and can deliver more water over a longer reach, this is for use externally. A fire engine would be pretty much just delivering water to that monitor. It gets as high as it

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can, its grounded so once it's in position you can't move it unless it is turned off and repositioned. It's attached with a 70 mil hose. A hose goes to the hydrant into the back of a pump, all engines have a pump, one fire engine has a ladder on it, a bigger ladder and that's why you have a pump ladder and one that is a pump, that's the difference. There were two or three of these around the building. Before I went in, outside there were members of the public, screaming. There were people hanging out of the windows, it looked like they were trying to get some air. The whole of the East side was alight. There was a smell in the air, a nasty plastic chemical smell.

Myself and fire fighter (FF) Geoff CAMPBELL had a hose and took it into the building mezzanine floor, I believe that's on the second floor, well that's what I was told. Here there were about 20 FF and this was where the Entry Control Board (ECO) was situated at the bridge head. The bridge head is a location positioned normally 2 floors below the fire and is where the BA ECO is located. It was no bridge head like I have ever been to before. There were two (2) ECO boards set up and everyone was trying to get in and tackle the fire. WM O'KIEFF was in charge at that time at the bridge head. The time I think would have been about 0130 hours, I'm not too sure. Myself and FF Geoff CAMPBELL were tasked with getting to the 20th floor. I could hear fire survivor calls coming through with CM's who were taking those calls, I don't know who they were. The calls were being shouted up from the ground floor to the bridge head. We were then china graphing on the walls the fire survivor calls, with information like the number of people at each flat and that's when the ECO would task FF's to go to a specific floor or flat. Everyone was writing on the walls. I did write on the wall, two (2) packs, being a person, so two (2) people, I can't remember the flat or floor. Myself and FF CAMPBELL were tasked with going to flat 175 on the 20th floor. We had Standard duration breathing apparatus (SDBA), not extended duration breathing apparatus (EDBA), which lasts longer. We didn't really question it, we just got on with it. We took 2 lengths of 45, a branch and a Thermal imaging camera (TIC) which I didn't use. As we were making our way up, the staircase was narrow. You had to stop to let people through, for people to pass you. It wasn't a double sized staircase on that mezzanine floor.

The firefighting lift was out of bounds as it was smoke logged, the staircase was the only way in and that was the only staircase. We carried out a gauge check before we went up, I had 302 bar on the SDBA, and you can't commit anything below 270. I am not too sure what FF CAMPBELL had. We took our time, I was taking deep breaths, if we got to the 20th floor it would have been a quick turnaround. I wasn't sure

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how bad the staircase would be, it would have been a lot easier with good stairs, we could have taken our time and not used too much air. I could hear alarms in the communal areas but I don't know what floors they were sounding. We got to the 4th floor, there was a hose coming in through the fire door, and there was heavy smoke logging. From the 4th floor up is where it got smoky and it was smoky all the way up. We were carrying a hose and a branch, it was hard going, and we had to work out where we were. What wasn't helping, was there were no floor numbers on the staircase and so it made it harder to know what floor you were on. There was no numbering at all, I was counting the floors and so was Geoff (FF CAMPBELL). While all of this was happening traffic on the radio got to a stage where there was just loads of traffic, I could hear people were getting louder on the radio, people were just chatting away on the radio. That was channel 1, I was on channel 6 which was the BA channel and that was jammed with lots of calls also. Some fire doors were closed, it just depended if there was a hose going through the door. If I opened any doors I made sure they were closed behind me. All the doors I did open did close properly with self-closing mechanisms. The spread of smoke may have been due to the hoses going through the doors keeping the doors open a little. The hose is connected to the dry riser hose on the floor below and there should be another crew backing you up, so you have to breach the fire door. One flat door was actually open when I reached it but I don't know which floor or flat it was. The dry riser was definitely charged as the hose was solid. We reached the 15th floor, the dry riser was charged with water but we didn't use it as we were not a firefighting tasking, we were tasked with rescue. Although we were a rescue unit, you never go in without any sort of firefighting media, which means you would never go into a building without a branch, a charged branch. Our intention was to get to the 20th floor, set in, which means putting the 45 into the dry riser, charge the 45, check the branch and then we would make entry into the flat, and therefore if we saw flames we would be able to fight the fire. You would never go into a fire without kit, it is drilled into you that's the reason we had the hose although we weren't firefighting we were rescue. We got to the 15th floor I checked my gauge, again, I was at 150 bar and Geoff (FF CAMPBELL) was at 160 bar.

We both took the decision there and then, do we carry on and get to the 20th, get the lady out, and then run out of air ourselves and then become casualties as such. It might have been she was waiting at the front door, or it could be she is over with come with smoke so we use more air getting her down. We both reached a decision we wouldn't be able to get to the 20th floor and there was no way we should even try at that time. I believe there were no other crews above us at this time. Anyone who went above the 15th

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would need to be with EDBA. I told Geoff to come down with me and go onto a different floor so we could at least try and find other casualties if we couldn't go up. We told the ECO what we were doing. Before we left the 15th floor we banged on the doors but there was no answer to any of them and did a sweep of flat. We went down to the 14th floor, which wasn't smoke logged, it was still smoky but not as bad as the 15th. As you come out of the staircase, you turn right and that was the bin room, this was not smoke logged at all, it was as clear as a whistle, I was really impressed actually, we went in there and you could probably take your mask off in there, it was very clear. We banged on the doors and did a quick sweep of each flat. We found one door open, we entered each room and were calling out but they were all empty, they were all heavily smoke logged. Having banged on all the doors and carried out a sweep of each flat we made our way down. On the way down I can't remember what floor it was but we met the FRU crew, A216 from our station, the guys on our watch. I believe the crew was, Phil Wrigley, Andy Harris, Martin Gillan and FF Gonzales. We saw them and when crews cross you ask them what they are doing. I couldn't tell you what time this was. They told us they had been tasked to get to the roof and they were taking the line gear with them. I can only presume they were going to try and fight the fire from roof. We told them we had been tasked with getting to the lady at Flat 175. I now know that they did bring her down, they were wearing EDBA. Before we left them I gave them the TIC I had so they could use it higher up. For me I think about that, that's something I am glad I know about, if she was up there and I didn't get her then I think that would have played on my mind. I did explain to them what our brief was and that we couldn't do it as we ran out of air, they then took that brief and went on up the stairs.

We got to the 9th floor, it was mega hot, when you went past it there was like a heat barrier, I didn't even want to open doors, I could feel the heat on the way through. We carried on down to about the 4th floor. We came across a crew of 2 FF, I didn't know who they were, they were from another station, they were trying to get a lady in a wheel chair down the stairs and it was clear they were struggling, she was a large lady. We helped this crew and brought her down, where she was handed to another crew who took her out. We got our tally's, these are plastic cards with our names on, this is so they know how many people they have in the fire, so when we turn up we hand it in. The ECO had 2 boards going, there were 20 holes and they were both nearly full. Whilst going up and down there was lighting but as the smoke became thicker it defused the lighting, past the 9th floor there was no lighting at all. Also at the same time I didn't notice any safety measures, there were no sprinklers, I did hear some alarms but I don't know on what floors or where they were coming from. There is also a rising main. There is a rising pipe running through the

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building, you open a valve and it is fed from the mains water.

I went outside and there was a WM there giving WM O'Keeffe a hand. I gave my brief to that WM and on the mezzanine floor and I drew a map, an outline of what the floor looked like. No one was understanding where everything was so I drew what I remembered, it's like a big H and drew where the stair case was, the bin room, the flats and the lift lobby and where the lifts were, I explained the layout and that the 9th floor was mega hot. We left and went to the lobby. It was completely wet because of the amount of water that was being used, there must have been 2-3 inches of water. The water was pooling at the bottom. When you leave a block you are trained to look up for debris, on the side I was on there was no fire, this is the main entrance as you look in. I think this was the south side and it started on the east side and was making its way to the north and around the building. I looked up and this is when I noticed a rope ladder coming out of one of the windows, it was made of sheets or something being tied together. I could see someone tying the sheets together. I believe he was a male and he was hanging out of the window tying sheets, there must have been about 12 sheets he had tied together. I think he was on about the 8th floor, he was on one of the lower floors but it was still very high up when you look up. I just remember seeing this thing just snaking around. I told a WM and we were shining our lamps up and could see him hanging out of the window tying these sheets. We tried to count the floors and it must have been the 10th floor I think. Someone radioed through to the guys inside the building. I didn't want him to do that, the ladder wouldn't have reached the ground. If they had fallen from the bottom of the ladder they would have hit a shelf. The WM said he would deal with it so we walked away. Once I was completely outside I walked back to our fire engine. There was lots of people and commotion. The TL was being hit by debris so it was put away and re positioned under the car park area as much as it could be to protect it. Myself and Geoff then carried out an A test. This is putting on a new cylinder and testing it making sure it was ready to use again. Our appliance was in BOMORE Road and it didn't move position from there. From this position I could see the flames, it was lapping over the top of it. Some of the residents were giving us water, everyone was with their phones out taking pictures. We made our way back to the entrance, the ECO had now been moved to the ground floor on the west side. It's the side with the playground. There were 2 windows open so we squeezed in through there to get in. It was like what I can describe as a community meeting room, there were fold away chairs and table and a sink.

We went back in at about 0230 hours, we were now with FF Grahame SHAW and FF Jim CUTHBERT.

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There was the 4 of us and about 20 of us in total. One of the mains had come out, they were trying to get the other one out. We started seeing casualties coming out of the block. The fire had now gone through to the East side and the north was alight, debris was still dropping and it had started to creep round onto the west. Some of the FF were giving their helmets to the casualties so they could get them to the LAS and at one point the police were using their long shields to help with getting them and us to and from the tower. At some point some people were using the fold up tables from a room to cover our heads. There were FF on all sides of the building checking the exterior

At this stage senior management was there, the commissioner, Dani COTTON, she was there on the ground floor and other senior management.

Sometimes we took a knee, this is kneeling on one knee to take the pressure off the load we were carrying and to get our breathing back to normal. There was also an assistant commissioner there, he did a stirring speech, saying things like this is the worst fire London has seen since this blitz, you need to be safe. He was saying this as there was a bit of panicking going on as we thought we had lost a FF. It was thought a FF hadn't come out but in actual fact he had. There was a general panic about losing a FF however, when the management changed there appeared to more activity, there seemed to more people with white hats, things were being done a different gear.

You could tell she was worried, there was smoke coming through to where we were. That was another reason we took a knee, there were wisps of smoke on that ground floor. We were carrying our BA but with the masks around our necks at this point. At this stage they said they had to move the ECO, move the boards and move everyone coming out of the building. At this stage crews started to leave, we went out by the playground where there is a big wall and everyone decamped to there, I later found out there were 2 other ECO's, on the east and west side. FF's were coming back in with burns. This was from debris going down their necks. We were near a sink so water was being thrown down people's backs. I didn't receive any injuries myself. Me and Geoff were the last ones out before they moved the ECO. It was weird, we were just stood there watching the fire, and we felt helpless. It was a stage where management needed to get a hold of it and use EDBA. We were a FRU with EDBA but only had 5 sets, we needed more sets. It took a while for that to happen. We were told to go and get EDBA so went back to the leisure centre before redeployment as that was where the sets were. We had to get set covers, these are

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plastic covers, and they protect the cylinders with straps over the top which stops you getting tangled. As people were coming out we were taking their covers. We were stood waiting for 2 to 3 hours and it was starting to get light. When looking at the fire I would see people at the windows and then they would disappear, the building was deteriorating but I didn't have any issues over the integrity of the building. I used to be a royal engineer, I knew the construction of that building and how it was constructed, and that fire alone wouldn't cause it to collapse. The fire was top heavy, if it had been at the base or ground floor, and the concrete was spoiled, I would have been a bit more concerned. I was never worried about it collapsing but others were.

The sun was coming up, it was a lovely day coming in, I saw what I can only describe as threads coming off the building, falling around us, about 4 metres in length, like streamers, but very thin plastic and it was very strange, very weird. It could have been anything but it looked like white thread, long string coming down from the building. There was also bits of insulation, bits of the building coming down. At about 6am someone asked me if I was the driver of the ladder/appliance, to go and move the ladder, so I didn't get to go in, they needed a team of five (5) or six (6) but I had to go back and move the truck. I was not happy about that. It was the commissioner who wanted it moved for another command unit to get into the area. I did move it a bit further down the road. I went back but the crew had been committed already so I went back to the truck and that's when I saw the guvnor, Steve COLLINS, Guy TILITSON and some others. I don't know what time this was but I know we finished at about 11am and we were told the other watch was coming in. I gave our sets back into the holding area by the leisure centre, as they had set up an equipment dump. I just stood there in the light of day and just saw the building really. There were still fires going on certain floors, there was still smoke coming out, it had pretty much made its way all around the building, and you could see where it had stopped coming down. On the south side you could see where we had stopped the fire, where the ground monitor had been used to spray the outside which kept it from catching further down. I know Steve COLLINS was pretty much just spraying it across the building. The crew came back to the truck and got on. They were talking about releasing 20 pumps and getting 20 in, there were 40 pumps there, 40 appliances. We left the scene at around 11am with the crew back on and collected the nominal role board, it's used so a head count can be done, and it stays on the machine.

We made our way back to Paddington Fire Station. We were not the only ones there. It appeared that all engines had to go there first. There was some parked on the Harrow Road, taking a whole lane and some

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were in the station yard. Tables were set up with water and other bits. They had set up a counselling service, management were also there to help us do our statements, initial statements. I made an initial statement myself and left the station to go home, I then had [REDACTED] leave. I think we booked off at maybe 1, or 2 o'clock, I don't know.

The initial statement I made at the time I handed to DC PREOU which I produce as my exhibit SPJM/1

This incident has really shocked me. I am a competent fire fighter, my guvnor at the station is good at training, and we do it every tour involving the tower in the back yard. Its 13 stories high, we use it a lot. Paddington has the highest concentration of high rise blocks so we do drills on a regular basis. Although we do this training I did take part in a large exercise about 4 years ago which was actually at NSY, they used dry smoke. I haven't had to fight a high rise fire since being at Paddington. No matter how much training you have it would not have prepared us for a fire of this scale. Thinking about the incident now, we needed a longer TL and aerial ladders, at least one of them. We needed more EDDBA instead of SDBA, with the EDDBA we would have had a better chance. Across the board we should have more training on multiple flat fires. I say this light hearted but a Hercules filled with water could have put that out.

There is stay put policy which the fire brigade use. It's for when a fire occurs in a block, in your home etc, when you can't get out because the fire is hindering your escape. You should stay in a room and open a window. The fire survivor policy will stay on the line with the person and ask what they can see and it will be relayed to us, they will talk us in or a ladder crew. If you stay put you should stay safe.

At all incidents there will be a command unit, it is there to assist the incident commander, the man in charge, making sure they have everything that they need to get the job done. They can have different roles so there can be more than one command unit.

During the incident outside, I witnessed a colleague of mine who had a near miss with someone falling from the tower and hitting him. That night I witnessed events I shouldn't have. In my eight years I haven't seen anything like this. I am truly blessed to be working with the men that I do, they have helped me get through this.

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During my interview with the officers I was asked to draw the same plan layout I drew inside the building at the ECO, I did this on a piece of paper and I produce this as my exhibit SPJM/2 which I handed to DC PREOU.

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