

**WITNESS STATEMENT**

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

Statement of: NGO, STEVEN

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

Occupation: FIRE OFFICER

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This statement (consisting of 5 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: S NGO

Date: 07/02/2018

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

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My name is Steven NGO and this is my statement relating to the Grenfell Tower fire, which I attended in my capacity as a firefighter. I'm currently attached to the 'Red Watch,' based out of Old Kent Road fire station in London. I hold the rank of Firefighter and have been one for nine years

I graduated from the training school in 2008 and I have been stationed at Old Kent Road Fire Station since. Prior to attending the fire at Grenfell tower fire I have had training in firefighting in high rise buildings. This has taken form of lectures, practical's and Breathing Apparatus (BA) refresher course. Which is pass or fail and has to be completed every two years. We have many high-rise buildings on our ground, so this is type of training is a priority.

As part of our duties we would attend High Rise buildings on our ground to familiarise ourselves with where the water hydrants and access points are.

There is no specific plan if compartmentation fails; it would be based on the situation that you are facing. Every fire is different and you would have to make an assessment of the fire in order to establish which firefighting techniques are best to tackle it — this would include 'pulse spraying' in order to stop the spread as soon as possible.

The 'stay put policy' is based on a normal compartment fire. When compartmentation works the fire should be confined to that one compartment and not spread to surrounding compartments. I do not know who was in charge of the stay put policy nor do I know who made decisions about 'the stay put policy' on the night. I'm not aware of the command structure for this incident.

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On Tuesday the 13<sup>th</sup> of June 2017 I was rostered to work a night shift, which normally starts at 8pm, however a colleague of mine Firefighter (FF) Rob LINLEY needed to finish early and had asked me if I could come in early to cover for him. I agreed to this and came into to work for 5pm. Once the rest of my shift came on we conducted a role call and I was riding our pump ladder appliance E351. The crew of which were — Watch Manager (WM) Matt HAYWARD, Fire fighter (FF) Keiron LAWS (Driver), FF Roger CUMMINGS (watch room), FF Ian ATMORE, FF Denis O'BRIEN and myself.

I completed my routine bits of inventory, which I would complete at the start of all shifts. This includes completing a fire ground A test on breathing apparatus as well as inventory of the appliance I was going to ride. I can remember that England were due to play France at either 7:30 or 8pm. So as a 'watch' we were keen to get all our bits complete so we could at least watch some of the football. However, we did not get to do this because a call came out to a chip pan fire, to a flat in [REDACTED]. A lady had burnt her hand. We had to give her first aid, and we put out a little fire. After this call, we had another to a warehouse in New Cross. Someone had broken into the warehouse, as a result 'security smoke' had emitted. Causing the fire alarm to go off. As a result of attending this call I had inhaled some of this smoke. Some of it was caught in the back of my throat.

We got back to the station for about 10pm, we missed the football game and had to watch the highlights. I do not think we had any other calls. At about 12pm on a night shift we go into a period of rest. This is where we are entitled to rest in our dormitories until a call comes through. I was laying on my dorm bed, awake just resting, when just after 1am on Wednesday the 14<sup>th</sup> of June 2017 I started to get text messages from my friends. They were sending me links of a building that was on fire. I know now this building to be Grenfell Tower. I tried not to pay much attention to this and I didn't reply to any of them. I also checked social media; Twitter and Facebook where this fire was being talked about, I could see images and videos of the tower on fire.

Sometime between 1 to 2am a call on our station 'Tannoy' system sounded. This was for E351 to mobilise. The call lights switch on and the sound of mobilise' with call sign E351, by listening to that you know who is required. There is a bit of a glitch with the system at our station, where the call is repeated several times before a call sign comes out. I was laying down, still coughing from the smoke from the previous job. I made my way downstairs to the watch room. I went straight to the printer.

When we receive a call out information, containing the location of the incident and resources needed is printed on a tele-printer. I was the first one to the printer. I could see that the tele-printer was several pages long, this made me think that this was quite a big call. FF Roger CUMMINGS looked at it; there

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was so much information to read. I looked at the address and saw it was to the fire at Grenfell Tower. The call read 'make pumps forty,' — meaning in addition to our pump appliance the number of appliances needed at the incident was forty. Grenfell Tower is not on our ground, and I have never been there before in any capacity. We had to work out a route of how to get there. FF O'BRIEN is a black cab driver and as a result he was able to direct FF LAWS, I also used my phone app to assist with directions

We made our way to Grenfell Tower on blue lights and two tones. As we are based south of the river we had to change the radio channel on the appliance. We have to ask permission to change channels. There was a big back log of other appliances trying to do this and to get booked on.

I can remember listening to the radio and hearing a lot of radio traffic, it was quite hectic. I could hear multiple Fire Survival Calls coming out (FSG — Calls). This is when the brigade receives calls from people who are trapped in a building that is on fire. The bridge (through control) give fire survival guidance until Firefighters can come to their location and effect a rescue. Along with a firefighter rescue (where a firefighter is in trouble), as a fire fighter you really don't want to hear FSG calls coming out as this means things have gotten quite serious and Firefighters would have to be deployed into buildings to get people out.

During the journey I had checked my phone, I looked on Twitter and Facebook Live. There were video clips showing Grenfell tower burning, I showed the rest of my crewmembers this footage. This was to show them what we were potentially going into. We were questioning if it was a partially built new building or if it was terrorists attack. My WhatsApp and Twitter was going mad with information about the fire. I was getting mentally prepared. I think we were all concentrating on the job that we were going to and getting into 'the zone.'

Once we reached Hyde Park Corner, I was aware of a whole load of Emergency services on blue lights. They all appeared to be driving in the same direction. We rightly assumed that they all were all going to this fire. We followed in this convoy of emergency services to the tower. I think I first saw the tower when we were driving down Ladbroke grove. I just remember seeing a 'glow' against the night sky. I think the journey took about thirty minutes. We parked our fire appliance on Clarendon Road junction with Dulford St. I could not see the tower at this point because there were other buildings blocking our view of it.

We got out of the appliance and grabbed our kit. We placed our Breathing Apparatus (BA) sets on. Even our watch manger (WM) Matt HAYWARD put his BA kit on. I had to go to the back of the appliance to grab my BA set. Almost immediately our crew got separated. We were approached by a lot of members

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of public. They tried to give us mobile phones to speak to loved ones who were trapped within the tower. We referred them to nearby police officers and other higher ranking fire officers. I knew that the best way we could help them would be to get to the tower and do what we are trained too. I did not speak to anybody on the mobile phone.

We were parked about three hundred metres away from the tower and we had to walk to get to the fire ground. We walked south down Dulford Street, then we took a right onto Bomore road where we walked west until we got to the junction of Grenfell Tower where we walked north up Grenfell Road.

As we turned the corner I could see two sides of the tower alight, it must have been the south and east side of the tower. The tower was well alight the flames were in a V shape I had a corner view of these sides. Some flames were blue some were orange. It reminded me of Lakanal house fire, (a fire that took place in a high rise building in south London in 2009). Some of the smoke coming out of the building were black some were grey. It was like the tower was wrapped in newspaper and dipped in petrol. The scene was so chaotic; it was like a war zone or a battle ground.

I could see casualties being pulled out of the building, casualties that were being worked on, I think a Firefighter that I know as FF BROWN was doing CPR on a casualty. As we got closer to the tower I could see debris falling from the building, we made our way to a walkway that was located to the south of the tower. This is a walkway in protected by a raised concrete walkway. Here we lined up with at least 100 firefighters all waiting in a line to go into the tower. I could see casualties being worked on I think FF O'BRIEN did some CPR on a casualty. The radio channel 1 was hectic there was so much radio traffic I was looking at the tower to try to work out where the fire had started but I was unable too. I noticed police officers in riot gear and riot shields. They were using these shields to protect firefighters going in and out of the building from falling debris. The debris were what I now know as pieces of cladding, as well as glass from windows and bits of metal. Prior to this incident I was not aware of the risk of cladding and any fire hazard it posed.

On the floor above us was a raised concrete walkway, this had a 13.5 metre ladder pitched to the tower (I think it had been used to conduct a snatch rescue) debris had fallen on it.

The entrance to the tower was situated by a playground. We had to be escorted into the building by the police officers with riot shields to protect us from the falling debris. I could see that debris had fallen onto the ground and had cut some of the hose that was going into the building. The door to the building was not an 'official' door. I think it had been made by previous crews. It was finally our turn to go into the building, we went through this small door which led to a small lobby area. There were around 100 other

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firefighters in this area. I could hear and smell smoke. There was a lot of water, it was like a water fall.

Some of which was red (I think from blood), it was senses overload.

At some point I was aware that the commissioner of the Fire brigade Danny COTTON was in the lobby area. The commissioner, through her number two said, that this fire was like nothing they have ever seen anything before. Some of our actions may be going off policy, but to get home safe. Don't worry about getting into trouble. After about half an hour of waiting, we were told to evacuate the building as there was too much smoke and it was not safe. We all had to exit this lobby area back to outside area. We went back and waited underneath the walkway, we lent against a wall to take the weight off the BA sets.

Once the lobby area had been made safe again, the officer in charge requested that Firefighters who were extended duration breathing apparatus (EDBA) wearers to come forward. EDBA wearers have an extended amount of air available to them, and therefore can be deployed for a longer amount of time. FF O'BRIEN and I were only Standard Duration Breathing Apparatus wearers.

Whilst waiting to be deployed into the building I could see people waving flags out at the windows, a lot of them trying to use the lights on their mobile phones to grab our attention. People were making noise with pots and pans, screaming and shouting at us. It felt like a dream. The hose that was spraying water onto the building wasn't touching the fire, our Aerial ladder couldn't get close to the building.

I thought to myself 'how are we going to get up there?' One such person stood out for me, I could see a woman with her daughter. I think this was on the tenth floor. This reminded me of my partner and my two-year- old daughter. They live in a high rise block flats and I couldn't help but think of them. I told myself not to get too emotionally involved in things and to stay focused on the job in hand.

Whilst waiting we were tasked by watch manager Paul MERIT to go and find as much hose as we could. FF O'BRIEN and I walked back to towards our appliances in search of hose. All of the nearby appliances were empty and we eventually found hose from an appliance parked about 200 hundred metres away. We bought the hose back I remember coming back to the line of BA wearers and seeing the windows of where the people had been waving at us had been burnt out. I did not know what had happened to them and I hoped they had been saved. I could see a number of body bags lined up along a wall. The shape of one of the body bag suggested to me that the person may have lost a limb. I could see Individuals that I respect (firefighters) coming out of the building looking absolutely destroyed. I was aware of some firefighters that had already worn (BA sets and been under air) being deployed for a second time. A lot of policies were broken.

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FF O'BRIEN and I pushed our way to the front of the queue, from a professional sense I wanted to get involved and do my bit. I think all the firefighters that were waiting to be deployed wanted to get stuck in. We handed the hose that we had found from the fire appliance to Paul MERRITT. It was our time to go back into the tower. We were escorted back in by police officer with riot shields, one police officer per firefighter. I could see that debris had hit one of the shields in front of me. One of the firefighter was acting as a spotter telling us when the coast was clear to make the run into the building. Once back inside I could see that there was a lot of standing water, the air was Smokey but breathable — it smelt like industrial material had been burnt out.

FF O'BRIEN and I joined up with crewmembers from West Hampstead to form a crew of four I do not know their names. FF O'BRIEN was lead firefighter and I was number two. We were briefed officer by Pat GOLDBOURNE. Our brief was to extend a length of branch as far as we could, and fight fire if possible.' Pat GOLDBOURNE would have said this to FF O'BRIEN, he would relay this to me and I would relay this to the man behind me, and so forth — a bit like Chinese whispers. We were informed of large deceased person's body on the upper floors. It was too large to move, we were told to leave the body in situ.

Once fully briefed we handed over our telemetry sets to the entry control boards, (there were around four boards in operation) my crew grabbed a hold of the hose we were meant to extend and followed it up the stairs (it was not charged). I changed to radio channel 6. This is channel for BA wearers, used to communicate with other BA wearers and entry control.

The stairs from the ground floor lead to a mezzanine level which had glass panels. This is where the hose was attached to the riser main. Once we got to this level, the stairwell changes to a narrow set of concrete stairs. We had to walk in single file, there was a lot of hose and it was dim. I think most of the light was coming from our lamps.

The landing area were not numbered; we had to count the floors as we walked up the stairs. The stairwell was littered with firefighting equipment, it was like someone had grabbed the contents of a fire engine and thrown it around the stairwell. One of the floors was quite Smokey, this is the floor where we found the deceased person's body, and I can remember seeing it was face down. I was being led by FF O'BRIEN I was following him and the hose.

I could see that a few of the lobby doors were being propped open (by hose), I could hear fire alarms and crackling noises coming from some of the floors that we had passed. I remember seeing crews without BA's set doing snatch rescues. I was not aware of any sprinklers nor was I aware of any smoke dispersal

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system. I think we got to about the 13<sup>th</sup> floor when we noticed the temperature increased considerably. I do not think we could have gone any further, as it was too hot, and we did not have any equipment to fight fire with. I felt exhausted. FF O'BRIEN was making progress quicker than the rest of us. I told him that there was no point progressing further if we had no means of fighting fire. We also had no communications. Although I was wearing a BARIE) set it was not working (A radio set underneath my helmet with a bone conducting microphone and an earpiece). We had to use a runner to communicate our actions to those below us. This was done by one of the Firefighters from West Hampstead. I did not use a Thermal imaging camera (TIC) nor was I wearing a body camera whilst deployed in the tower. I do not believe there were any other Firefighting crews ahead of us, we were at the limit of our capabilities. There were two crews had to withdraw from one of the floors below us 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> floor. They told us it was too hot and the floor may fall through.

Normally as firefighters we all work to one goal, however speaking with the others we met whilst in the stairwell, it felt like we were all working to separate goals, the whole situation was chaotic.

I would say we were under BA for about twenty minutes and we spent a total of an hour within the tower. We made our way back down the stairwell to the entry/ control point on the ground floor. We debriefed Officer Pat GOLDBOURNE. We then made our way back out under the protection of the police officers with the shields. Once outside we waited in the green grass area, and conducted a fire ground 'A' test in order to be redeployed. I spoke with FF O'BRIEN and suggested to him that we keep busy and do something useful. By now it had started to become daylight. FF O'BRIEN a FF Steve OIL from Dockhead and I asked permission to set up a jet from the upper concrete mezzanine level to shoot jets of water at the building. Once this jet has been set up we realised we were not getting enough water pressure for it to be effective.

We went downstairs and asked if we could take over from Brixton's to give them a break. We were given permission to take over and we manned a hose shooting a jet of water at the tower. We did this for a decent amount of time, until we were relieved by other firefighters.

I had lost track of time but I was aware that it had become daylight. I think we were asked by an officer to collect an information board from one of the command units. We walked passed Paddington's aerial appliance. I knew there was a body near their appliance, apparently someone had jumped from the building — I did not see this happened but I saw the aftermath of Firefighters reacting to this. We handed the information board to the officer who had requested it.

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I did not receive any injuries nor did I need any first aid as a result of this incident. I was hit by a piece of black cladding, but this was not a forceful hit it was more like it had wafted down and on to me. At one point the cladding looked like black ice raining down from the tower.

By this time the Red watch were being stood down, we regrouped with my original crew, FF Roger CUMMINGS had said that in his forty years of service he had never seen anything like this incident. We were told to make our way to Paddington Fire Station where we were to make notes of our involvement and to see occupational health if need be. I had to refer to FF O'BRIEN to assist with my notes just to make sure I was getting things right. After we had done this we made our way back to Old Kent Road Fire station. This was for about five to six in the evening. I took this time to make calls to my family members to tell them that I was ok. Blue watch had told us to take as much time as we needed before back on duty.

In my opinion there has been a lot of cuts to the brigade. If blue watch had not volunteered to cover for us we would have had to go straight back to duty — as there is no one else to cover. Our MDT system is outdated and there is a massive lag when you are trying to navigate your way to an incident. Our radio communications are old and out dated. It also did not help that our aerial appliance is not good enough, it was not able to get close enough to be effective. There were a lot of parked cars making it difficult to get our appliances in the right place.

There were also issues with the water pressure — I do not know if this was due to a breakdown in communication. I also believe that more firefighters should be EDBA trained, this would have given us more time to fight fire within the building.

I have been given a map/plan of Grenfell Tower and the surrounding area. I have marked the following points to indicate certain points. They are as follows:

- A - Entrance to the building
- B - Emergency services and casualties triage
- C- Playground/covering jet
- D - Raised concrete covering jet
- E - Where our appliance was parked.

I exhibit this map as map as my exhibit SNG/1 sealed with MPSZ13114914

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