

**WITNESS STATEMENT**

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

Statement of: SOMERS, 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.SOMERS

Date: 19/04/2018

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

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This statement is my account of my attendance at the Grenfell Tower fire, which occurred on the 14<sup>th</sup> June 2017.

On Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> November 2017 at 1011hrs, I was interviewed at my place of work, East Ham Fire Station, by DC Ray SWAN and PC Darren SMITH. Also in attendance was Fire Brigade Union representative Paul CLEMENCE. I was aware of this interview being audio recorded by DC Ray SWAN.

I am Steve SOMERS, a Firefighter for the London Fire Brigade for the last 25 years. I am currently attached to East Ham Fire Station on Red Watch. I would say that having done this job for 25 years, and having worked out of four different stations, I have a considerable amount of experience.

I worked with various crew members on my shift that day, and I shall refer to a number of them by name, as follows – Crew Manager Martin STEVENSON (CM STEVENSON), Firefighter Mark THORPE (FF THORPE), Firefighter Richard THOMAS (FF THOMAS), Firefighter Adrian TYLDESLEY (FF TYLDESLEY) and Firefighter Paul HOWARD (FF HOWARD).

On the night of the fire, I was allocated to ride the FRU truck, which tends to deal with a lot of road traffic collisions, working at height, underground jobs, with heavy lifting equipment. I was on the first of two night shifts, which run from 2000-0930rs. The call to Grenfell Tower came through to our unit just

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before 0400hrs, asking us to attend a 40 pump fire, the first time I've seen such a request come through on a call slip. At this moment, I knew we had a big job to go to.

We made our way across town, and I remember it being a clear drive at that time of the morning. I could see the fire at Grenfell Tower from a long distance as we were making our way there, so I knew we were attending something fairly major. It was quite shocking to see, even though I know now that we'd missed the worse of it. The building looked angry, and I did have fears that it would collapse while we were there, this was definitely something that was in my mind when I entered the tower as well, as I know that when a building has been on fire for that long, that badly, it's going to have weakened. I remember it being daylight by the time we arrived at the tower. I could see that most of the upper floors were completely burnt out, just shells remaining. The fires that we could still see burning in the remaining flats still looked good working jobs in my experience, despite the blaze having been battled for hours by the time we got there. We parked up as near to the incident as we possibly could, it was probably about a 5 minute walk away from the 'hot zone' of the incident, due to road closures that had been put in place.

Our Crew Manager (CM), Martin STEVENSON said to grab our breathing apparatus out of the lockers. We were told by our CM to hold back until he found out what needed to be done. Loads of other crews of firefighters were there with us, so we grouped together while waiting, outside a sports hall. Our CM came back and told us that we were on hold, so to stand by until needed. It felt like we were waiting around for quite a while, not really doing a lot.

We were then called over to a briefing point outside the building, and were told that we would be going into the tower with Extended Duration breathing apparatus. At that point, we were sent to what I would describe as the basement area of the building, due to the falling debris coming down from the exterior of the building, we were guided through by Police Officers using riot shields to protect us. Once inside the basement area, we were sat alongside other crews waiting to get sent up with our EDBA. It all seemed to take a long time, and then Pat GOLDBOURNE, the Group Manager, came down and told us what we were likely to be doing. From there we were sent up to the entry control point, initially as a crew of 5 although crews of 4 were being sent up. This meant that someone from our crew would've had to join onto another crew, which none of us were keen on, so we spoke with Pat about this and he agreed to let us up in a crew of 5. We were then sent in with an additional crew, who I believe were from Croydon, so we were actually committed into Grenfell Tower as a crew of 9.

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We were instructed to go up to the 11<sup>th</sup> floor of the tower and continue firefighting. I remember there being a sort of mezzanine area between the ground floor and where the staircase started. It was approximately 0700hrs when we were first sent into the tower, though I can't be sure of the exact time.

On our way up the stairs, we were told by LFB colleague, whose name I do not know, to go and get a 'reccy' of the floor layout on either the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, but it was too smoky in this area so it seemed pointless really. By the time we got to the 11<sup>th</sup> floor, I remember the stairwell being reasonably cool, and quite clear in terms of smoke – I even recall seeing some firefighters without breathing apparatus on the stairs. Firefighters going into the tower to actually tackle the blaze were required to wear EDBA, however. I do remember if there was a second stairway that we could use, but I was told that there was not. The stairwell we used seemed just like a narrow, vertical tunnel going up with no windows either.

As we continued our way up the stairs, conditions were bad in terms of trying to negotiate our way past the hoses running up the stairwell, despite there being firefighters near the bottom of the stairs trying to keep the hoses free and tidy. I recall that the dry riser in Grenfell Tower had failed that night, and had it been working, our job would have been made easier due to the hoses not having to be ran up the stairwell causing an obstruction.

The fact that the floor numbers were not visibly marked from the stairwell made it difficult for us to know which floor was which, especially as the mezzanine area through which we entered the building made it unclear as to where to start counting floors from. I believe we went past the 11<sup>th</sup> floor, and the firefighting crew behind us alerted us to this, and so we turned back and went back down to the correct level.

When we approached the 11<sup>th</sup> floor there was a large black lady, apparently deceased, on the floor, partially blocking the doorway to the lobby. Her presence was hindering any attempts to get through the door, and I noticed that she was caught up in a hose too. I was told about the lady before I made my way up to the 11<sup>th</sup> floor, so her presence was not a surprise to me, but I just didn't know where exactly on the floor I'd find her. We were also briefed not to attempt to move any bodies that we found, due to the time that had elapsed since the start of the fire making the prospect of finding anyone alive minimal, so my job was solely to help extinguish the fire that was still going, rather than try to rescue anyone. I and firefighter from Croydon decided to gain entry to the lobby, but due to the intense heat and smoke, as well as the hose being caught around the deceased lady, it became obvious very quickly that fighting the fire on this floor was going to be impossible.

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We could only get a few yards into the lobby, and attempted to jet the lobby area with a short and long pulses just to cool it and get some more air into the atmosphere, but it seemed to be making little difference. I would describe this heat as unbearable, and the hot air and gases didn't seem to be going anywhere despite our efforts. As well as these difficulties, us having the door open to the lobby was allowing smoke from the 11<sup>th</sup> floor to escape into the stairwell, which clearly was not helpful. There was not point even attempting to get into any flats of the 11<sup>th</sup> floor, due to the working conditions, which was frustrating as I wanted to try and do my bit to put the fire out. The doors to the lobby areas seemed really good, considering how bad the conditions were on the 11<sup>th</sup> floor and how clear the stairwell was.

There also seemed to be a lot of water coming down the stairway from above us while we were on the 11<sup>th</sup> floor, I'm not sure what the cause of this was though. This was making it difficult to keep our uniform and equipment dry, which is dangerous in such intense heat, as the water starts to boil on the clothing next to your skin.

I couldn't say exactly how long we were up on the 11<sup>th</sup> floor, but I wouldn't say we had a great deal of working time up there, due to the difficulties with the door, the deceased lady and the intense heat, this contributed to our air supply running low fairly quickly. We made our way back down and relayed what we'd done to Entry Control, and then went outside, to the grass area in front of the sports hall. At this point we removed our firefighting gear and tried to let it dry off outside, as it was quite a sunny day.

Even though in the grand scheme of things I don't feel like I did that much in terms of extinguishing the fire, my job was pretty arduous, and the conditions on the 11<sup>th</sup> floor are not something you'd be able to work effectively.

I was made aware that some EDBA firefighters were being asked to go in for a 'second wear,' which is where you go into the same incident again with the EDBA apparatus. This is extremely rare due to the amount of hard work that is put into the first wear, but due to the severity of the incident and the limited number of crews with EDBA, it was deemed necessary.

Later on in the day I was asked to go back in for a second wear, and this may have been about 1300-1400hrs, though I cannot be sure. On this occasion, FF HOWARD, one of my colleagues from East Ham who had been sent to work out of Bethnal Green for this shift, said he'd crew up with us, but FF THORPE and FF THOMAS's kit was still too wet from the previous wear, so CM STEVENSON and FF TYLDESLEY made up the crew of four for our second wear.

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Once again we were called to a holding point, but this time it seemed to be in the gym area instead of the lift lobby area. From there, we were sent to the entry control point which had been moved to the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> floor, although I can't remember exactly which floor. We were sent into a flat to sit and wait further instructions. This was the first and only time that I entered a flat in the tower, and this one seemed undamaged by smoke or fire, but it was uninhabitable due to the amount of water that had gone in there from the firefighting. Having sat in the flat for around 30-40mins, considering we'd been on duty since 2000hrs the night before and didn't seem to be needed at this point, we asked what exactly we would be used for once deployed, to which we were told that we'd be used for extending a hose from, for example, Point A to point B. This didn't seem like much of a job for us to be sitting around waiting to do, considering how tired and hungry we were, and how hard we had worked.

We made our way back outside to the grass area outside the sports hall, and met up with FF THORPE and FF THOMAS again. I had something to eat and collected my thoughts for a bit, and we were then given permission to leave. We were told that we needed to go to Paddington Fire Station for a debrief of the incident, so that we could write down our actions and what was done. However I did not make any notes. I'm not sure about what time of day this was, but from what I remember I got back to East Ham Fire Station at about 1600hrs. there seemed to be lots of waiting around from when we left the tower, it all seemed like quite an ordeal, especially considering I was due back on duty at 2000hrs that evening. I know that FF HOWARD didn't get back to East Ham Fire Station via Padding and Bethnal Green Fire Station until about 1900hrs, when again he was due to start at 2000hrs.

The fire was definitely the worst I've seen in my career, although in terms of the work I actually did, I've done more at a smaller scale house fire.

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