

**WITNESS STATEMENT**

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

Statement of: CHESSUN, STUART

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

Occupation: FIRE OFFICER

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This statement (consisting of 4 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 CHESSUN

Date: 02/03/2018

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

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This statement is being provided in relation to my attendance and actions at the fire at GRENFELL TOWER on WEDNESDAY the 14TH JUNE 2017.

I currently hold the role of Crew Manager at BROMLEY FIRE STATION having been in the Brigade for sixteen (16) years. The other firefighters I was on duty with that night were Watch Manager (WM) Steve VYDLELINGHAM, Fire Fighter (FF) Dave KELLY, FF Mick BEAL, FF Jason BOYCE, FF Paul CROW, Crew Manager (CM) DIXIE and FF Ed HAYNES.

I have never been to Grenfell Tower prior to the morning of the fire and as such was unfamiliar with the grounds.

As a Crew Manager part of my role is to deliver training and lectures to the rest of the watch. I am the first level of Supervisor and a line manager to some Fire Fighters. I, myself, report to a Watch Manager.

At BROMLEY FIRE STATION we have two machines, one (1) is the "pump" which the Crew Manager is in charge of on a shift, and the Watch Manager is therefore in charge of the other machine which is the pump ladder. The only difference being that one has a bigger ladder.

In respect to training, when I first joined the Brigade I completed sixteen (16) week training in Southwark and since then I have been training and learning constantly as it is written into a fire man's schedule. The learning, training and development takes a number of forms from lectures to practical exercises and is

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delivered each shift refreshing on a three-month rotation. As a Standard Duration Breathing Apparatus (SDBA) wearer, I also refresh my training in this.

Before the Grenfell Tower fire and since then a watch is expected to complete drills and lectures in respect to tackling a blaze within a High Rise. BROMLEY FIRE STATION is equipped with a short tower in the yard that we use for the practical element of our learning. The closest training package we would have received prior to the fire at GRENFELL TOWER would have been in the APRIL-MAY-JUNE training round and so would have been fresh in our minds.

We also get training in compartmentalisation and I would be able to identify a failure in compartmentalisation and deal with it.

I believe that the training we receive is sufficient for our roles. The packages had been outsourced prior to the fire at GRENFELL TOWER to BABCOCKS. They are all uploaded and accessed online and I think that these packages are better as they include PowerPoint presentations and lectures that are read out rather than me having to read them out to the boys in training.

I have been to high rise fires before in my capacity as an SDBA firefighter as well as having been to a number of familiarisation visits for residential towers, but not GRENFELL TOWER as it is not in any proximity to my Fire Station.

A familiarisation visit is when we go to a premises and familiarise ourselves with the floorplan, the layout of the grounds. We will also make contact with the “competent person” at the site. We ensure that there are no fire hazards such as broken sprinklers or doors propped open and then we return to the Fire Station and report our findings.

On WEDNESDAY the 14TH of JUNE 2017 I was at work in bed within BROMLEY FIRE STATION when we received the call to attend GRENFELL TOWER, I think we got this call around 03:00 hours. I had never heard of the location and was initially surprised that we were being called to a location so far away.

When we receive a call, the station receives a tip sheet printed out in the Watch Room, I went to the watch room to read it and it read, “PERSONS REPORTED, HIGH RISE”. When you go to an incident like that with that many units and that late after it began you just assume that it’s probably more or less

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over, you think that the fire is out and that you're going to assist the investigation. You don't expect to turn up at a developing fire. We were given an RVP to head for; I don't remember where it was, and an address near the tower. I looked at the location on Google to work out to which kind of location we were going.

I remember when I looked at it I thought to myself that I had never seen one that long. I initially thought that there might have been a mistake but looking through the list of the call signs asked to attend I saw ours "E391" and so I knew we had been called. Both of the machines were called up, that night there was two (2) crew managers in, and so I rode the Pump Ladder with the Watch Manager.

En route to The Tower we realised that it was so far away it had to be a big one, something unprecedented. It took around an hour for us to get there, and that was with blue lights and sirens; I was sat in the back so I was not aware of the route. As we got closer to the location the only thing we could see was the massive plumes of black smoke in the sky, we couldn't see the Tower because of where the RVP was located. I believe we arrived at the RVP at around 05:00 hours. There had been no difficulty reaching the RVP because it had been organised on a large road, although it was quite a distance from the Tower this is how we would normally run an RVP because of the scale of resources required; there would have been appliances closer to the Tower, the relief don't have to be that close and our engines didn't move until we left.

There was many Fire engines at the RVP and Police Officers blocking off the road. Our governor went to the Command Unit with our boards to go a book us in; when he returned he told us to rig up into our BA, stay where we were and wait for further instructions. I stood on the path next to the machine; most of us did, stretching our legs after the long journeys. Whilst stood on the path I actually met Richard BRANSON, he came up to us and told us that we were doing a good job. That was a bit surreal; I didn't actually see any other members of the public. Just him.

We had not received a lot of information en route to Grenfell Tower because people in the control rooms were just too busy to pass it over. The information we did receive was from people who had already been at the scene that we met whilst there. They told us about the scale of the fire, that there was people still alive and that the fire was still going.

The waiting was fine at first but eventually it became tedious and the boys just wanted to get stuck in and help. Eventually, after what must have been around two hours of us waiting there the governor got a

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message from the Command Unit that we were now tasked to attend the fire ground. We were told to go to the queue of BA wearers that were being committed to a holding area; the queue was outside what I believe to have been the back of the Tower and the Holding Area was within the Tower.

All of the firefighters on our appliance were SDBA trained except for FF HAINES who has been trained in extended duration breathing equipment.

It was now daylight and the walk from the RVP to the fire ground was approximately ten (10) minutes. I walked with my breathing apparatus strapped to me but did not put the mask on, as you would want to conserve the air in the tanks until it was necessary. On our walk to the Tower I came across more members of the public and Senior Managers who were stood closer to the Tower, there was no hostility from the public, all I could hear were positive comments.

As I neared the Tower this was when I got my first real look at the building. I remember the word "ARMAGEDDON" coming to the forefront of my mind, it was the only way I could describe it. I thought to myself that there surely could not be people still in there, but there was, and they were still alive.

It was absolute carnage, there was sheets falling off the building, fires and faces at widows and police with shields. I did not have my mask on and I could smell the familiar smell of building fire, I could hear the debris falling to the ground, large pieces of panel and foam. I was amazed to see how large the panels were; maybe 10x5ft and I thought how dangerous it would be to people stood under these.

It appeared to me that the fire on the 12th floor was going quite well. There was a smaller tower to the right of where we stood and I know that there was an issue with the press going up there and getting close to Grenfell Tower where it was quite dangerous. There was a covering jet aimed up the tower, the purpose of the covering jet is to try to stop the spread of the fire.

There were Police Officers in front of the holding area who were holding shields above the heads of the BA wearers going into the tower and they were guiding them in via a side door.

I joined the queue and there were probably 20 BA wearers ahead of us, there were other BA wearers against the wall, these were the ones that had already been in and were taking a break. I was stood in the queue for around ten (10) minutes when a senior manager approached me; I think he might have been a Watch Manager (WM). He would have recognised my rank by the two (2) bars on my helmet; he said to me "I NEED A CREW MANAGER FOR THE BRIDGEHEAD".

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With a police officer holding a shield over my head I followed him into the building and headed to the Bridgehead. I walked through the reception area on the ground level and saw a few fire fighters and a Station Manager there; there wasn't any smoke but there was lots of hose and water down there so walking wasn't easy. All I could hear was water and once reaching the Bridgehead from the internal staircase, I could hear conversation.

The bridgehead is a type of control room, which is classed as a safe area and at this incident, was based on either the 5th or the 4th floor when I arrived. Typically, the bridgehead will be located two (2) floors below the fire and will be moved upwards once floors are cleared - the reason it would be moved is so that the firefighters can get further up the Tower without getting as tired.

It took about five (5) minutes to walk from the queue to the Bridgehead and when I arrived there was another Crew Manager with two (2) entry control boards. I received a handover from the Group Manager and Station Manager who were at the Bridgehead and they told me to take over from the Crew Manager who was already there.

When I spoke to the first Crew Manager, he told me that we would be using channel six (6) on the radio and that the communications network was poor; I was not surprised by this as the building was a large concrete construct and we often have comms issues in buildings like these. I was also informed which areas and floors were classed as "NO GO" meaning that I was not to commit any crews to these locations.

The Station Manager was drawing plan lay outs and writing on the walls of the bridgehead - in addition to this we also had the Entry Control Boards which I managed as the "Entry Control Officer" BA crews were being brought in from the queue outside and we were using two (2) flats on a lower floor than the Bridgehead as a holding area, one flat for SDBA and the other for EDBA. A BA crew would come to me and I would task them to where they were needed, I would instruct them to stick to the wall lines and report back to me. I informed them that the radio signals were poor and that they were required to report to me with status updates when they could. The instructions that I gave them came directly from the Station Manager. Due to the intermittent signals I would tell the crews to use their distress signal (ADSU) should they come to need it - the distress signal is a priority message and cuts through any signal.

There was only one occasion when that distress signal activated during my time at the Tower. I knew where I had sent the crew that had activated it and so I assembled another BA crew as an emergency team and sent them to that location - fortunately, it transpired to be an accidental activation and the crew were

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fine. Using the Entry Control Board I was able to monitor the oxygen levels of the BA crews, before being committed the firefighter would put his tally on the board which I would use to record their entry time and from here you can calculate the levels of air. Again, there was one (1) board for SDBA and a different one for EDBA. I didn't encounter any issues with Breathing Apparatus or air.

I had been informed a number of times how bad the communications were in the Tower and once I started working the Entry Control it quickly became apparent just how bad it was - it caused me to feel a little uneasy committing crews when we had such little communications. The messages that I did hear coming through were regarding what the crews had come across and what they needed. I would receive progress reports and send back to them messages such as "you're getting low on air". Any location updates I received were passed on to the Station or Group Manager.

I had been told that the stairways were getting quite blocked. It was reported to me that there was a big build lady on the stairwell and after reporting this to the Station Manager, I tasked a crew to move and clear the blockage. We moved her rather than removing her as we have a responsibility to treat this as a crime scene and so endeavour to preserve this as much as possible.

Some of the crews, when coming back down, were reporting to me that they were experiencing a loss of water pressure on the higher levels; this was always going to be a problem at a fire of such a large scale. There is a rising main on each floor and these are charged from our machines; we will encounter problems with pressure if there is hose on hose, an airlock or excess deliveries. The amount of hoses we were running that day it was just logic that we would not get the pressure we would have with less hoses. We had someone sweeping water down the lift shafts because the lifts were not being used.

Another issue that was brought to my attention was that the gas was on. Although I didn't see it first-hand some senior managers had visited another floor with the intention of identifying a new location for the Bridgehead. They told me that the gas was ignited at the mains; the gas authority was in attendance but I understand that they were struggling to turn it off as they hadn't located where to do so.

It is obviously not ideal to have the gas on during a fire as it poses a risk of further combustion and is also hazardous for us to breathe, however it is relatively safe to leave it once ignited and dangerous if we tried to put it out so it remained on.

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I understand whilst I was at the Tower that there was a Stay Put Policy implemented during the Fire Survival Guidance (FSG) but people would have ignored that, when they saw that fire rising and moving the way it did they would have left their flats.

At around 15:00 hours I heard a call asking whether any of the Red Watch were still in the tower and so I told them I was. A relief Crew Manager was sent to me and I left the Tower to walk back to the RVP where our appliance was. During my time at the Bridgehead I did not see any casualties or other members of the public. On the walk back to the RVP I met up with Watch Manager VYDLELINGHAM and another fire fighter from SIDCUP, together we followed the road around the back of the Tower.

At this point I didn't know where the rest of the crew was, I just knew that I would meet them eventually. I remember that I felt incredibly tired and hungry. The route back to the RVP took us past a pub where George CLARKE from the television show "AMAZING SPACES" was stood and he was offering us food, the food was good and much appreciated.

When I got back to the RVP we were told that we were the last of Red Watch to leave and we were conveyed to PADDINGTON FIRE STATION with the rest of my crew.

Since the fire people who know I work for the Fire Brigade have been coming up to me and congratulating me, I haven't really experienced any bad effects of this incident. Since the fire at GRENFELL TOWER, the Brigade suffered the loss of a Watch Manager from BECKENHAM FIRE STATION who died on duty and therefore naturally this has taken over at the forefront of our minds.

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