

WITNESS STATEMENT

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

Statement of: LOWE, TERENCE

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

Occupation: FIRE OFFICER

This statement (consisting of 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: TERENCE LOWE

Date: 06/12/2017

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

This statement is my recollection of the events and my actions on the morning of Wednesday 14 June 2017 at a fire in Grenfell Tower between the hours of 02:20 and 09:00. I made hand written notes of the incident later that morning at Paddington Fire Station.

I am Terence Lowe and I have been a firefighter for 27 years and a few months. In 1990 my training began at Southwark Training Centre and having successfully completed my firefighting training I was posted to Red Watch at Millwall Fire Station. I moved to Red Watch at Shoreditch Fire Station where I have been in the position of firefighter since 1993.

Grenfell Tower is a 23 floor residential tower block located near to Latimer Road Underground Station in the London Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. As a firefighter I had no previous knowledge of this particular tower and I have never been to this tower block before nor had I had any other dealings with the tower before or after the fire. Our unit was requested to attend the fire at about 02:00 about an hour after the fire had started on the fourth floor.

On the night of Tuesday 13th June 2017 I arrived at Shoreditch Fire Station for a night shift starting at 20:00 hours and due to finish at 09:30 hours on Wednesday morning. On the watch that night were the Watch Manager Shaun COLTRESS, firefighter John WARNSBY, firefighter Paul DESMOND, and

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firefighter April CACHIA and myself. We had role call and did our usual checks followed by our dinner. John WARNSBY was driving that night and Paul, April and myself were all assigned to breathing apparatus sets, that we call BA for short. John would also use BA if required. Shoreditch Station call sign is F24 and the station pump call sign is F241 and a 1 at the end of a call sign determines it is a pump engine with a ladder. Our ladder was a 135 ladder; this extends to 13.5metres. I don't remember going out to any calls during the night and the first I knew about Grenfell Tower was when the bells sounded, lights came on and the tannoy system announced our call sign at around 2:00am to a 40 pump fire.

We all quickly turned out and kitted up and got in the pump. John new the route and where to go, he knows his way around pretty well, we didn't have to look it up. As we left the station I was thinking a 40 pump fire it's the biggest fire I have been to during my service, and we were going to be out all night. The phrase 40 pump fire still sticks in my mind. The Governor Shaun had the printer message, he was in the front with John. The other three of us were in the back, I think I sat behind John next to the window but I can't remember who was next to me. In the front of the cab is a mobile data terminal-MDT. Shaun would normally read information to us from the MDT but it's slow and often freezes. I don't remember receiving any updates from the MDT whilst on route.

I'm not sure how long it took us to get there or what route we took but it seemed pretty quick arriving about 2:20am. We pulled up at Latimer Road underground station next to a pub called PIG and something. Shaun the Governor walked off, I think to a Control Vehicle that was parked near to where we parked. There were a lot of people standing around pointing and looking up. We hadn't seen the fire yet as we were parked under a railway bridge and we had to walk down a walkway. There was another pump parked in the side access road, it was the Kentish Town pump. I recognised my mate Tyron who used to be on our watch at Shoreditch, he was the pump operator at the back of the pump supplying hoses to another pump and doing a lot on his own, something out of the norm.

We all put our BA sets on our backs but not the masks and grabbed whatever high rise kit we could carry. This included, the fire bag, branches for the hoses, lift keys, tool bag, wheel handle for the dry riser units, first aid kit and breaking in gear. We had two lengths of 45mm Cleveland Lay Hose which is on trial at the moment. It folds up rather than rolls up its very good. We were directed to the tower down the walkway alongside the station. We still couldn't see the tower because of a row of maisonettes about two

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or three storeys high. There were lots of people standing about in night clothing, crying and screaming. As we turned along the walkway I saw Grenfell Tower for the first time it was like a scene out of the movie Towering Inferno.

We approached the tower from Station Walk along a walkway. We arrived at the base of the tower by a small playground area. I saw a jet hose near a swing being directed up to the tower and aimed at the falling debris. The bright orange flames were coming around the corner of the tower and all the way across this side of the building from about the fourth or fifth floor in a diagonal shape up towards the top, it was like a slash of fire going through the tower. Everything was just orange flames, I don't remember seeing much smoke but the flames were bright orange. I remember thinking they are all concrete flats and thought how can this be happening in this day and age. I had no idea how it was spreading across the building or how it got this bad. I thought it could be the flats on fire because the windows were open and fire had got in through the windows.

We went into the building which was the ground floor lobby area. It was busy there, lots of officers in white helmets giving instructions to firefighters in BA gear. We queued up with other BA wearers and so did Paul and April. We were waiting to be tasked and myself and John were one of the last ten crews to go in the tower with standard BA sets. I think they changed it to EDBA extended duration breathing apparatus crews only. Myself and John Warnsby were directed to the bridgehead on the 3rd floor, the Mezzanine level I think. I'm not sure where the rest of my unit went. We didn't put our BA masks on yet because the air was clean and we didn't need any air. We reached the bridgehead and it was very busy, lots of writing on the walls with notes scribbled down. I have no idea what they read but there was lots of writing.

The bridgehead is an area below the fire where the BA control point is located and tasking's are issued. It's also where you hand your BA tally to the Entry Control Officer-ECO who checks tally's and manages the BA Entry Control Board-ECB. They record what time you went in and what time you are due to return. The BA tally is a yellow tag that activates and deactivates the BA set. It identifies the set number and who the wearer is. A normal BA set would give you 20 or so minutes of air depending on how quick your breathing is. Myself and John were tasked to go up to the 14th floor to flat number 113 to a fire survival guidance call FSG. An FSG is a call received by the control room that someone is unable to

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leave the premises because of the fire.

We made our way to the staircase, the stairs were made of concrete and very narrow, about two people's width wide. The walls were beige or yellow and the lighting was on and visibility was okay. We took our time walking up as we didn't want to run out of air too quick. I don't remember hearing any fire alarms or sprinklers going off. We walked up the stairs and I can't remember exactly which floor we were on, possibly the eighth or tenth. I was not aware of any fire doors on the stairs being wedged open, I only opened a door on the fifth floor but that was much later which I will come onto. We met people coming down the stairs, they had towels wrapped around their heads and faces were blackened and covered, they were coughing and struggling to breathe. There wasn't much smoke in the stairs and it got heavier when we started to go higher and encounter people. I think John helped one person down the stairs and we then went back up again. We couldn't identify which floors we were on so John who was in front of me started writing on the walls the floor number in wax crayon or china graph pencil that we had with us.

We got back up to near the eighth or tenth floor it could have been the fourth. The stairs were busy now with firefighters helping people coming down and firefighters going up. There were residents coming down, it was chaotic and the stairs were cluttered with firefighting equipment. We came across three people coming down, they were struggling to breathe and suffering smoke inhalation and very near to collapse as the stairs were starting to become heavily smoke logged.

I remember putting my arm around the waist of a young girl, she was Middle Eastern, aged about 10 or 11, about 5'5. She had a traditional head covering over her head but her face was not covered. With her was an older woman maybe her mum, aged about 40 also of Middle Eastern and wearing a traditional head covering. Her face was not covered; she was of a large build also about 5'5. They were both saying they couldn't breathe. I reassured them and helped the young girl down the stairs which were now becoming more smoke logged and also holding my other arm out to stop the lady from falling on the stairs. John was in front of me and quicker going down he was carrying a young toddler aged about one or two in his arms and held close into his chest.

We handed them over to crews on the third floor that were not wearing BA sets and in a clean air environment. John told someone, I don't know who it was that we couldn't get to our FSG on the 14th

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floor as we were nearly out of air. We collected our tallies and were checked out from the bridgehead and went down to the lobby area. The lobby still very busy with casualties and fire crews. We left the building by a side door which was by the playground. We dumped our BA kits along the walkway with other pieces of firefighting kit. There were lots of firefighters sitting along here, absolutely knackered and some were sweating and steam coming off them. It was away from the tower because of the falling debris, lumps of burning cladding and hot cinders were all coming down around the tower.

We walked back to our pump, I'm not sure why, maybe to change something and a couple of teenage girls stopped us and were telling us about family and friends that were still in the tower. John wrote these down on an estate sign along the walkway and I am pretty sure he passed them onto the control unit that was parked near our pump. We arrived about an hour and a half after the fire started and when we came out, the whole building was on fire, every floor. There were people above the fire and waving lights out the windows and waving phones and pieces of cloth. They were above the fire and completely surrounded we knew what was going to happen to them.

I felt a bit helpless as no firefighters were going in, it was suggested the building may collapse and I was told or heard it was going to be evacuated but it didn't. Me and John wanted to go back in, we were not even dirty and felt we hadn't done enough and wanted to help out where we could. We went back into the lobby area and I met Station Manager Walton and we were detailed to liaise with the crews waiting to come in from the outside, this was about 03:30. They were held in the staging area undercover by the covered garage area. Myself and another firefighter would say when it was clear to run across because of the falling debris and casualties were coming out. I was on the lobby side and the other guy was opposite me. I did this for about an hour and a half spotting for falling debris and checking it was clear to leave. I saw a large window on fire come crashing down just missing someone. I used a police riot shield to hold above my head when going back and forth to get crews into the lobby. The only crews going in were the EDBA crews. The police in riot gear were also doing the same with the shields. I was looking at the tower and it was like watching 911 but on a smaller scale, the fire was worse than when we arrived. I didn't see anyone jumping. The fire was all the way up the left side of the building, bright orange flames in every flat. I wasn't concerned about the tower collapsing.

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I remember being asked to take either the Assistant Chief Officer from the staging area opposite the tower into the lobby which was still very busy with crews going in and coming out. I know Danny COTTON the Commissioner had arrived but not sure when or where she was. Casualties were being brought out by firefighters and some of the crews looked absolutely exhausted coming out, they were knackered. The entrance we were using to get to the lobby was around to the right of the play area as you look at the tower. I remember a hole had been cut into a metal shutter to allow us access into the lobby area. I waited until the right time to go and myself and the Assistant Chief Officer ran towards the lobby, I fell down a small pot hole and injured my left ankle. It was while lying on the floor that a piece of red hot cinder landed on the right side of my face. My injury didn't stop me from doing what needed to be done and I just wanted to get stuck in. I stayed on the door duty for a long time, watching debris coming down and lots of pieces of burning cladding were falling. I'm not sure who but someone took over from me. John was on the water jet by the play slide aiming the jet up at the windows and any falling debris on fire that was coming down. I can't remember the exact time line but I do recall being in the lobby area and it began to fill up with smoke so I was told to smash out the big panes of toughened laminate glass that divided the lobby areas and the outside area to allow the smoke out. It was pretty late on as it was day light outside. There was a wall with lots of numbers diagrams and writing all over it and I couldn't make head nor tail of it. Our old boss Pete Wolfenden, he was there next to the wall. The lobby was still busy mainly crews coming in and out and John Warnsby re-joined me.

We met Crew Manager Damien McGEE from Whitechapel in the lobby area and the three of us were tasked to take a 45mm hose to the 12th floor. We had no BA sets on and it must have been clear of fire above the 12th floor otherwise they wouldn't let us go up. The stairway was clear of smoke but you could smell it, it was horrible. There were other crews going up and coming down. We got to about the tenth floor and I saw a body of a lady laying on her front but facing up the stairs, both her arms were folded under her face. She was half on the stairs and half on the landing with her legs sticking out from the stairs. She was West Indian, a very big lady around 20 stone, about 40 years, black skin, black curly hair, wearing black leggings. I'm not sure about the top clothing but I could see both her arms were burnt and blistered. There were a few firefighters coming and going so I asked if anyone had checked her for a pulse. Someone said she had been there for about 3 to 4 hours and everyone was stepping over her and walking around her. Pat Goldbourne the Group Manager was there talking about getting a body bag to move her, I think John was tasked to do it I'm not sure.

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I never went any higher than the tenth floor and I think someone took the 45mm hose up or it wasn't needed. I started to make my way down and must have been on the way down. I heard on the radio to a FSG on the fifth floor to someone waving out the window. I answered the radio and told them I was on the fifth floor and I would have a look. Radio communications were okay I had no problem with them. I met firefighter Richard Benaicha of the Whitechapel Red Watch and he was one of the firefighters I saw earlier who was absolutely steaming, fair play to him he came back in again. I opened the door to the fifth floor lobby and me and Richard went into the lobby. I turned left, he had the breaking in gear and he started steaming into the doors. The fifth floor was strange because one side of the lobby and flats were just water damaged, no fire or smoke yet the other side was completely burnt out, the smoke wasn't really thick and you could see through it. It was a horrible taste, there was someone else with us but I don't know who it was. I got down low to see but you could feel the smoke burning your throat it was horrible and we didn't have BA sets on so we got out of there. Richard came out coughing and I requested a BA crew to the fifth floor and they arrived soon after. We later found out nobody was on the fifth floor. We may have looked in a few flats on the fourth floor or lower and saw mattresses on the floor. I don't recall going into Flat 116 on the fourth floor. I went down to the lobby with I think Richard, I'm not sure. I wasn't sure where John was. We arrived at the lobby which was completely flooded in water and I remember seeing lots of white helmets floating around and met John. We left the lobby by the same entrance as before and went to find our BA gear. I think this was about 7:30am it was daylight.

I returned to the walkway where I left my kit and met up with April and Paul. We returned our BA sets to our pump which was still parked where it was when we arrived. On the way back along the walkway you could hear people saying, the people have been told to stay put in the tower and it's safer to stay in the flat than try to get out. My understanding of the stay put policy is always the best policy in a high rise. If there's a flat on fire ten floors below you it's not coming out and you should stay put. We went to where all the other fire fighters that had been in the tower were now sitting looking worn out. This was the grass area on the opposite side of the building. It was accessed by going through the covered car park and out the other side and past the turntable ladder to the grass. The turn table ladder jet was having no impact on the fire what so ever, the jet had no effect on the cladding. It was then that I saw the extent of the fire to the tower. It was the opposite side to where I first went in by the playground. The whole tower was on fire from the top down to around the twelfth to fourteenth floors even lower. Individual flats were on fire and

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one of the flats about the eighth or ninth floor had blue flames which I believe to be a gas main that didn't want to go out when water was put on it. I counted down to the twentieth floors and I knew these people above the fire would be dead.

The ambulance crews and the first aid area were a bit further along and I went there to get my injuries seen to. My face was cleaned and had cream applied to it. I haven't required any further treatment for my injuries. I returned to the grass area and chatted to my colleagues and some crews said it was like a blast furnace on the twelfth floors and the heat was about 1200 degrees or more. A lot of crews broke brigade rules and procedures that night to save people, you never go above the fire. We were at the Grenfell Tower for about seven hours or so and we were released about 10:00 to report to Paddington Fire Station where I made my notes. My timeline may not be exact but it's a rough estimate of my involvement and the tasks I carried out.

I would consider myself a competent firefighter and we regularly have realistic training drills and even had high rise training last week, it's not realistic to a proper tower block as we only have a tower in the fire station yard. I've been to fires in high rise blocks before but they were always contained in the flat and never spread outside. I was not aware of a lift for firefighters at Grenfell Tower as I used the stairs, there was only one staircase for everyone. Unless you knew this fire was going to happen, there was nothing you could have done it was unprecedented.

During this interview I have referred to my handwritten notes, these were made on the 14 June 2017. There are two pages of notes which are my exhibit TL/1 with a seal number MSZ1 3059698. The six pages of hand drawn sketch plans I have referred to are my exhibit TL/2 with a seal number MPSZ1 3059699

I would like to say one thing, Pat Goldbourne really got a grip that night, the sector that he was in control of they really knew what was going on. He was making decisions left right and centre, we all said how impressed we were of all the Senior Officers, all of them were brilliant that night.

Since the night of the fire I have been offered counselling but I have declined this offer but aware it's there if I require it.

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