

**WITNESS STATEMENT**

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

Statement of: ABNETT, TERRY

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

Occupation: FIRE FIGHTER

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This statement (consisting of 7 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: T ABNETT

Date: 20/03/2018

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

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This statement relates to my involvement of the Grenfell Tower fire, beginning in the 14<sup>th</sup> June 2017.

I have been a fire fighter since September 2001, joining Red Watch on the completion of my training. Training school was approximately 13 weeks and covered all manner of basic training, every aspect of firefighting including the basic roll out hose, putting up ladders, squirting water, commands (to give and receive), fire behaviour, first aid, RTCs, basic discipline and fitness, values, some input with press dealings and community fire safety. When I joined was a new element, 'safe and wellbeing' visits. This was to give advice to people in homes and fire safety for businesses. Back then, there was a much bigger Fire Safety Department and not as much expected of firefighters. We used to do '1 1(d) visits' of commercial premises. We have no jurisdiction over family homes so can only advise when invited in. However, laws have changed and made owners more responsible. The idea was to go as a crew, meet a responsible person, go through policy of the building and get shown around. We would look for water/gas/electrical shut offs, not so much during the day but in evenings if we need to break in, to give us an idea of what to do in the event that a key holder was not present.

We also conduct familiarisation visits. Every watch on a station is handed out tasks for various locations. They are for us to familiarise ourselves with the premises. Mainly commercial properties in Surrey, we can police it in terms of adherence to fire regulations around fire exits being used inappropriately. If in breach, the Fire Safety team can move in. The inspections used to be on a 4 year cycle and would get a rating around safety. If they scored more points, it would be visited more regularly. When a new crew

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member joins a Watch, they are taken round by the Watch Manager to familiarise themselves. At Polsden Lacey, for example there is a big heritage risk. They take us round and show us certain things. We are made aware of valuables that need to be removed in the event of a fire. We do exercises with salvage teams who tell us what is important. If there is a new member on the Watch they will point out the risks to them and there is a build-up of the knowledge over the years. This is also done in residential areas, but more of a leaflet drop and targeted campaigns. Due to being residential, we have no jurisdiction unless it is sheltered accommodation.

There are no high rises in Leatherhead but there are in Dorking, the 'Twin Towers' for example. We use these for ALP training. We acquired the ALP 2 years ago and allows us to look at the ground from a different perspective. When I first joined in 2001, we had an ALP and I was trained. However, after 2 months it was given to Chertsey. Leatherhead became a 1 pump and water carrier station. Now we have an ALP back at Leatherhead and we are the first crew to go out on it when required.

The ALP is an aerial ladder platform. It is 42m in height and crewed alternately on a daily basis. It is not immediately crewed unless there is a need for it. Usually only the crew of 4 at Leatherhead will crew a pump but if the ALP is needed they will split and 2 will crew the ALP. We would now always take pump and the ALP on the run. Our pump is big enough to facilitate the ALP so we take both. We always have 2 on pump and 2 on the ALP. We are nominated every day as to our core skills, either BA wearer, driver of pump, if in the back of the pump, crew the water carrier or the ALP. Every day we rotate what we would be doing in order to keep up our competencies. Only changes if people on annual leave, sick or someone from a different station. Otherwise, we rotate daily. All about keeping our competencies up. We train most days. Fire calls take precedence over everything, however. We structure our day via the officer in charge. There are standard tests to do every day for equipment and are completed daily, monthly or yearly depending on the need. Every Wednesday we test the ALP; it goes out on its legs and we check it is fully functional. Quite often we keep tinkering with the kit because we want to be good. When it turns up to incidents, a lot stop and look. We are the cavalry. The worst you want to be is getting it wrong, so we get things wrong on the drill yard but not for real. We know the eyes are on us. We train very regularly on it. I am currently setting up with my Station Manager and colleague from Green Watch, a new training package to incorporate every bit of training to keep our competencies.

The other week we went to training in with Epsom and simulated a RTC. This was done for my benefit because I am developing to a Crew Commander. The Watch Commander will ask the crews if they want

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to do anything — BA, ladders or table top exercises. With my development, a lot for my watch will come and assist. I will do a drill with them and I am assessed to make sure they are safe as well as other things.

We also conduct 'Safe and Wellbeing' visits. These are for dwellings and can come through daily. They can be requested by public or be referrals through age concern for someone else. Our biggest task is usually to put up smoke alarms, but it varies to taper to the need, for example the age of the person, how many people inside, are they smokers? Do they know their escape plans? Do they know how to get hold of emergency services? Locating electrical sockets. Some are themed - Christmas, candles, November, fireworks, all tapered depending on need. Sometimes they are led by occupants if their children develop an interest in fire and we can be guided on what they want to talk about. We also do schools visits, cubs, scouts and talk about risks of fire. I am 'YES' instructor - Youth Engagement Scheme. A scheme run for children showing truancy. They can spend a week as a fire fighter, wearing BA and running hoses. They can then show off their new skills to their parents or guardians at a Passing Out Parade and hopefully it turns a corner for them.

We do have high-rise kit and basic stuff that we would need such as breaking in equipment and everything that would be needed. Now, though with the ALP, either us or Guildford that would go. Our main responsibility with the ALP is positioning; can we get to the building? Watches have been to sites to see if we can pitch it. There are some where we are unable, but that is why the familiarisation visits are important. After Grenfell, the Brigade did a survey of buildings in Leatherhead. We mainly have 4 storeys or above. We have very few high buildings. I have not been to many high rise jobs because they are not in our vicinity.

The ALP has been off county before. I am aware that it has been to Cheshire at one point, but it is not a national asset. Surrey would offer it but done via brigade request. Since Grenfell it has highlighted deficiencies across the country. I have heard London has ordered a 56m one. There are issues around its manoeuvrability but our ALP has rear wheel steering, meaning we can move well.

High-rise firefighting is on the Pre-Determined Attendances of properties when roofs are on fire. In that case, the ALP will be called. Messages often comes back that we are not required. But ALPs completely change tactics. We can squirt 4500L per min (4.5 tonnes of water per minute). You have to think of your load that you put in to the water. The stresses that that means. If using ALPs for roofs you have to keep

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you're the crews out. It can force a fire in to a building via the 'Venturi' effect but that is down to the skills of the ALP operators and the officer in charge.

My understanding of the 'stay put' policy is it is designed to keep people safe because flats are a safe environment with fire doors and protected stairwells. At Grenfell, the stairs were quite narrow because of the stay out policy. The idea is if everyone is trying to get out in one go its like trying to get water out of an upturned bottle. A 'stay put' policy allows people to get out one floor at a time in a controlled manner.

Stairwells should be protected. Everyone leaving doors open compromises everything. I have heard Grenfell had a stay put policy. Everyone is aware of the calls the Control Room were getting and we understand how dreadful it must have been for them to tell them to stay in.

On the night of the 14<sup>th</sup> June 2017, I was covering a night duty for a colleague. I came on duty at 6pm, and I was on for a 24hr tour, which we can do if we have rest periods either side. My colleague was unable to get the night off because of crewing figures so I stepped in. It had been a pretty busy night, with a car fire at 9.30-10pm. We had not got back until midnight, having been at Polsden Lacey down a track, using a 4 wheel drive vehicle. It was quite a protracted job. So when we got back we had a meal, then rest for the night which was quiet until around 6.45am bells went down. I made my way to the Watch Room, having been the nominated driver of the ALP that night. FF Burley asked if I had what we were going to, and showed me pictures from Sky News. The colleague I was covering sent Nick a message saying he could not believe we had not been sent for so Nick had been following it since the early hours. I refused to look any more because our training is based on 'drive to arrive', and I did not want emotion clouding my judgement when I was driving.

We left just before 7am after our officer had worked out where the RVP was. On the M25 we were on the hard shoulder and the ALP is not taken above road speed. I would not do 70mph on the motorway anyway. I said to FF Burley to let me get there and I would think about it when we got there. Our initial reports were 350 missing, and I did not want that to affect my driving so I put it to the back of my mind. From the M25, we then drove down A40. Along the A40, I saw what looked like candle and smoke rising. I started to get a picture of what I was going to and was told the LFB had their aerial platform on scene, so I had a good idea I could get close to the building. It was a stressful drive for a couple of reasons - the incident and the traffic. The traffic had caused a ripple affect out of London. So on A40 and down to a roundabout there was massive congestion which we fought way through, I cannot recall the names of the

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roads. A Police out rider helped us get through and within a mile, we were barely doing walking pace due to congestion. I am sure it was like that on a normal morning but sure this added to it. We managed to get a straight drive to the scene, then through the cordons and the press. We were initially held back on the outer cordon, before our officer in charge, Watch Commander Matt PERRY, spoke with the LFB liaison officer and we arrived between 8-8.15am.

WC PERRY told us to wait whilst he was briefed which was hard to do because you want to get in and do your best. I remember seeing a lady on the pavement crying. I wound down my window and asked if she was ok, concerned that she may have friends or relatives in the building. All she could say was "How long will this go on for? I have a removal truck coming because I'm moving today and they can't get in". I could not fathom what she was saying. With everything going on, it simply seemed unreal. We parked up for 10-15mins waiting for the liaison officer to bring us through to the inner cordon. When we were eventually brought through, it was down to me to sight the ALP. I met with the LFB Arial Ladder Platform operator and we decided how best we could get in to help. There was a bit of a delay waiting on London to get their machine down and stop pumping so we could move in. I spoke to the LFB colleague and our policy, usually, is that we do not take the ALP off hard standing - it weighs 32tonnes, but like London I think we broke a few policies and used our discretion and I wanted to sight it where London had sighted on the grass on the east side by the leisure centre. Due to the warm weather the ground was hard as there had not been much rain for a few weeks so I was prepared to take the risk. London had not moved all night, so we set to work. The first problem was the ALP pumps at 4200L per mm. The tank we had only holds 2000L. The ALP has no tank, but is supplied by the pump, so we decided not to use our big branch and instead hose reel which is on the cage and can reduce our water so we could squirt for longer. If anything it made it appear we were doing something. Later, we requested through water board to increase pressure, via the LFB water officer and thankfully it was done.

At that time of the morning, a lot of water gets used for showers, washing and breakfast making, so when boosted, we set to work with the branch through the hydrant. The pump acts as a booster and needed to be up to 10 bars of pressure due to the hydraulics and being 42m long, it had to be up to get the water we needed. We put no one in the cage, as it was deemed unsafe so close to the building with falling debris, so we did it all remotely from the turret using cameras. A thermal imaging camera was used on the ALP, but I did not use it but was aware it was used. Some of the guys used it. It is normally used for hotspots and temperatures, but you could make out images of people. Very hot people. There is a very good camera on

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it. I did not want to zoom in on rooms, by which point it was too late for those people if the camera is picking them up. It would not have achieved anything, it was all about focussing on getting water to the areas that needed it and could be helped.

The senior officer from LFB acted like a spotter and using their guidance, we could reach 10m higher than London so up to about the 14th floor, but with the extra reach of the pressure we got water up to the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> floors. When putting 4 tonnes of water a minute in to the building we had to be guided by LFB to know where their guys were and adjusted accordingly so we could hit the hotspots where needed.

At 9am I was due to come off duty, but as I was on a 24hr tour and my Watch, Red Watch arrived, I stayed on until approx. 8pm. When Red Watch came on duty, I repositioned the ALP to the corner of the building so I could hit 2 sides at the north and east sides. Generally, a corner is a safe place to be because if there is a chance of a building collapse, it is a safer place to be. I continued to spray water throughout the day and eventually completed the shift at 8pm, before returning for a rest period that night. At some point during the day, I took a call from a senior officer in Surrey and I asked for overtime, as I knew the oncoming Green Watch were short. I also explained that if allowed to volunteer, I would work with Green Watch to act as a liaison regarding the situation and what we had achieved to date. I had had my rest period so I felt fine to go back. Thankfully, my request was granted.

My understanding was that the gas board had struggled to find the cut off for the gas mains in the building. After the first day shift with Red Watch, we put the news on, and a camera crew had taken pictures from a sister block, level with the 14th floor. Our jaws dropped and we could see it was still burning. We then found out that the gas main was not off. I think it was about 24hrs before they got it shut off.

When I was allowed to return with Green Watch, we used a 4x4 to get to the incident because the kit was already on scene. We could not use blue lights so it was time consuming to get there. After arriving at 9am at the incident and a handover, we probably got to work at 10am. We continued to put water on the building where required by the LFB. We were trying to hit the hotspots. By the time we arrived, some building inspectors had arrived from BRE and wanted to remove some of the undamaged panels for evidence and testing. It was safe to put them up in the cage to remove the panels and they attempted to remove them. I seem to remember they were quite heavy and I knew this because I had seen various bits

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falling off the building throughout the time I was there and the debris was everywhere. Some came down in bits and almost appeared to be floating.

At some point in the day, I also took Commissioner Dany COTTON up in the cage so that she could get a better view of the building. Watch Manager Clive LEWIS from Green Watch was also with us the the London second-in-command. It was mainly a recce for them. From that point, it became sporadic putting water on the building. I remember at one point there was a loud bang from inside and a belief the floors were pancaking. For safety reasons, crews were taken out of the building and we withdrew to create distance from the building. It was eventually decided we could go back to working remotely and working from radios. I cannot remember too much radio traffic however.

Once we had got the good water pressure up again, we had monitors working around the building and other water hitting the building from London. That reduced our pressure so we asked for the water to be turned down in other areas because we could hit the 18<sup>th</sup> floor. We kept going for up to 12 hours at a time and would put water where requested by the LFB. By the time we returned, the ALP was in a bad way and needed some remedial attention. We had reported a couple of leaks when it returned because it had been worked so hard for so long, especially at 10 bar worth of pressure.

At some point, we again had 2 members of BRE and 2 Green Watch members on the platform when I was asked to get the down quickly because one corner had started to collapse on the far side. There was again concern that it could go, so we withdrew again. I think that may have been the last work we did. I am not sure now. When it was decided we would not be using the ALP anymore, the fire was much more under control; we took it down and stowed it. Green Watch brought it back that day on the 16<sup>th</sup> June.

When we were trying to get the ALP out of the area, people saw that we were fire and we were told well done and thanked for what we were doing. I remember though, I had a member of the public approach me asking me why we do not use huge airbags so people could jump. I explained that due to the amount of debris that had fallen from the building that was impossible. To a degree, it felt that despite all our efforts over the days, some people just felt it was not enough. We did absolutely everything we could - day and night.

When we drove along the A40 on the first morning, it looked like a candle snubbed out - wispy smoke. When nearer you could see still alight, going well. Along the Westway, then we saw it sporadically. I was looking in front. If I looked to the left, burning building looked like a disaster movie. My thoughts were

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solely about getting there safely. Only when we stopped could I think what was going on. When up close, looked like images from Syria, Beirut. A lot of flame coated the building on our initial arrival. My thoughts were it was 7am after it had started about 12.30, so it had already been going for 8 hours and then the enormity of it hits you. It just seemed a perfect storm and every flat had its windows open so once the fire had wrapped itself around, it got hold of the curtains and that was that. It was so strange that some of the bottom parts of the building were intact, but from where the fire started, the 'coander effect' had taken affect (where the wind had taken it around the building) and then spread up. The bottom 2/3 floors and seemingly nothing wrong with them but then it had gone up and it looked gutted. I was completely shocked by what I saw. I was wishful, but nothing more, that there was no one dead but knew that was highly unlikely. I never had a thought for myself or my own safety, even though we were in the hot zone and there was a risk of collapse, it did not enter my head. I wanted to assist our London colleagues. I did cry a little at the level of disaster. When I had a break I took myself off and spoke to a couple of the street pastors to try and get a bit of clarity. It really helped speaking to them.

By the time I left with green Watch, I was still unsure if fire was out completely. It would have been impossible to say without scaling every room. Our work was done, but beyond my pay scale to say whether it was out. The rubble would have hidden pockets.

It was really good that our senior officers also came to the incident because on a job like that we would not have sent our senior officer routinely. Initially, the Watch Commander would liaise, however that leaves us with 3 people; the pump operator with fire engine and 2 on the ALP. The decision to start with at the incident was not to send a senior officer but that changed and Dave NICHOLSON was sent. That allowed us to stay as unit of 4 and WC PERRY was no longer pulled away. Mr NICHOLSON became the liaison officer so messages passed down through him. I was also aware that Station Manager Danny JOHNSON was present at some point.

The incident was sectorised by the LFB and we acted as our own sector. We then got a better chance to see the state of the building and I could see windows hanging precariously, with cladding hanging too. We had to be careful when moving between floors with the water and monitor the situation carefully because we were aware of falling debris. If we hit the cladding that did not need to be hit, it would have brought it down. We had to be very careful. The frames and cladding were hanging, as well as fixings.

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On reflection, you always want more in terms of kit to save people. Our 42m is good, but why did we not we have a 56? A lot of it comes down to cost and I know that. Our chief has looked at his risks, regarding high rises, especially with new builds in Woking, hence why we have the ALP. The only thing I would want is more firefighters. We have been cut to the bone. We need more people and resources.

I have never witnessed anything on that scale ever before. I hope never again. However, something tells me it could well happen again.

Throughout the statement, I have referred to a map, which has been marked where the ALP was positioned. I exhibit this as TDA/1.

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