

WITNESS STATEMENT

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

Statement of: ATKINS, THOMAS

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

Occupation: FIRE OFFICER

This statement (consisting of 15 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 ATKINS

Date: 25/01/2018

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

This statement is my account of the Grenfell Tower fire that took place on Wednesday 14th June 2017.

After the night of the fire I made contemporaneous notes. I exhibit these notes as TGA/1 and may refer to them throughout my statement.

On Tuesday 9th January 2018 I was interviewed by Detective Constable Matt LONGDEN and Detective Constable Luke BACON from the Metropolitan Police Service. This interview was audio recorded.

Below is a detailed summary of the interview pending a full transcript.

I joined the London Fire Brigade in 2008. Prior to that I was part of East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service for two years in a retained capacity. On joining the LFB, my first posting was as a Firefighter in Downham. A year later I came off my development and became a temporary Crew Manager moving from Downham to Croydon on the Blue Watch. I then went into training and became a BA instructor (breathing apparatus) and Fire Training Instructor for a year. I then went back to Croydon still on the Blue Watch and then onto Red Watch where I got my USAR capability (Urban Search & Rescue) and general rescue skills to ride the Fire Rescue Unit (FRU). I got promoted to substantive Crew Manager two years ago and was posted to Lewisham. After a short spell in Lewisham I made my way back to Croydon on Red Watch. Up until the night of the fire I stayed on the same watch. I became a competent Crew Manager and put my plus on around the 30th January 2017. This allows me to act up as a Watch Manager.

As mentioned above, I am also a qualified Fire Behaviour training instructor. For this role I had to do a Diploma from Edexcel and training courses to learn about how to deliver fire training. I spent two weeks

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in Lancashire where I learnt about various things including fire science (theory behind why fire happens) and fire behaviours such as backdrafts/fire gas explosions. Within this was learning what needs to present for them to occur and how to prevent them.

There were also parts where we taught firefighters how to extinguish fires and fight these type of fires. I did this instructor role for a year spending a lot of my time at Gatwick doing real fire training where we were doing real scenarios every other day.

I have also been training in Urban Search & Rescue (USAR) for three years. USAR is a rescue capability for natural disasters and building collapses. We learn specialist skills around unsafe structures and advanced search techniques such as where to look in building and moving rubble to access areas. Linked in with that we do exercises with the Disaster Victim Identification Teams (DVI) knowing how to mark up where bodies and significant and evidence is.

I am also a trained Extended Duration Breathing Apparatus (EDBA) wearer. In summary this is extended duration BA and you can wear it for longer than a standard set. They are carried on an FRU. The course itself I had to do as part of my instructors training which was a one-day conversion courses into wearing the set. It is a twin cylinder, slightly heavier set. The night of the Grenfell Tower fire was the first time I had used an EDBA set operationally. They are primarily used for long travel distance to get to where your work site is, for example, in the tube lines where you are not exposed but is a prolonged wear to get to where you need to go. They are effectively used for straight line work or to get down to where you need to go to and based around the HAZMAT chemical world. On the night of Grenfell Tower fire, they were used primarily for firefighting.

With regards to High Rise training, I had my initial input as a trainee. Following that, on station we would go through proper high rise procedure training every quarter linking in to other things. On a couple of occasions, we have used a high rise building as part of the training exercises and carried out laying out the hose and all the media we need to get to the floors. Post Grenfell Tower we have had a lot of high rise training, within the last month. In the run up to that I couldn't tell you my last training.

With regards to familiarisation visits (Section 72D visit). Here in Biggin Hill we do none as there are no high rise buildings in our area. When I was in Croydon I certainly did them. In my role as a Crew Manager plus I would be sent out to other stations as a Watch Manager for the day and had quite a lot of exposure to other high rise buildings. You would look at access routes to the buildings, familiarise yourself with access/egress, look for what firefighting facilities there are such as dry/wet riser, the condition of the building, the flat layout and most recently EPIPS (electronic premises information

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plaque). EPIPS are big yellow plaques that are found on the outside of the building and would say the name of the building, number of floors/flats, access points, dry riser points, what floors certain flats are on. This information is all found on our Mobile Data Terminals (MDT) systems.

I will now talk about my understanding of the 'stay put' policy. It is a policy that works if a building behaves how it should. Providing a person is not in immediate danger, they are to stay put and await rescue.

You need to consider various things such as how many stairs there are, how many exits there are and the amount of people inside. You do not want a stampede of people to exit the building. If a building is not compartmentalised properly, then the stay put advice won't work. I was not aware that the policy was withdrawn during the night of the Grenfell Tower fire. It was unprecedented and was not safe. There was no protected lobby area and no breaches internally in the stairwell.

In relation to Grenfell Tower, I was not aware of any notes or information on the MDT. I was not aware and did not look on my way there. If you were going as one of the first few machines to a fire you would tend to look at the information on the MDT to assess where you are going and see what risks there are. If you go later on, you tend to find that you get to the scene and get a brief there of the floors and risks. At the time we were committed I was not looking for information like that and was waiting to get the brief on scene. I have never had any previous knowledge or experiences with Grenfell Tower. That is one part of the brigade that I have never been too.

I will now talk about events on the night of the Grenfell Tower fire on Wednesday 14th June 2017. That night I came on duty slightly early at around 7.30pm. That night I was a Crew Manager plus detailed to ride the pump for the night - H312 in Croydon. This is a rarity for a Crew Manager plus. It was a very quiet night. I had a bit of a struggle to sleep and was a bit restless, going to bed at around 11.30pm. The first I knew of anything was the FRU at Croydon getting a call at around 4-4.30am. It woke me up and I wondered what it was. I then turned my phone on and opened up the Daily Mail app, seeing initial pictures of the tower on fire. It shocked me at first. I got up and went downstairs to go onto the computers. I logged onto our live incident system called BOSS where you can see any messages from any incidents. I pulled up the Grenfell tower fire and scanned through it releasing it was a substantial incident by that point, possibly make pumps 40. I wanted to see what our FRU had gone for. I saw a message requesting all EDBA resources to be sent to the scene, meaning all 14 FRU's were sent. I called our control room at this point telling them that we were EDBA wearers riding a pump and that you had an extra eight firefighters who were all EDBA trained. The lady on the phone took my name, ended the call

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and I went upstairs. We were watching the news on the television when all the lights came on and it was a multi appliance ordering which is unusual as it is normally a specific call sign to know who is going. We saw a long call slip with our number printed on there and came through as an immediate 10 pump relief. I called the control room and asked if they wanted us to attend on normal road speed or emergency conditions taking into consideration the severity and location of the incident. They left that up to me as a judgement call. I told my crew what we were going on.

My crew that night was FF GONNELLA, FF MCCLELLEND and FF Ben DOTCHIN. I discussed the driving with my driver FF GONNELLA and with it being around 4.30am, it was my judgement call to drive at road speed, but only go under blue lights if we hit traffic. Fortunately, there was no traffic.

The truck on the way there was quite noisy with an air of excitement with the adrenaline as we wanted to be there and help. I was in the front passenger seat. The mood on the truck changed as we went over Wandsworth Bridge. On crossing the bridge, we could see the building over to the right hand side and it was there was just flames. It was a tall building standing out, flames everywhere with a plume of smoke above it. There was not a lot of radio traffic on the South channel so I changed to the North channel but no messages stuck in my mind and just heard generic messages that I didn't pay much attention to.

We arrived in the area of the tower a short while later. We had been given an RVP of Ladbroke Grove. We didn't know the area so I used Google maps to help us get to the RVP. Driving in we saw the tower in the distance, and turned round the corner we saw fire engines everywhere. We drove onto Blenheim Crescent and there was a Watch Manager from Lewisham who directed us to park up. I got out the truck initially and he took my name, rank & call sign. He told me to take as much as we could carry which included branches, hoses and our BA sets. I knew we had two spare EDBA sets and cylinders so we took them with us as well. He gave us directions to the tower but they were confusing and we quickly got lost. We saw a few police officers and asked them on how to get to the tower.

On being shown a map of the area I have been able to show our route from our fire engine. I exhibit this map as TGA/2 for reference, pinpointing our route and points that I will refer to below. We walked through an alleyway which came out onto Bomore Road. There were low rise blocks either side of us and we came across Kensington Leisure Centre and walked alongside that, with it being on our right hand side. I was looking up to the tower and could just think of 9/11. It looked like something from a film. There we firefighters everywhere testing their BA sets. I still had our role board and needed to find a Command Unit to book us in. Command Units are like mobile offices and assist Commanders with the running of an incident. They are places to send/receive messages, collate FSG calls and for appliances to

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book on when they arrive on scene. For a larger incident there may be more than one command unit, with each one dealing with their own part.

We walked past the Leisure Centre and the BA testing area, walked down another alleyway and came across a Command Unit on Grenfell Road. This was the wrong Command Unit for booking on, but we were directed round the corner to Bomore Road again to another Command Unit. I handed in our role board to the Command Unit and recognised the person in there who was from Fulham's Command Unit, Watch Manger Mark KENTFIELD. We exchanged pleasantries and asked who we were relieving. He told us that we were the unofficial make pumps 50. I knew there was already 40 pumps and 14 FRU's on scene. He told us to report to the BA sector.

All four of us walked round to the BA sector near the Leisure Centre and I saw Malcolm STANTON from the Protective Equipment Group (PEG) who deal with all of our BA sets and servicing. I know Malcolm from previous roles in Croydon and he said "Hello Tom".

I told Malcolm that we were EDDBA wearers but only had SDBA sets on our backs. Malcolm got us to dump our SDBA sets to the side and gave us fresh EDDBA sets, a cylinder each and orange cylinder covers. After quickly changing our sets, we were directed to a grass area and told my lot to stick together. At the grass area we sat next to the Lewisham FRU crew who had just come out from the tower. There was a quick chat with them. We tested our sets and went to the BA main control area to the side of the tower. I said I was from Croydon's pump, EDDBA wearers, four of us and fresh wearers.

We were told to wait and would be called back. Five minutes went by and just watched the tower burning. It was burning all over the tower. We were then called up with a Wimbledon crew and lined up on a ramp in two's from the Leisure Centre. We were given a quick safety brief to make our way round the back end of the building, being careful of falling debris and being careful of debris on the floor. We walked round the back in our two's. I remember walking past the building and just looking up. I was shocked by the magnitude of the fire and to what we were facing. We went round a covered walkway area with the tower to my right hand side and garages to the left. There was a lot of water everywhere from an aerial appliance that was feeding water onto the tower. I remember seeing a casualty or deceased person that had been dragged into a garage on the left with a salvage sheet half over them. To see them outside was a bit of a shock as they normally get taken away quickly. We went round through another alleyway out to an open area bit where the BA holding area was located. There were two officers there whom I know. Station Manager Brett LOFT and Watch Manager Paul MERRICK. We had a little chat as to what was happening. There were firefighters resting, propped up against walls and machines, just as many

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firefighters as the other side. I remember just constantly looking up at the building and seeing bits of debris falling from the sides. Big and small pieces that were still burning as they were falling. I just wanted to get in with the adrenaline pumping. I was then told that they needed 10 EDDBA wearers. We were to enter the building when I noticed the riot police there which I thought was out of the norm and a bit unusual. My brief there was to go one in front and one behind with the riot police shielding us with the shield above their head. There was a police officer in front of me who was around my height, 6'4", and I went in with somebody who was about 5'5". I was hunkered down underneath her shield whilst debris was just hitting the shield as we were walking along. I couldn't stay underneath it the whole time with my heavy BA set on so just took the risk, stood up and just walked into the building. Inside the building we funnelled off into another room in like the lift lobby area. The lifts were not being used and there was water just cascading down the stairs, and ankle deep. You could feel a bit of heat in there but that could have just been from all the people inside. In there I was watching all the people coming out looking exhausted. It was a weird sensation and they were going "two more", "four more", "six more" and it's like you are just waiting to get picked, standing in a queue. Eventually they wanted a crew of two.

At that point it was Group Manager Pat GOLDBOURNE at the bottom of the stairs. I remember seeing more telemetry boards than I have ever seen and the noise was incredible. Pat gave me and FF GONNELLA a briefing. The brief was that there was a casualty who could be seen at a window but don't know what floor he was on. Everyone who was counting was coming up with different numbers but believed he was on the 9th or 10th. We have a bit of a policy in firefighting or search & rescue that if there is any possibility there is a person still alive, we bring them out. Pat said that if there is any doubt of survivability on our way, then we are leaving them as we are going after the one who is alive. If they aren't walking or talking, we are leaving them. I asked Pat at this point if we had a direction and what side of the building this person was. Pat sort of waved his arm about and said over there, but this didn't help in the slightest being in a building that I didn't know. Pat said he effectively was in a survival pocket and will let me make a judgement call. A survival pocket is an area in a building that is not engulfed by fire or is untouched by fire. There can be many reasons for these pockets. I then asked Pat where I was getting my water from and where I would find a hose. His response to that was "There isn't any". I was aware that the highest point they had water was the 6th floor, but he was telling us to go to the 9th and 10th floor. This goes against everything I have learnt as a firefighter. You get taught as a trainee recruit how to search without any firefighting media, and even I have told recruits that you will never do this in

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combustible atmosphere, saying that you will always be taking something in with you. So what Pat said shocked me.

I then asked Pat if he wanted us to follow a specific search pattern, whether we go left or right. Pat said that it was our call and decision to make on getting up there. The only equipment I had was a radio and our BA sets. I didn't have a Thermal Imaging Camera as there wasn't one available.

I confirmed my brief with Pat GOLDBOURNE and he told us to stick together, use our judgement, be cautious and if we were not happy at any points then to come out of the building. His last words were "Don't die, I don't want to lose anybody here". I never expected to hear that as a briefing.

After this, both myself and FF GONNELLA committed through the Entry Control Point. I checked FF GONNELLA was alright, but he is an experienced firefighter. On-going through a lobby area into the stairwell I saw a Telemetry Repeater. These are used to boost the telemetry signal. Our sets have a wireless transfer of information between the set and board to tell us how much pressure is left in the set, and notes any distress signals. If it goes out of range, there repeaters are put into place. They boost the signal for up to 3km and up to that day I have never had one fail including all the tests we have done on it. I thought it was weird that the repeater was there.

We began to ascend the stairs. There were no sprinklers or alarms. It was getting darker and darker as we were going up. It was hot. There were people everywhere. Firefighters on the stairs not in breathing apparatus trying to manage hoses. There were no numbers on the stairwells as we were going up.

It was pitch black but someone had wiped the floor numbers on the wall with the dust so managed to use that as a ball mark figure. I believe we got up to the 9th floor and checked our air at that point. I noted that I didn't have any telemetry at that point and my connection between my set and the Telemetry Board had gone for whatever reason. I tried to send a radio message to say that we were on the 9th floor and were going to commence our search. FF GONNELLA and I had a verbal brief as to what we will do. We had no idea what was on the other side of the lobby door. We didn't know the layout of the floor or what conditions would meet us.

(Detective Constable Luke BACON showed me a floor plan of the flat layout which I exhibit as TGA/3. I will refer to this at various points below).

FF GONNELLA tucked in behind me and we did a door procedure, opening up the lobby door. I was instantly hit by the heat and level of smoke in there. I poked my head through. Everything to the right hand side of us was alight and remember seeing an orange glow with a really intense heat coming from it. Everything to the left of me was black. I pushed back out and the door closed. The lobby door was a

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swing door flapping in the wind. It closed shut. We decided that we would go in and go to the left where it was survivable. We would stay away from the orange glow. We went in again and did a left hand search using the left hand wall. We went down a narrowish corridor and found a door which was open. This is labelled as '1' on exhibit TGA/3.

We then searched that flat. It was a one bed flat. We were using a main landmark of the window where there was a bit of light from outside. On going into the flat we stuck together shouting "Fire Brigade", "Can you hear me", "Make yourself known" and constantly communicating with one another ensuring we were ok. No one had answered and we did not find anybody inside.

Once we completed that search I wasn't 100% happy that we knew where we were so I decided that we would go back to the first door, the swing door into the lobby. I could push the swing door and know where I was using that as a landmark point on the floor. It was so dark you couldn't see your hands in front of you.

On getting back to the lobby door, we started our search again via the left hand wall. We attempted the search the next flat past the one we just searched. This is shown as flat '2' on exhibit TGA/3. It was a three bed flat and a bit larger. I felt like we lost track of where we were in that flat with it being larger. We came back out not finding any person inside. We could see a door past the flats that were alight and headed to that flat to give it a go. We went in, and it got really hot really quickly. We were down low on the ground making our way through and it got unbearable. With no water I don't know what I was doing in there. We both said we were really hot and needed to get out, so we did, and made our way back to the stairwell lobby door. We didn't even make it past the front door in that flat because it was so hot with the intense heat from the other flats that were on fire. On getting back to the stairwell, both myself and FF GONNELLA checked with each other that we were Ok and confirmed that we would not be able to go into that flat and save any person safely without water.

Referencing to TGA/3, I believe that to be flat '5'.

We then went up on to the next floor, the 10th floor. I was crawling up the stairs and came across a large deceased casualty on the stairs, greeted by the soles of her feet. I knew this wasn't right and wondered what we were doing. There was no way we were going out and I had the level of determination to find this person. We got up to the 10th floor and did the same thing as we did on the 9th floor, completing a door procedure on the lobby door. I opened up the door. To the right hand side, I could see two flat doors that were still intact but there was a large amount of fire around the door frames. The fire hadn't broken through the door yet but did not seem survivable behind. It was similar to the 9th floor and I noted that

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the left hand side of the building was the more survivable. There was more smoke but it wasn't alight. We did the same search pattern. As we were going along the corridor I could feel some cabling on the wall where the wall had started to fall away. The wall was not as smooth like it was on the 9th.

We went into the first flat, (number '1' on exhibit TGA/3) and searched around. There was no one inside. We then made our way to the next flat (number '2' on exhibit TGA/3). Inside that flat I remember going into a kids' room. I knew it was a kids' room because I was knocking into things on the wall whilst sweeping up and down the wall - posters and other things. I knew I was looking for an elderly gentleman but the kids take precedent so completed the search of that room, looking under beds.

We then made our way to the third flat (number '3' on exhibit TGA/3). It was at that point both myself and FF GONNELLA were running lower on air. I made the call that I would separate from FF GONNELLA in the flats. From the doing the floors below we got a feel as to where we were and the size of the flats with a corridor and rooms off to the sides. I sent him into one room and I did the other. It is a technique that I have used before to clear a flat quickly. When you go into a small room you can sweep the room fairly quickly and come back out. I explained to FF GONNELLA that if at any point he wasn't happy, then we would get back together, and I would do the same. We were constantly shouting at one another the whole time we were in that flat saying "Are you alright", and making sure we were ok.

We made our way around the rest of the floor, but did not manage to enter any other flats (numbers 4/5/6 on exhibit TGA/3) with the fire breaking through the doors. It was too dangerous for us to enter.

I then came across a door in the hallway that I thought was another flat. I opened it up and it was the bin chutes. What struck me straight away was that it was clear. Amongst all this chaos, it was weird that I came across a clear room with clean air. I immediately closed it again as I wasn't dealing with that.

It started to get really hot again, almost unbearable, so we went back out to the lobby door.

There was this door on the right hand side past two flats that were on fire (number '6' on exhibit TGA/3). We thought we could get there and search it. We got into the lobby area where one of the flat doors failed. All of the smoke, unburnt fire gases and potentially flammable gases started to ignite across the ceiling with a rapid rise in temperature. There was a lot of combustible stuff in that lobby and was worried that we were one of the things. I basically got to saturation point with the heat and we managed to force our way back through the lobby door onto the stairwell. I found myself laying on the floor on the stairwell. I took my gloves off and tried to do something we call 'radial cooling'. This is a quick way to cool yourself down safely is to go to where your blood pumps round. Your wrists are the easiest place, and if you cool

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them down, your core body temperature will lower a lot quicker. If I can bring my core temperature down I could think more clearly and make better decisions.

I was cooling my hands down in the water that was cascading down the stairs. It was at that point I noticed that I was laying on top of the deceased casualty. All I was trying to do was cool my hands. I got off of her, put my gloves back on and asked if FF GONNELLA was ok. He confirmed he was and we decided to go for one more entry through the lobby door. We tried but it wasn't a good call. The heat, smoke and fire was all too much to go into the lobby.

It was at that point there was messages coming from downstairs. Up until this point I hadn't heard anything on my handheld radio up and felt a bit lonely as though it was just me and FF GONNELLA against everything else. If your radios fail, the normal procedure is to leave the building, but this was not like any other job. The messages were garbled and was being shouted down the stairs, as though there was someone in trouble or a casualty on the 6th floor. I followed a crew down the stairwell, who I now know to be my FRU crew from Croydon. We tagged on with them and went down the stairs at a rapid rate, sort of falling down the stairs where it was so cramped and dark. It got confirmed that we weren't needed.

We continued down the stairwell and got to the 4th and remember taking a knee in the corner just trying to get my breath back. FF GONNELLA did the same behind me. We were completely exhausted, but managed to get back downstairs.

On getting downstairs we reported to Entry Control, taking our helmets/gloves off. I was so hot and I had overheated again. I remember standing there in ankle deep water trying not to get too wet because I had a feeling we were going back in. I took my tally from Entry Control and reported back to Pat GOLDBOURNE, saying that we did not find the elderly man, but if he was on the 9th or 10th there was no way he was alive, so they might want to try the floors above. I mentioned the two doors on each floor that may have been survivable. He said thank you and we made our way out of the building.

As we were making our way out, firefighters were just streaming in. My set was just dangling around me. We made our way back to the BA servicing area on the grassy area by the Leisure Centre and I saw my FRU crew from Croydon.

Whilst servicing our sets, I had a brief conversation with the FRU crew chatting about where we went and what we did. In my mind at that point I just wanted to service my set and go back in.

I don't know what time this was but the sun was up.

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I serviced my set, and it was getting hotter and hotter outside. It was a warm day. I was taking on water but was starting to get a headache. I let main control know where we were, if they required us again. We left our fire gear in the sun to dry and went to sit in the shade to take a breather. We were sitting there for about an hour or so and looking up at the building. Myself and Crew Manager FEARNLEY were looking at part of building, and with our USAR background we were looking at how the building was behaving. There was a corner facing the Leisure Centre that didn't look right around the 13th floor. The fire looked as though it was being forced out from inside and was behaving differently to the rest of the building. Even though I was looking at it questioning if it was going to come down and thinking that there was no way I should be going back in, I just wanted to get back in.

We were outside for an hour or so. Main Control said they needed EDBA wearers. I checked with my crew that they were all ok to go back in. We had a quick safety briefing asking if we had worn already, if we were hydrated, and if we were ok to go in again. We all said yes. This was at around 9.30am.

We took the same route around the building under the walkway. We got to the entrance and another Station Manager was there taking our details. He asked us the same questions if we were fit and ready to go back inside. We answered yes. They told us that things were changing in the building and were told to take a seat. They separated EDBA and SDBA wearers but there was only so much space available with all the firefighters there.

At this point I sat against a wall and just looked at the tower. I realised that one of my firefighters, FF MCCLELLAND, was not well. He suffers from diabetes. I said to him "Are you ok?" and although there was no way he was missing out on this one, I was not happy. I told him to go and get some medical attention. Any other incident I would have gone with him but in this instance I wanted to get back in there. I knew he was ok but not fit to wear. He went to get some medical attention accompanied by FF Ben DOTCHIN.

I remember texting my wife again at this point, telling her I was Ok. I bumped into Crew Manager DENNY who I know from Woodside. He basically joined in with our crew as an EDBA wearer. We sat by the wall for what felt like forever. Maybe an hour or so. I was looking at how the building was behaving and fading around us. We were watching bits of debris and cladding fall off. I saw a bit of the foam insulation fall off and float down in a majestic manner. Out of nowhere it just clumped me on the back of my head and neck. It was really hot and flicked it off me straight away.

FF Martin HOOPER returned and said he had spoken to Group Manager Julian SPOONER. GM SPOONER was made aware of the deceased casualty on the 9th/10th floor and that she was hindering

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firefighting operations. They said we were to go and retrieve her, setting up a line system to do such (ropes, stretchers and strops). We got a brief and by this point the Bridgehead had moved to the 4th floor. We went into the building following GM SPOONER. We got up to the Bridgehead and out of courtesy, GM SPOONER poked his head into the Bridgehead and spoke to the Group Manager who was in charge at the time. I don't know whom. There was a heated discussion between them about what GM SPOONER had planned. The officer in charge of the Bridgehead controls who goes past that point and it's a staging area that you are meant to be under air as you go past. He said that he was not stopping firefighting operations to rescue to deceased casualty off the stairs. They are dead and take a backseat to what we do. After a bit of a heated discussion and not knowing what was happening, GM SPOONER gave in and said that firefighting operations take priority. The Group Manager on the Bridgehead then said he needed firefighters up there and we may as well stay. All of a sudden we had jumped the queue to be re-committed. That floor there we had a three bed flat that we gained access too. I walked into the flat which was full of water but looked as though someone had just got up and left. There were firefighters in all of the rooms just waiting. People in the front room were getting committed and we were moving up the queue. It was all of the Croydon firefighters together.

It was just me and FF HOOPER. I was laying on the bed, propped up. They then came in and said the Bridgehead was moving to the 7th floor. All we did then was chip in, grab equipment and go up the stairwell to the 7th floor. I grabbed a couple of lengths of hose. On the 7th floor we broke into some flats on that floor to use as a staging area. I went into a flat, took my set off and really needed a wee. I wanted to use the toilet, and whilst using the loo I thought it was a bit smoky. Normally Bridgeheads are in safe air. I poked my head around the corner and was greeted by a fire. I shouted out for "water". FF HOOPER came in at that point with a bottle of drinking water, which was not quite what I had in mind. It was a fire in a storage cupboard going out and spreading into the kitchen. At this point I had my tunic on, but no helmet, no fire hood, no gloves and no set. I expected the Bridgehead to be a safe point. I thought it was not what I should be doing but carried on regardless. FF HOOPER tried to put the fire out with this small bottle of water which was bonkers. Someone else came through with more drinking water but I told them that we needed some hose. They plugged into the dry rising main on that floor, passed through a 45mm jet. I took hold of the hose and began to put a pulse in.

With my training background it was all about water application to try and cool the temperatures. I put a pulse into the ceiling but it bought all the conditions from the ceiling down on top of me. It was a mistake and basically steamed myself. I got really hot really quickly. It was at that point a Station Manager came

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into the doorway and said “For fuck sake, at least put a helmet on. We need to look after each other here”.

I said sorry, handed to hose to FF HOOPER who put the fire out, and went to put my fire gear back on.

I remember someone having a Thermal Imaging Camera on them up there and mentioned about the temperature being about 300 degrees.

We then all had discussions as to whether it was safe being on the 7th. There was already one fire on the floor and we didn’t know what other risks there were from the other flats. We went back down to the 6th floor. Someone gained entry to one of the flats there and found a gas main alight in a flat on that floor.

The gas pipes were in cupboards, and you could see fire was coming out under pressure. If you put out a gas main fire, unburnt gases can set alight and burn. It was best to let it burn off. The decision was made to go back down to the 4th floor, effectively a retreat back to where we were.

Because of all the commotion I lost my place in queue with people going up and down. Whoever went in there had a very short wear. There was then a delay and by this point my headache was getting worse and my back was aching from having the set on. I took everything off and just laid on someone’s bed in a flat on the 4th floor. I felt really bad, but needed a rest.

I then went out and assisted with sweeping out the lobby area. There was a load of water in there and I tried to get it out down the lift shaft to get that area a bit clearer. We were not using the lifts. I was aware at this point that I was on the fire floor where the fire started. And this was where our Bridgehead was. I remember thinking that it was bizarre with our scene of operations being based on the fire floor.

I went back into the flat and sat there for a bit longer. It felt like hours we were sitting in there, but I am sure it wasn’t.

It then came up that all Red Watch were going home. A couple of the guys in the room couldn’t get out there quick enough. FF HOOPER was holding back a little bit, and we both wanted to stay to help. I went to speak with the same Group Manager on the Bridgehead telling him that we wanted to stay. He said he needed the Blue Watch for the jobs coming up. I was still fresh and had been waiting for a while. The Borough Commander there just went “Its good enough for me. As long as you are fit and healthy then I am happy for you to wear”.

At that point our brief was to start on the 10th floor and establish/secure a water supply on each floor as we were going up, put out any substantial fires and leave a hose where the SDBA crews can pick it up and put out the hotspots.

Just told to go up and see what you can do. Myself and FF HOOPER made our way up the stairs from the 4th floor. Exuberance got the better of us because as we were going up someone shouted “Oi, where are

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you two going. What floor are you meant to be in?" We said we were going up to the 10th, where the person replied "Well you are on the 15th, so you better come back down".

We got to the 10th floor and went in through the lobby door. It was quite dark still and difficult to see. It was at that point I realised that each floor had an identical layout, which I wish I knew earlier. I was getting more of an idea of where we were. I remember seeing the flats that were on fire to the right hand side. There was hose everywhere. I basically got the end of a hose, plugged it into the dry riser main outlet on the floor and then fed it through my hands, hand over hand until I got to the end. I plugged it into another one and did the same thing until I had two 45's connected together. I turned the water on. At the same time, FF HOOPER had been scouting around the area looking for the rest of it. I then handed FF HOOPER the branch and he put out some of the fires.

As soon as the bulk of it was out, we went up to the 11th floor. We did exactly the same thing on that floor. There was the same amount of fire, and we did the same setup as on the 10th. I gave FF HOOPER the branch. I can't remember which flat he was in, it was hard to tell. There were no partitions inside the flats anymore and the insides of the flats were completely open. You could see an oven or washing machine on its own in the middle of the room. It struck me as a bit weird, and there was 18 inches of ash on the floor around my ankles. I have never seen anything on that scale before. Plasterboard normally takes a long time to burn through. FF HOOPER went into one of these flats and had closed the branch for whatever reason. I identified a fire to him was around the back by a filing cabinet. He went round there with a hose and as he opened the hose it kicked, causing him to fall straight onto his back. I was in hysterics, but helped him up. It was only when we were putting the fire out that we realised it was actually a body and we could make out the human remains. It didn't sit well especially as we were just laughing from FF HOOPER falling over, but it brought us back down to earth. I cannot remember what flat we were in.

We then made our way up to the 12th floor. We went in through the lobby door but the floor was like an ice rink. I don't know what it is, oil or something. All 6'4" of me slipped and fell over onto the floor. I hit the floor and it hurt. FF HOOPER helped me up and we did the same thing again on that floor. I found the end of a hose, plugged it into the dry riser main, found the branch and fought small fires in the lobby area on the floor.

We were just going up to the 13th floor where our Telemetry things came on to tell us to come out. They can send us a message from the Telemetry Boards in the Bridgehead. We immediately made our way back down to the Entry Control Point.

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Both myself and FF HOOPER were exhausted, we had cleared a few floors. We collected our tallies and I thanked the governor. I remember seeing the Lewisham Blue Watch crew and told them to be careful. I remember walking out to the holding area and I was shocked by the sheer volume of firefighters still waiting to be committed.

When we made our way outside, I had my helmet and gloves in one hand, and released my tunic a bit to let some heat out. We went to the grass area by the entrance, dumped my set with the PEG. I smelt out a bit of food and there was a burger van. I then asked how FF MCCLELLAND was. I was told that a Station Manager was looking for me. I went to a Command Unit but didn't manage to find him/her. I was told that FF MCCLELLAND had suffered from severe heat exhaustion, but had also forgotten his diabetes injections. He had fuelled up to go in but suffered from a bit of a spike. One of the paramedics actually managed to do a prescription to get him some insulin. He refused to go to hospital.

At that point I hit my limit on dealing with people that day. A Station Manager told me to take FF MCCLELLAND to hospital otherwise I would be disciplined. We tricked him saying that we were going to Paddington Fire Station, but instead took him to St Marys Hospital.

That was the only real contact I had with people in the area. So many people saying thank you and handing me water.

We drove round to St Marys Hospital. I took him in and sat with him for a bit. That is where I did my contemporaneous notes. They gave him a few bags of saline solution and other bits before we left. We could still see Grenfell Tower whilst driving around, glowing still in the daylight with the fire burning out.

We arrived back at Croydon Fire Station at about 7.45pm that night. I had a shower and got told that I could either go home, stay on until midnight or go straight back on the run. We ordered some food and my crew were back on the run at 8.15pm. I had no other involvement with the Grenfell Tower after this. Post incident I have had a few thoughts about the fire. In my opinion, is one stairwell good enough in that type of building? Perhaps not, and you would expect a protected lobby area, but the swing doors from the stairwell into the lobby made that difficult. I would have expected it to have had a wet riser. Normally, a building around 12-18 floors has a wet riser main, and not a dry riser. A wet riser supplements the water supply from internally to give permanent water supply.

Some people have mentioned the need for bigger aerials. They may not have made much difference as there was no access to get an aerial ladder any closer to the building. I would have liked another Thermal Image Camera whilst I was fighting the fire inside.

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With regards to the fire spread itself, it went up rapidly. It had already gone from top to bottom when I first arrived on scene at around 5am. When I was there and observing the building, it looked like sections had been missed, and the fire had wrapped itself round the tower. There were odd big panels of metal/plastic coming off the building, alongside pieces of insulation that were still burning. The insulation was light but solid and looked like candy floss.

I have nothing further to add at this time.

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