

WITNESS STATEMENT

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

Statement of: DOTCHIN, THOMAS

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

Occupation: FIRE OFFICER

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 DOTCHIN

Date: 12/12/2017

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

This statement is about my involvement on the 14th June 2017 in dealing with some of the events around the Grenfell Tower London.

I have been in the fire service for approximately thirteen years and my rank is a fire fighter. I am stationed at Croydon fire station on red watch and my pay number is [REDACTED] 4D. I completed my Fire Rescue Unit course around six years ago. This is the more technical aspect of a rescue, so more specialist equipment to deal with incidents like road traffic accidents, rescues from buildings with rope line equipment and also a boat for flooding incidents. I have had basic high rise block training which was delivered via powerpoint. In my opinion it is not very realistic as it is not done in a high rise building but all the aspects of high rise fire in a building can be simulated.

Our basic breathing apparatus training covers compartment fire fighting. There are pre prepared fire fighting plans for high rise buildings. I have visited high rise blocks on my ground in Croydon to gain familiarity. This is known as a 72D visit. This involves looking for fixed installations such as sprinklers, dry/wet risers (their inlets and outlets), fire fighting lifts and any automatic smoke vents.

The largest fire I attended was a thirty pump fire about 10 years ago near Royal Albert Hall. It was on the 3 floor in a block of flats. I have not been to Grenfell Tower before or have any knowledge of it and I have not been posted to the fire safety department.

Signature: T DOTCHIN
2018

Signature witnessed by:

In this statement I will be mentioning colleagues that I worked with on that day.

On the 14th June 2017 I was working with CM Dominic FEARNLEY, FF Constantine NWAGWU, FF Martin HOOPER and FF Tom BUNDEY. FF NWAGWU was the driver of our machine, the FRU.

I was on night duty on 13th June 2017 at Croydon fire station. I was resting when the call came in at approximately 04:00hrs. The message came through via the tele printer. I read the tele printer message which said there was a forty pump high rise fire. The message said we were required as EDBA (extended during breathing apparatus). This gave me an indication of how big the fire was. We left the station within a minute of receiving the message and made our way to Grenfell Tower.

When we arrived in the Shepherd's Bush area, I could see heavy fire damage to the tower. The building was very much alight. I could see all round the tower with the mid section alight. At his point we were about one to two miles away.

I do not remember the direction we travelled but on arrival, we had difficulty finding parking space. I believe the name of the road we parked on was Dulford Street. The RVP was on the main road but there was no one there to direct us. We all got our BA sets on and were then directed by members of the public towards the tower. There was a number of alleyways down the sides of some flats. It then brought us out near the Grenfell tower by the side of the leisure centre. There was a holding area by a wall on the opposite side to the leisure centre. I can't remember the time of day but there was daylight when we arrived. We saw Battersea's crew there, one of whom I knew was Aldo DIANA who is a CM. I did not know the other crew members. They were talking about the conditions of the tower and that they had been in the tower up to the twentieth floor evacuating people. We waited here for approximately half an hour.

I could now see the tower alight between 10th and 14th floor. The building was heavily damaged with the exterior completely charred and black. There was good orange flame with lots of black and grey smoke being omitted from the fire. I could see lots of glass everywhere that had fallen down, and what I assumed was cladding which had come off the tower. It was completely mangled and burnt. I could see an aerial appliance (ALP) on the front face of the tower by the leisure centre putting water onto the fire at the mid point of the building and there was also another ALP to the side of the tower. There were a lot of fire fighters in this area. There was a police controlled cordon and no members of public where in this area. I was about twenty to thirty metres from the tower.

Signature: T DOTCHIN
2018

Signature witnessed by:

We were then told to move to the second staging area nearer to the tower but I do not remember who by. This was a short walk, about thirty seconds from the leisure centre going towards the tower near the garages. We were then asked us to go and retrieve our second BA set bag from our machine. I believe this was CM FEARNEY. This is because contact had been lost with a BA set crew already in the tower. Myself and FF Hopper then ran back to our machine to retrieve the second set bag. When we returned we were informed that these were not required. We were there between twenty to thirty minutes before being directed round to the third staging area.

The third staging area was about a one minute walk through some garages which was underneath a walkway. We walked passed an ALP which I mentioned was at the side of the tower. There was a playground to the side of this area and a grass area which is where we waited. There was about thirty SDBA crew also waiting here. I recognised one crew from Brixton who were waiting to be committed. They were Mick WOOD and Dean LAWRENCE. We waited here for about an hour. I believe this area was being run by another station manager (SM) but I do not know his name.

We were waiting a further three to four hours before being sent into the tower. I do not remember who the officer was that committed us to the tower. Our whole crew were still together. We then went through a walkway which was alongside the playground towards the tower. We entered the tower through a side door to get into the foyer. As we approached the foyer area, I could see a lot of debris and broken glass. The foyer was a large open space with glass on the front. It was hectic in the foyer area with fire fighters and senior officers. We were then told to go to the entry control which was at the foot of the stairwell on the ground floor. I do not remember who this officer was. The entry control is an electronic control board where you insert a tally, which is a key which then transmits information from your BA set to the board. This tells you how much air you have in your set and will indicate by an alarm when your air supply is low.

We were then given a briefing by Group Manager (GM) Pat GOULBOURNE who is a senior officer. He instructed us to proceed to the 12th floor and search all the flats on that floor as no crews had been able to get further from this point and then progress from there. He also informed us there may or may not be a useable fire fighting jet on that floor as previous fire fighters were having trouble with getting water. if it became unsafe then we were to proceed back down from the tower. Our crew then became divided at entry control so we were teamed with other fire fighters. CM FERNLEY and FF HOPPER were used as a crew of two and FF MCCLELLAND joined myself, FF NWAGWU and FF BUNDY as a crew of four.

Signature: T DOTCHIN
2018

Signature witnessed by:

FF MCCLELLAND arrived with Croydons pump crew along with CM ATKINS, FF GONNELLA, FF B DOTCHIN who is my brother and joined the lift area just before we went up the stairwell.

One of the crew, I do not remember who, picked up a thermal imaging camera. We then headed up the stairwell. There was a lot of equipment everywhere. I picked up an axe from the stairwell. As we proceeded up the stairwell, the conditions were very humid as there was a lot of water cascading down the stairwell. There was also a lot of residual heat. There was a hose going up at the side of the stairwell. I was leading the crew up the stairwell with FF MCCLELLAND following, then FF NWAGWU and FF BUNDY.

There was very limited visibility in the stairwell so we were counting each floor as we went up. The stairwell was very congested. We were trying to move our feet around the hose as it was taking up a lot of the space on the stairwell due to the diameter of it. We also passed other crew members who were withdrawing from the tower.

The walls were all smoke blackened with no natural sunlight in the stairwell. I remember that the doors on each floor were closed. I did not see any walking casualties on the stairwell as we were walking up. I did learn of others crews talking about seeing dead animals such as cats and dogs. We did pass a casualty just off the landing on one of the stairwells but I cannot remember what floor it was on. It was a large casualty who was lying face down with arms to the side of their body. There was no doubt that the casualty was not alive. I cannot describe the casualty as it was too dark to see even if it was a male or a female. I do not remember if it was the crew we passed on the stairwell that mentioned a body by a stairwell, or if it was mentioned at entry control, that the person was deceased but we knew for sure when we came across it. There were no signs of life so that is why no attempts were made to save the person. We stepped round the deceased person to continue on to the 12th floor.

It was very hard work getting to the 12th floor and after a while, every floor started to appear the same and we started to lose count of the floors. I did not see any signs for the floors. I believe we were on the 11th floor and I tried to mark on the wall the floor we were on for guidance to other fire fighters.

When we reached the 12th floor, we opened the door to the lobby which gave out a lot of heat but it was tolerable. There was a lot of black smoke. We discovered there was no jet to get water from. We then discussed amongst our crew that we would check what the conditions were like in the flats. We then got

Signature: T DOTCHIN
2018

Signature witnessed by:

low to the ground and started to crawl along the right side wall. We had no idea of the layout of the lobby which would have helped us a lot. I would describe the layout of the lobby area like a 'H' fashion.

We followed the wall around to the right which I believe was the right hand corner flat until we reached a door of the flat which had been burnt through. All the windows had gone so we could see daylight coming through the flat. All the walls were black and nothing inside was identifiable. The whole flat had been burnt to the floor and it was apparent there was nothing left inside the flat. There was a lot of heat inside the flat. We then made our way back towards the lobby door that we first came through.

We had a further discussion amongst the crew about the condition of the flat we had just been too. We discussed that it was impossible for anyone to have survived on this floor after seeing the condition that the flat was left in after the fire spread. We decided we should try and search a flat on the opposite side and maybe the conditions might be different there. We then followed the wall to the left side to check the other flats. We came to the first flat on the left side. The door to the flat was open. We went in but there was limited visibility and it was smoke logged. The corridor led round to the right side with one bedroom directly in front as you walk in and the second bedroom further down to the left. There was a door to the right which lead to the kitchen and lounge area. There was heavy fire damage but no visible flame. I believe the windows were still intact but were blackened with smoke and it was very dark. FF MCLELLAND entered the flat with me. We started a search of the rooms and got as far as the kitchen. It became rapidly hotter by this time so we discontinued the search. We did not find any casualties in the rooms we searched.

By this time, the whole flat had become far too hot and without water, it was too hot to continue. The heat had become unbearable where it had started to enter the openings between my tunic and flash hood and towards my neck and head. I felt my skin was starting to burn so I said to FF MCLELLAND that I need to get out quickly and that I was getting too hot and we had no water. We then left the flat and with the rest of the crew, retreated back to the stairwell. As soon as we closed the door to the lobby from the stairwell, you could feel the heat cooling down. We were on this floor for approximately five to ten minutes.

We then discussed as a crew whether we could make progress to the next floor up and whether it would be a greater risk for us. Given that we did not know what the fire spread was, we thought the 13th floor

Signature: T DOTCHIN
2018

Signature witnessed by:

OFFICIAL

may not be as bad as the 12th floor so we all decided that we would go up. The conditions between the 12th and 13th floor were similar to the other floors.

When we got to the 13th floor, I opened the door to the lobby and put my head through to check the conditions. As soon as I did, there was real punishing heat that just came at me. The heat that came through the door was horrendous. It was not bearable at all. I did not even step inside the lobby. All I saw was thick black smoke with no visibility at all. The heat I felt was much stronger and hotter than compared to the 12th floor. I then said to my crew that it was way too hot and we could not make any progress through there or make any searches safely. We quickly agreed there was no way anyone could have survived that amount of heat.

None of us were confident to go any further safely, without any water. Everyone agreed that was enough and we did not enter the lobby on floor 13. We were not confident going any further up to the floors and looked at how much air we had used just to get to this point. We did not feel safe going further up and bearing in mind we needed air to get back down again. I do not remember how much air we had at this point.

We then started to make our way back down the stairwell. I remember passing the same large casualty on the way down who was still lying in the same position. I then heard a message come through on my radio that there was a possible sighting of a casualty on the 6th floor. We made our way down to the 6th floor and I noticed there was better visibility. We then turned left from the lobby door and entered the first flat on the left side. We were then met by another crew in the corridor of the flat. The crew informed us they had already searched the flat and had not found anyone. The flat was smoke logged with a blackened corridor and limited visibility.

We then left the 6th floor and headed back down the stairwell. We then got a message on our sets which is like an alarm that beeps. This indicated that we needed to leave the building. A symbol appeared on my set like a little running man and I acknowledged the beep by pressing a button on my set. We reached entry control which was very congested with fire fighters and officers. A senior officer asked my crew how we got on. I relayed back what searches we had carried out and the conditions of the flats and the floors. I also explained to the senior officer that the conditions on the 13th floor were worse so it was not searched. I do not know this senior officer's name.

Signature: T DOTCHIN
2018

Signature witnessed by:

OFFICIAL

We then left the tower through the same way we had entered and were escorted from the tower by police with their shields as there was still falling debris and cladding. We headed back towards the leisure centre and sat down on the grassed area. I believe it was around 10:00hrs. I just wanted to get out of my fire gear as I was very hot and stressed. We had some drinks to cool down and I had a rest for about half an hour before getting another cylinder for my set. I then sat on the grassed area for about another half an hour. I felt tired but after resting I felt quite reasonable. Whilst sat on the grassed area, I saw that a ladder platform from Surrey had arrived and was set up in place the of the London appliances as it had a further reach. The London appliance could not reach the floors that were still alight and that we had no water inside the tower. The Surrey appliance was set up on the face of the building which was facing the leisure centre.

CM Dominic FEARNEY then approached our crew and informed us of the large casualty that that was required to be moved off the stairwell. He had previously spoken with SM Julien SPOONER who had discussed with him about the removal of the casualty. We already knew about it as we had seen the casualty in the stairwell. CM FEARNEY then asked us to go back to the FRU and bring back any equipment that was suitable in order to lift the casualty. We then went back to the FRU and got the bucket stretcher, which is a big plastic stretcher. We took some strops which is a loop of material used to wrap round the stretcher to carry it. We took three backpacks containing ropes rescue equipment. We, the full FRU and the pumps crew, as mentioned earlier, then made our way back to the third holding area which was by the playground. We then waited in this area for about another half an hour.

We were then informed by SM Julien SPOONER that another bridgehead had been set up on the fourth floor in the tower. We then made our way to the tower with SM SPOONER through the same entrance as before and also with police escort. There were a lot of fire fighters with their BA sets on waiting in the foyer area. We went straight up to the fourth floor. As we were walking up the stairwell to the fourth floor, there was a lot of water coming through the ceilings. Everyone was getting soaked. There was about one to two inches of water on the ground and the water was coming through the ceilings quite heavily.

When we got the bridgehead, we were waiting for a maximum of a few minutes. There was another SM in charge of entry control, SM SPOONER told him that he wanted our crew to go up and remove the casualty. The SM disagreed with SM SPOONER saying that we were not going to be used in that way. So

Signature: T DOTCHIN
2018

Signature witnessed by:

SM SPOONER told us to take our FRU equipment and put it inside a flat and standby to be used as a fire fighting crew. I do not remember the name of the other SM.

The flat we went into on that floor was cool but heavily fire damaged. I believe it was the far left corner flat. Whilst we were waiting for further instructions. Some of the crew walked further inside the flat to what would have been the lounge area and saw a small amount of smoke issuing which gradually became worse. A fire then reignited in the flat. That crew then contacted entry control about the smoke and then we all left the flat. We were in the flat for approximately five minutes.

The bridgehead was then moved down to the third floor. We entered into the far corner flat but I don't remember which one. There was no smoke damage in this flat. We waited in the flat for about an hour. I believe two of the crew were used for a task but I do not remember who. The rest of our crew were instructed to leave the building. I don't remember who told us. There were still others crews waiting at the entrance of the tower as we were walking out.

We left the tower in the same way as we had entered. We walked straight round to the same area by the leisure centre where I then took my gear off. I believe it was now around 15:00hrs to 15:30hrs. We waited there for a while as two of our crew were still being used. FF MCLELLAND had been hospitalised from heat exhaustion. This was after the first entry we made into the tower.

Once all our crew were together, we headed back to the grass area by the leisure centre and had some refreshments. It was now around 16:00hrs. The officer on entry control whose name I do not know, had communicated to CM FEARNLEY that we could go. CM FEARNLEY then informed us we were required to go to Paddington fire station to write our statements and for a debrief. We then made our way back to the machine but it had been moved to the location near Camelford Court. We were then directed to the location where our machine was parked. We then went to Paddington to write up our notes. I did not have any medical assistance and was offered counselling but declined the service.

On the day, I was informed by CM FEARNLEY that the dry riser was not working and there had been problems with it. I did not have any dealings with the dry riser myself. I was informed by CM FEARNLEY that there was a lift shaft but none of the lifts were working. There was only one mean's of escape from the fire which was the stairwell.

Signature: T DOTCHIN
2018

Signature witnessed by:

OFFICIAL

A dry riser is a fixed installation in a building. We then attach a hose to an inlet that supplies water to each floor in the building. We would normally go in with fire fighting media so if you did not already have hose in your hand, you would have a hose ready to be plugged into the water supply on that floor. We were told that there was trouble with the dry riser and that it was not working. I made a decision to carry on without the hose, although this would be a breach of policy.

In my understanding, the stay put policy is told to residents to stay put in their flat in the event of a fire. If they have fire doors, it would be safer for them to stay inside rather than go outside and be overcome by smoke or fire. I had heard from officers that the stay put policy was in place on the night.

My understanding of the role and structure of the command unit is, it is there for coordination, communication and strategic purposes. It is a hub where officers can meet up and discuss issues. All communications are sent via control through the command unit. The command unit is another appliance, like a truck with a room in the back of it and people can talk to each other and use radios to communicate. I did not attend any command unit on the night.

Each face of the building would have been assigned a safety officer. Part of their job would have been to monitor fire spread. This can be at rank of fire fighter and above but I've no idea who was doing it on the night.

In my opinion a lot of things failed that should have worked. The lift should have been working, the dry riser should have worked, I don't know why it didn't. If these were working correctly then it would have helped us to fight the fire.

The Grenfell incident has not affected me personally but it was a sad incident to attend. I found it frustrating that we could not do more.

I made my original notes at Paddington fire station on the 14th June 2017. On 12th December 2017 I exhibited these notes as TJD/1 and exhibited a map of Grenfell Tower as TDJ/2 and handed them to DC BENNETT.

Signature: T DOTCHIN
2018

Signature witnessed by:

Statement of: DOTCHIN, THOMAS

OFFICIAL

Form MG11(T)

Page 10 of 10

Signature: T DOTCHIN
2018

Signature witnessed by:

OFFICIAL