

WITNESS STATEMENT

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

Statement of: ALASSAD, ZADE

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

Occupation: FIRE OFFICER

This statement (consisting of 16 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: ZADE ALASSAD

Date: 27/03/2018

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

My name is Fire Fighter Zade ALASSAD and I am with the Red Watch, Wandsworth Fire Station. My number is FF [REDACTED] LE. I started working at Wandsworth Fire Station in 2002 after completing an 18-week Fire training at Southwark Fire Training School. I have since been at Wandsworth Station till today.

On MONDAY 29th of January 2018, I was interviewed on audio disc at Wandsworth Fire Station. The interview started at 10:29 hrs and ended at 13:15 hrs. Dc HART and Pc AFRAM from Operational Northleigh, based at the Metropolitan Police Service, conducted it. Also present was my FED rep, Firefighter Ben SELBY. I gave this Statement Voluntarily and it is an account of my involvement as a Fire Fighter and Rescuer at Grenfell Tower fire on Wednesday 14th June 2017.

The People I shall mention in this statement are my crew members, Watch Manager John PARKER, Fire Fighter John WRIGHT, the driver, Fire Fighter scot BELL Fire Fighter Margaret ERRINGTON (Maggie) and Crew Manager Richard MCSHEE

In this statement, I will mention the Wandsworth Fire Station, where I was on night duty when I heard the initial call. I will mention the external face of the Grenfell Tower on our approach to the scene. I will mention the lobby area inside the Tower, which was the holding point whilst we awaited to be deployed up the Tower. I will mention the Bridgehead, which was located on the First Floor mezzanine. I will mention the 23rd floor, which was supposed to be my first deployment. I will mention the staircase from

Signature: Zade ALASSAD
2018

Signature witnessed by:

the ground floor up to the 12th Floor, where we stopped and descended to 10th Floor where we dealt with a cat and two unconscious adults. I will mention three other flats where we had to use an enforcer to gain entry into. Finally, I will mention the playground area, which was a resting area for Fire Fighters.

On the 13th of June 2017, I came from home to duty at 8pm and it was my first night shift after I had already done 2 day's shifts. I carried out my checks from my Breathing Apparatus (BA), which is a routine check to ensure they function properly. I was not aware of the exact time the calls came through for the Grenfell Tower, as I was sleeping. We got the call and Fire Fighter John WRIGHT, the driver, went to the watch room to check the route. I did not go to the watch room but the watch room attendant would have been in the watch room. I am not sure who it was. I knew my Watch Manager (John PARKER) would be doing the checks also, so I just went down the pole to my machine, I put on my boots, leggings and tunic and I was ready to set off.

John PARKER, the Watch manager was in the front seat, Fire Fighter John WRIGHT was the driver, Fire Fighter Scott BELL Fire Fighter Margaret ERRINGTON (Maggie) and I was in the back seat with Crew Manager Richard MCSHEE. I was in the middle and I had my BA kit inside the locker on the machine. The call slip showed where and what the incidence was, so while in the truck, we were discussing which direction we should go. The only information available to me at the time was that it was a highrise incident and it was a big job, as it required 20 pumps on the call slip. The slip was not specific about the Grenfell Tower street address.

I had not been to the Grenfell Tower prior to that night, though I knew the general direction as I used to be a motorcycle courier the past. We decided we would go through Shepherd Bush and turn right. I believe we went through that way, exited at the roundabout and turned left through Crescent, then turned left again to join the main road that goes up. We went around some road works and we got into some vehicular traffic. I think at that time, someone had the direction on his or her phone.

As we were approaching the Grenfell Tower, we were discussing the scale of it as we had been to the incident at Shepherds Bush and we assumed it was a similar incident. We did a few right and left turns. There were narrow roads with cars parked everywhere, appliances parked along the road until we got to Stoneleigh Street, which was as far as we could go. At that point, we saw the burning tower and we were

Signature: Zade ALASSAD
2018

Signature witnessed by:

all stunned. The first thing I saw was one large side of the Tower in flames and the flames appeared to be going up on the outside. We went up on Grenfell road and I could see it clearly, once I got out of the machine. We grabbed all the high-rise equipment on our machine, hose, jet, the breaking in equipment (the enforcer), the ice pack, the IEC bag and our breathing apparatus.

We then set out on foot to reach the Tower. At that point, I was carrying my BA. We left the truck and headed towards Grenfell road. As we approached, there were officers and someone said they needed BA wearers. Someone handed in our nominal board, which shows who was on the truck in case of an incidence. We waited there for a little while and then, Fire Fighter John WRIGHT, Fire Fighter Scott BELL and I decided we would go in as a crew of three due to the scale of the fire. Crew Manager Richard MCSHEE and fire Fighter Maggie stayed together so the crew manager could look better after Maggie as it was her first night on the job. Watch Manager John PARKER was assigned on a different role. I was not aware of any pre-prepared plan for the Grenfell Tower and I do not know of any pre-prepared plan for firefighting when compartmentalisation fails.

There were many members of the public hanging around and filming the incidence with their mobile phones. I do not remember speaking to any member of the public at that time. There were many firefighters and many senior officers in white helmet.

We went straight to the building through the main entrance door. We waited a little at the entrance door before going in. The fire was still above us and there was no debris coming down. Our thoughts were just to go in and get to work. We got into the lobby area and there were a lot of firefighters and BA crews. There were casualties walking out and we just walked past everyone to the bridgehead, which was on the ground floor or the mezzanine. The bridgehead is a holding area and an entry control-point, which is normally sited two floors below the seat of the fire. You would usually not go straight to the floor on fire in a high rise, but you would go to the bridgehead where you get your brief, hand in your tally and your name placed on the board showing exactly where you are and the officer in charge of the bridgehead will allocate you.

We were initially tasked with going to the 23rd floor to search and rescue and do firefighting. We went through the stairwell, which had light smoke and poor lighting. It was concrete and it was narrow. We

Signature: Zade ALASSAD
2018

Signature witnessed by:

carried a hose and a branch, and we climbed the stairs, We went up several floors and saw no one on the stairs. As we moved higher, it was getting smoked-logged. I feel it was worse on the 10th floor when I first went in. We were discussing what we would do once we got to the 23rd floor as we were carrying so much equipment. We discussed how we would get anyone out through so much smoke. We got to the 12th floor and it was Fire Fighter John WRIGHT, who managed to see what floor we were on. There was very thick smoke from the floor to the ceiling, and we did our gauge check and it suddenly got very hot. The heat prompted us to stop at that point to check on each other and our gauges and decided something had changed and we needed to find out what had changed below us, as it was our only way out. We did not have any image camera on. I personally went in assuming it was going to be hot. We then descended to the 10th floor to know what had changed and we saw another crew who had gained access to the tenth floor lobby. We joined them on the stairwell, and at that point, there was another fire officer at the door of a flat on the 10th floor laying down. I cannot remember the flat number but he was shouting out and said he had a cat and he passed the cat to us. I do not know what happened to the cat. I thought to myself that there must have been someone who let that cat out. At that same moment, He shouted that he had casualties. Fire Fighter John WRIGHT and Fire fighter Scott BELL went kneeling down next to him on the floor. He dragged an adult male out unconscious and fire fighters Bell SCOTT and John WRIGHT got the casualty. We decided there was work to be done on that floor and it needed immediate attention. They took the casualty and as I was about to join them, the firefighter shouted again that there was another casualty. At that point, I thought the firefighter was alone since he did not have his partner with him. I said to him that I would help. He pulled out another unconscious female casualty. He came out of the doorway, so I helped him get her to the stairs. At that point, another officer came in to help. I assume he was the partner because he was on the same floor. I helped them carry her downstairs, behind fire fighters Bell SCOTT and John WRIGHT, who were already on their way down with the first male casualty. I think they carried him one on the shoulders and the other on the legs.

As we went down, there were more fire fighters, smoke and less heat. At one of the floors, there was a bit of congestion and a lot of confusion and shouting. One of the crew caught up with us. He had two children casualties. Both we, FF Scott BELL and FF John WRIGHT moved aside against the wall to let him through as they were moving faster than us. We moved slowly, after FF John WRIGHT and FF Scott. BELL. We eventually got down to the mezzanine floor, heading towards the entry control point, which was mobbed with fire fighters and officers. I believe an officer grabbed the woman (casualty) from us. I

Signature: Zade ALASSAD
2018

Signature witnessed by:

saw FF John WRIGHT and FF Scott BELL go back to the entrance towards the stairs.

The crew I was with went off with the casualty and I decided I would stick with my crew. I headed back towards the stairs where we had assumed the entry control board would be, but it had been moved. One firefighter told us it had been moved to another floor. We later found it, but our breathing apparatus had whistled for low oxygen by that time and we needed to go out. Someone recognised me and another person handed me my tally. I took off my mask as it wasn't needed. We headed out of the building through the main entrance. Someone said we should go back to where we came from around the building on Grenfell road. When we came out, there was more debris on the floor in the south area. Something had fallen on another firefighter and someone told us to be more careful as they also suspected there were people jumping from the building. We ran to the covered area, with our helmets on, and we looked around for anything falling. The debris was charred building materials. The debris was enough that we had to pay attention to where you put your feet, but it was not nearly as bad as it was later. The charred building material on the floor was not on fire as there was a lot of water where it lay.

We got back to the corner on Grenfell Road where we came from. We were hot and sweaty, and I believe our crew manager Richard MCSHEE handed us some water. We sat on the floor with our backs against a concrete wall/bank, took our breathing apparatus off and sat there for a while. At that point, we could still see the top floor was alight from our side. It was difficult to tell what level it was due to the smoke.

We were hydrating and resting. There was a lot of fire Brigade activity and members of the public. There was at least one fire Survival call in progress. Danny MORRISON, whom I think is a Crew Manager from Tooting, was talking to someone inside the building on a mobile phone. I believe it was a relative outside the building who asked him to, but I have no other details of what was being said.

Richard MCSHEE turned up again with some fresh cylinders for us. He then rushed off to do something else. We changed our cylinders and made up our sets ready to recommit or to re-task if needed. It is policy to do a fire test and recommit if you feel up to it. It is not very common, because usually you have the resources and you do not need to or the fire is put out and you do not have to recommit.

There is A and B test. The 'B' test is more in-depth. The 'A' test is checks for the straps, to make sure

Signature: Zade ALASSAD
2018

Signature witnessed by:

that all is working and making sure the equipment is ready to be re-used. The only difference was that it would not be thoroughly cleaned, as you would usually do it if the kit were to be given to someone else to use. All three of us put our cylinders on, and we did not stay there much longer. Someone moved us towards the grass near the leisure centre. We moved all our stuff there and sat there as a crew. We composed ourselves while watching all the things going on around us and waited to be told what to do next. I saw someone waving in the windows. At some point, I believe there were trees that were obstructing our view and we could see more of what was happening above the trees than what was at the base of the tower. There was an aerial appliance or platform up to the 5th floor I guess, and there were hoses directed at it. I cannot really describe the spread of the fire as it happened while we were inside. It looked one way when we went in and it was different when we came out.

We could see fire fighter crews moving around. I was not directly involved in the external firefighting. While we sat there, there were fresh crews coming from the other side of the leisure centre and congregating around the wall, while those crews on the grass had already been in. The fresh crews walked past us and went into the building. I am not sure how long we sat there; we then went to get some food.

The officer-in-charge came and spoke to us. I do not know where he was all this while. He was great and appraised us of the proceedings and communications. He was realistic about the situation and how poor the radio communication had been on the night. He asked us to do the best we could and to be careful. I cannot recall if he gave us any specific instructions, apart from entreating us to keep up with the good job and doing our best. Up to that time, I did not know of any guidance, neither did I know of any fire precautions. No one told us a thing and as a brigade policy, we assumed what people were told was to stay put. The stay-put policy as a rule is to stay put in your premises and keep your doors shut, stop the smoke from getting in and wait for us to come and get you out. I guess this is to stop people from wandering about in the blocks and be in safe environments. I was not involved in any of the decision-making processes or any of the command. I do not know who made the decisions asking the residents to stay put and I do not know who made the decisions to withdraw the policy either. I did not have anything to do with spotting the fire and I could not pinpoint any spotters, as there was firefighters everywhere. I do not think there is any training needed to be a spotter.

I remember Fire Fighter Neil joined us because he had lost touch with his BA partner because he was on

Signature: Zade ALASSAD
2018

Signature witnessed by:

standby at a station. He joined us and we teamed up as crew of four since there were three of us. We knew it was going to be hard work whenever we went back in and decided to stick as a group of four as it would be easier for us to do so. Someone came up and said they needed more crews in. At that time, we had rested enough so we went back in, this time from the west side. I cannot remember if we walked all the way around while going in, because after the second round we were running around a lot, but I know coming out, we went all the way around.

The west side is above the entrance and there were the riot police with their shields taking us in. There is a little pathway where firefighters were queuing and waiting. Then when the police came with their shields, we would stand under them and run through the entrance. There was a lot of debris coming down at that point. There were building materials falling on the shields and the men holding the shields were braced, as the impact on the shields was great. There were half a dozen of police officers, one in front and another at the back, each holding a shield over my head. We got in the building and it was full of firefighters. Some going in and others coming out. There were EDBAs, SDBAs and Bridgehead was on the stair by the way. We ended up in a queue in the main entrance lobby and waited there for about an hour. The condition in there at the time was fine. Someone said the ventilators had been switched on, as we had seen the people mount them at a point in the day, but suddenly it got smoky in there, which was enough to make you uncomfortable and give you watery eyes. We still had to queue to get out. Someone broke the glass on the Southside to ventilate, but they were quickly able to stop the smoke from coming into the building.

The entry control was near the stairs, there was a leg lying by the window on the Southside and a lot of debris where we were walking. We saw the leg when we were waiting. Someone said it was for someone who had jumped in an attempt to escape the fire. We waited until someone came in and said they needed a crew. We explained to him that we were comfortable as crew of four, which he agreed to. We reported to Watch Manager Brian O'KEEFE, the Kensington Manager. He had a long list of flat numbers written on the wall. He said they were a list of people who were still inside the building. They were all in the higher levels of the building and we guessed it was EDBAs who would get there. We were tasked to go to the fourth floor, find anyone that was still there and put out every fire that was still burning. We asked for hoses as we did not have any, and we were told there were hoses on the fourth floor, but in case we did not find one on the floor, we could still get one in the hallway.

Signature: Zade ALASSAD
2018

Signature witnessed by:

There were lightly charged hoses on the stairs and firefighters who were not in BA going up and down the stairs, running errands. We saw FF Margaret ERRINGTON on the stairs, and there were two other crews helping with hose Management. We started out from entry control again and got up to the fourth floor. There was a hose there but the water pressure was very low. There was negligible amount of smoke and more water than anything else. There was not much to be done there. We went to the back and there was a hose there. We followed up, turned right and got to a flat which door was open. We picked up a hose and went into the flat which was mostly burnt out. The windows in the living room were broken and there was fresh air in there, though it was a little warm. There were pockets of flames in the debris at the back of the doors, in cupboards, in charred furniture, and what was left of the burning items. The front room and the bedroom were literally gutted by the fire, only leaving charred debris. We put water around what we could, which was laborious than usual because the hose had very low pressure and it helped that there were four of us. One of the rooms had the door shut and it was hot in there. There was fire in the ceiling, which we put out. We systematically checked everything and put all fires out.

We then went to the next flat on the same floor. I do not think there was much to do there. The last two flats were shut and locked. We broke into them as we were told to do. There was some confusion over the breaking in gear, as we did not have it but the crew on the stairs had it. We had one or two locked doors and the last one had given us problems breaking in. We grabbed a sledgehammer, but it was not working properly and eventually, an enforcer came up and broke it. I did not go into that flat, but two other fire fighters went in and checked it. There was no fire and no one in those flats. On that floor, one flat was completely burnt. I cannot remember the extent of damage in the second flat we went into, but it was not significantly damaged. I think I was doing more hose management and might not have gone in with them. It was not smoke-logged on that floor so we could see each other clearly and communicate. We must have passed by the lift. We searched every room in the flats that were open as a crew. We did not find any casualties and did not see any one.

We checked everything on our brief. We had enough air to get back down. There were other fire fighters around so we went back to entry control. We reported to the entry control what we were asked to do, and asked if there was anything else for us to do. They said they were Ok. We got our tallies back and got back to the entrance at the west side. We again waited for Police officers to report with their shields and

Signature: Zade ALASSAD
2018

Signature witnessed by:

went out the same way. There was still a lot of debris on the floor and a lot more water. We went back along the path and there was a large area with a tarpaulin laid down with firefighters resting on it. There were many firefighters all over the area. Some had just arrived and others were resting and preparing to recommit. We did not feel we needed any more rest as we had rested already. We were told there were going to be more BAs, so we went round to the leisure centre and at that point, we walked down the road and ended up back at Grenfell road.

There were still many people all over the place. A woman approached us and asked if we had spoken to her cousin, who was on the 23rd floor. She had not heard from her. We just said sorry, we had not been that way. That is possibly the only member of the public I had spoken to about the incident. We directed her to the fire brigade officers and asked her to speak with them if she needed to. I did not speak to anyone else and people commended our job.

We got back to Kensington Leisure centre and there were crews everywhere. It was daylight and we were soaked from the water that was coming out as we were running back and forth. At one point, we laid out our gear on the path to dry and we stayed there for quite a while. Some officers were talking about crews getting away and they started to call out crews by machines. We were called. FF John WRIGHT had to go and find the keys of the truck, which he had left with someone at the command unit in case the truck had to be moved at some point. FF Scott BELL and I went looking for the rest of our crew. We went again to the west side where we found FF ERRINGTON (Mags) and Watch Manager John PARKER who I believe were in the Tower. FF ERRINGTON was working. I said to her 'we have to go'. I did not go in, but we spoke to the officer who was liaising. He got in touch with FF John Wright and he joined us. I do not remember where CM Richard MCSHEE was. FF Neil stayed on the grass area because his crew was not called. At this point, I am not entirely sure but I think the building was burning less, though I cannot really quantify. There were still crews going in but I saw no one in the windows. There were still casualties coming out.

Our chief Danny COTTON came around during the second time we were sitting outside. She was very good talking to people and going around. It was great to see she was very positive.

No one in my crew was injured or had to see a GP after the incident. We were told we had to go to

Signature: Zade ALASSAD
2018

Signature witnessed by:

Paddington to write a statement so we got in our machine and went. We were asked to write down what we remembered which we did and we came back to our station. We got there late, after 10.

I have been given a hand written notes dated 14th of June 2017 and I can confirm that this is the notes I made at Paddington and I exhibit it as ZAL/1. I was due back home that night and I went home to get some rest and get ready to go back to work the following night. I came back to work at 8 o'clock. I was sent out for out-duty; that is when we take turns to cover up shortage in other stations. They needed someone in Fulham and it was my turn so I went. We did not go back to the Tower. I have been at high-rise fires as we have a lot on this ground. According to the rulebook, a fire does not spread in such a Tower. It is a concrete construction so the fire stays in the building where it started provided the windows and doors are shut. There should be a smoke lobby and the stairway should be smoke free. I have not seen a fire behave like the Grenfell Tower. I have seen it come out of the floor that it is on, through the windows but we have always contained it before it spreads further. In this situation, the fire came out and spread throughout the building. The building did not look old from the entrance or from the surroundings. We assumed it was a concrete building and I personally did not think it was going to go up in flames. I assumed it was something superficial that was burning. I have never seen something of this size. I have been in high-rise fires and the worst I have seen is the one in Shepherd's Bush back in the summer before, which spread up a few floors.

I have no idea if there was a firefighter's lift in the building or not, or if someone took control of it. I had no dealings with the dry riser and have no idea whether it was charged or not. I cannot remember any alarms sounding or any sprinklers. I do not have any information relating to Flat 16 as I did not go to that flat, and I have no idea about gas issues. I do not know if the gas was on or not. I do not remember anything about the doors and I did not notice anything about the windows other than the fact that they just fell out. From my point of view, the factors that hindered our ability to firefight and rescue occupiers were bad communication, low water pressure and the fact that there was only one narrow stairwell. I believe that having enough water, bigger appliances, better communication sets and obviously a bigger budget would improve our ability to fight fires in such instances. When I joined the Wandsworth Red Watch, we had a Pump Ladder and a Pump but we only have one Pump Ladder presently, which I suppose is due to the Government Cuts. The scale of the incident was enormous and bigger than any previous experience I have had, and it required the Surrey fire brigade's attendance with their aerial

Signature: Zade ALASSAD
2018

Signature witnessed by:

platform. They have a higher one but I do not know any details of it. I just saw this on the news.

I have known FF John Wright for about 16 years and FF Scott BELL for about 6 years. It was FF ERRINGTON (Mags') first night with us, as we had only known her for 2 days. Both she and Crew Manager Richard MCSHEE were new to the station. Our initial feeling in a rescue is to get civilian casualties out. Things would have to be so bad for that to change and I do not remember being in a situation where I had to choose between a casualty and a colleague.

In terms of high-rise training, I cannot remember if I have had any specific training on high-rise. But as part of our Breathing Apparatus training, we do sometimes have some inputs anytime a procedure changes. We also have a Tower here at our Wandsworth Station, which we normally simulate for high-rise training. Apart from that, I have never been trained on actual high-rise building. I have never been posted to the fire safety department.

My initial training at Southwark Training School started with a standard training, which included Pump and Pumping training, Ladder training, Road Traffic collision training and Breathing Apparatus(BA) training. I became a qualified and a competent Fire Fighter after 18 weeks training. After the Training School, I have had various additional trainings, which include usual refreshing Fire Fighter skills course. I have had mass decontamination training, and for a while, I had Large Animal rescue training at Enfield Agriculture College. I have also been trained on Hose, Ladder, BA (Breathing Apparatus), I have also done STDBA standard training which is a station-based training. I am up to date with my training as we do STDBA training on a regular basis; sometimes once in a week especially when we get a new recruit. The Officer in charge will put up a standard drills which includes compartment fire. We also do Road traffic Collision training.

I can describe the male casualty pulled out from a flat on floor 10 as big and tall, but not fat. I believe he was black but he was covered in ash. He was in clothes. I can also describe the female casualty taken unconscious from the 10th floor as black or Asian. She was grey and had long hair, long trousers and long sleeved top.

Signature: Zade ALASSAD
2018

Signature witnessed by:

Statement of: ALASSAD, ZADE

OFFICIAL

Form MG11(T)

Page 12 of 12

Signature: Zade ALASSAD
2018

Signature witnessed by:

OFFICIAL