

**WITNESS STATEMENT**

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

Statement of: APPLETON, JASON

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

Occupation: ASST HEAD COMM JHC HQ RAF

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This statement (consisting of 3 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: J APPLETON

Date: 29/01/2018

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

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This statement relates to an enquiry by the Metropolitan police as to what immediate aerial support could be provided by the military if requested by emergency services.

I work as Assistant Head Commitments at the Joint Helicopter Command Headquarters on behalf of the Ministry of Defence. I have been working in this role for 8 months and have served in the Royal Air Force for 27 years, the majority of which has been spent in helicopter-related flying and staff appointments. During my flying career, I have amassed in excess of 3000 flying hours, and have deployed extensively on operations to the Former Yugoslavia, Northern Ireland, Iraq and Afghanistan, flying either Puma or Merlin Helicopters. I am a Qualified Helicopter Tactics Instructor and also completed a tour at the Defence Helicopter Flying School, instructing on both Squirrel and Griffin helicopters, where I attained A2 (Above Average) instructor category. I have commanded an operational Support Helicopter squadron, the Joint Aviation Group in Afghanistan, was President of a Service Inquiry into a fatal helicopter accident and, prior to my current appointment, was Station Commander of Royal Air Force SHAWBURY, home to the Defence Helicopter Flying School.

The Joint Helicopter Command (JHC) is responsible for generating the MOD's Battlefield Helicopters to meet military tasks, both in the UK and overseas. The various roles include LIFT (Chinook, Puma and Merlin helicopters), FIND (Gazelle and Wildcat helicopters) and ATTACK (Apache). Of note, although JHC helicopters could be involved in Combat Recovery operations, the military is not responsible for delivering UK Search and Rescue operations; this role in the UK is the responsibility of the Maritime and

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Coastguard Agency.

In my current appointment, I am responsible for all Operational and Exercise commitments, future plans and training for JHC helicopters. I am providing this statement to explain the resource and capabilities that could be offered by military battlefield helicopters in assisting the emergency services in the case of an immediate response. I will also consider this in the context of the fire at Grenfell Tower, London.

Whilst the majority of the JHC's aircraft are held at various states of readiness to deploy on operations, a Chinook and Puma helicopter are held at a heightened readiness in order to provide an immediate LIFT response, should there be a short notice UK requirement. These are referred to as the UK National Standby aircraft and requests to use these helicopters are made to the Chief of Defence Staff's Duty Officer. This officer would assess the request for assistance to see whether a helicopter should be sent and ascertain information about the scenario to disseminate to the crew of the helicopters. If the National Standby aircraft were tasked, a helicopter could be in the area of West London between 90-150 minutes from the time at which the call was made.

The two helicopters provide a similar role but with varying capabilities due to their different weight and size.

The Chinook is classed as a Heavy-Lift Helicopter, with a Maximum All Up Mass (MAUM, i.e. maximum operating weight) of 24,500Kgs. Its size (including rotor blades) is approximately 100ft x 60ft, and therefore requires a landing area of at least 120ft x 80ft in order to maintain minimum separation criteria. The Chinook can carry between 24 and 30 passengers (dependent on seat configuration) on a routine basis, or if there is an emergency or operational necessity, up to 54 passengers (with some secured to the floor of the aircraft using lap straps). Alternatively, the Chinook can carry approximately 8000Kgs of freight either internally (depending on available space) or as an under-slung load (i.e. in a net on a hook under the aircraft); ideally, these loads should be prepared by appropriately trained personnel (such as the JHC's Joint Helicopter Support Squadron (JHSS), who also hold teams at heightened readiness and are co-located with the National Standby Puma). The amount of downwash created by a Chinook will depend on a number of factors, such as MAUM, Air Density (due to weather conditions), wind direction and proximity; however, for the Chinook it is significant and, as a rough planning guide, 65 to 85kts

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‘wind’ is a reasonable expectation, dissipating reasonably quickly away from the aircraft.

The Puma is classed as a Medium-Lift Helicopter with a MAUM of 7,400Kgs. Its size (including rotor blades) is approximately 60ft x 50ft, and therefore requires a landing area of at least 80ft x 70ft in order to maintain minimum separation criteria. The Puma can carry up to 14 passengers, but typically 12 on a routine basis. Alternatively, the Puma can carry approximately 1750 Kgs of freight either internally or as an under-slung load, again with loads preferably prepared by the JHSS. The amount of downwash created by a Puma will depend on the same factors as the Chinook, although the effect will be considerably less - estimate circa 40kts ‘wind’ near the aircraft. Other considerations are range and endurance; aircraft cannot exceed their MAUM, so there may need to be a trade-off between the amount of fuel carried and the number of passengers/freight.

Neither the Chinook nor Puma are fitted with specialist equipment to facilitate a rescue capability, they do not carry additional medical supplies or routinely have a rescue hoist fitted. That said, a hoist can be fitted to the Chinook for pre-planned events, although these are limited in number and rarely available for crew training; therefore, proficiency in their use is low. Further, when this hoist is lowered, it is not routinely manned and therefore the person beneath places themselves directly into the harness to be lifted. This requires training and instruction to ensure that it is used correctly and safely. I consulted with the Puma Force Senior Operator (Wing Commander Donal McGurk), a very experienced former Search and Rescue Winchman (from when this role was conducted by the RAE). His view is that winching without proper training, particularly in an unusual location like a tall burning building with limited visual references (required by aircrew to maintain safe flight), heat induced updrafts, and unknown stability of the burning cladding, would be extremely hazardous to the crews and the public. Therefore, it is my opinion that a JHC helicopter would not have been able to provide any winching/rescue hoist rescue capability.

JHC helicopters can, in theory, land or touch down on rooftops, but this is not conducted routinely and normally only with the knowledge that the building was designed to withstand the weight of the helicopter and the force of the downwash. In these circumstances, buildings should have been formally assessed as suitable (an example would a rooftop Hospital Helicopter Landing Site). In extreme operational or emergency circumstances, a landing to an uncleared rooftop could be conducted, but the aircraft commander would have to make an assessment if it was safe to do so. Many blocks of flats

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contain hazards which would preclude a landing, such as rooftop furniture, wires and aerials. It is my opinion that a JHC helicopter would not have been able to land safely on the roof of Grenfell Tower, even if there were not additional hazards from the fire and smoke.

Other considerations when providing assistance to Civil Authorities or Emergency Services include communications. Although Chinook and Puma National Standby crews carry hand-held Airwave radios, these are not integrated into the aircraft communications and radio suite. Therefore, messages or instructions would potentially have to be relayed via an Air Traffic Control agency (such as RAF Northolt in West London). However, if a police helicopter or Air Ambulance was also in attendance, then it is possible that Air Traffic Control could provide them with a discrete frequency to provide direct communications between aircraft.

Regarding the incident at Grenfell Tower, it is my opinion that a military helicopter could not have been used to perform rescues from the building or rooftop. If the National Standby aircraft were tasked to operate in the vicinity of a situation such as Grenfell Tower, I estimate that military helicopters (and in particular the Chinook) would need to maintain at least 500 metres clearance from the building (if not further, depending on whether it is upwind or downwind) for the downwash not to have a detrimental effect on the fire or cause debris to come loose/fall away from the building. Landing or touching down on the rooftop would not be an option, especially with the stability of the building potentially being compromised by the fire. The aircrew's primary concern would be the safety of the aircraft, immediately followed by concerns for the persons around them. As such they would not fly near the fire due to the likely damage this would cause to the aircraft, the tower itself and the potential to spread or exacerbate the fire.

When taking all of the above considerations into account, it is my opinion that for the fire at Grenfell Tower, the only assistance the JHC would have been able to offer would be LIFT support from the National Standby Chinook or Puma aircraft. This would have entailed logistical support, such as transporting equipment or people to or from the scene where other options would not be practical or access/egress was limited.

In order to provide assistance from military helicopters, there would need to be an open, clear area (either

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green field site or hard standing, including roads etc) where the helicopter could land. Prior to landing, the helicopter crew would perform an aerial reconnaissance, considering potential hazards and assessing the viability of the area as a helicopter landing site to ensure safe operation of the aircraft. Considerations would include factors such as: the size, shape and slope of the clearing; the stability of the ground, considering the weight of the helicopter both loaded and unloaded; sufficient space for the rotor blades to operate; the potential effect of the helicopter downwash (which is especially significant for the Chinook); and any other hazards on the ground or in the area, such as arials, power lines or pedestrians/vehicles.

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