

Witness Statement

Meier, Mark Andrew.

10 March 2011

C/- Queensland Fire and Rescue Service, GPO Box 1425, Brisbane, QLD, 4001.

**I, Mark Andrew Meier State:**

1. I am a Senior Fire fighter employed by the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service in the South East Region. I have been employed by the QFRS for approximately 12 years as a permanent firefighter.
2. In addition to my permanent role with the QFRS, I am active within the Auxiliary section of the QFRS and have been so for 17 years. I am currently a Lieutenant within the Rosewood Auxiliary Fire Station command. It was in this role that I responded to the events on Monday, 10th January 2011.
3. On Monday at approximately 1440 hrs, I was the Officer in Charge of 673Y, which is the Rosewood Auxiliary 4x4 light attack appliance. I was deployed, as OIC with two other firefighters to the Murphy's Creek area to assist with a swift water rescue. I (673Y) was directed from Murphy's Creek to the Withcott area for further swift water rescue's, however we could only get to the Eastern end of the Gatton bypass as the roads were blocked by rising flood waters.
4. We were then redirected a second time to Grantham to provide assistance as water was reported to be rising quickly there and calls for assistance were beginning to come through to Firecom South East. We drove within approximately 500 metres of Grantham township, along Gatton-Helidon Road and we could see waves of floodwater rapidly moving through the town toward us. As OIC, I withdrew the fire appliance to higher ground to reassess, as we could not make it to the town. My decision was based on the fast flowing movement of the water, poor visibility of the road, rate the water was rising, all of which were creating dangerous conditions. Furthermore, there was the possibility that the appliance would become inundated.
5. There were three houses near us that were in immediate danger. I ran into the first house to warn any occupants to evacuate. Upon making a forced entry to the dwelling, I located one middle-aged man and directed him to evacuate. As I spoke with him, the waters were already encroaching onto his yard. The occupant and I exited the dwelling and the both of us returned to the fire appliance.
6. On returning to the appliance, which had since been forced to relocate down the road due to the waters, we encountered rapidly rising floodwaters. These waters were now at a depth of 80cms. We only had time to literally jump onto the appliance and drive out of the rising waters to further higher ground.
7. The resident of the first house was dropped off to be with other residents on higher ground and we then tried a number of alternate routes to get into Grantham, however every path we could take to get there was blocked.

8. We returned towards Gatton township and took up with another Queensland Fire and Rescue Service Appliance (643A-additional statements forthcoming) and discussed our plan of action given our capabilities. At this point we realised what was unfolding and prioritized who was in the greatest need of assistance. We continued with evacuations of various properties, which were determined to be in the path of floodwaters.
9. I received a radio call from 643A to assist with the evacuation of people on a bridge spanning Lockyer Creek mid way between Gatton and Grantham on the Gatton-Helidon Road. As we approached the bridge, to my astonishment there were approximately 8 cars and a group of people who had parked on the Gatton side of the bridge and were watching the water rise and appeared to be photographing it.
10. These people, in my opinion, did not seem to appreciate the extreme danger that they were in as water was still rapidly rising. As we had witnessed in Grantham, the water rose very rapidly and also came in waves. The noise of the water was very loud and I decided I would not be able to physically reach all the people in the time available, as you could literally see the water coming.
11. I directed our truck to move quickly down to this group of people and using the loudspeaker on the appliance, I informed them of the extreme risk and advised them to evacuate the area immediately. To my astonishment, I could not believe that some people were reluctant to take my advise and were going to remain.
12. I used the loudspeaker again and quite forcefully directed this group to leave. This time they adhered the direction and left as the water was already beginning to pour over the bridge. We made sure all vehicles got to safe ground and as we were driving out, I would estimate we were in approximately 80cm of fast moving water.
13. On exiting the area being inundated and following the last vehicle out, its driver advised me of two more people being unaccounted for and were now trapped in a nearby house surrounded by floodwater. We could not reach these people as the water had risen to a depth of approximately 2 metres in a matter of minutes.
14. Fortunately upon hearing the PA message and seeing the approaching floodwater they were able to make their way to a neighbouring two storey residence. I was able to obtain a mobile phone number for these people and I advised them to get onto the roof, which they did. I kept in constant contact with them as the water rose into the second storey of the residence.
15. I continued reassuring them and ascertaining the condition of the house given the extreme forces and pressures it was encountering. While we awaited the arrival of the rescue helicopter, Rescue 500 at our location, the waters began to subside slightly. I advised the occupants there were still people who were in greater need of assistance from the helicopter and if they felt they were safe they would be transported later.
16. They motioned to Rescue 500, to address more urgent matters and they were later transported by helicopter, that afternoon. We then continued with further evacuations of local houses, whose occupants who were at risk. We then returned to the Gatton Incident Control Centre to be retasked.

17. As multiple calls for help were being received by Firecom South East. We were deployed to the western side of Grantham to assist with two other Swift Water Rescue crews making entry from that direction. My crew and I teamed up with Station Officer Phil PAFF and Firefighter Nathan CHADWICK of Ipswich Station (separate statements) to make up Swift Water Team Two.
18. From the western side of Grantham, three QFRS appliances approached, the two previously mentioned and a third light attack appliance, which contained Firefighters, Allan RUB and Kim STAPLES. These two swift technicians later formed Swift Water Team Three along with 673A.
19. We began to conduct searches of the now devastated township. The actual time of the searching is difficult to recall, however, it was shortly after dark. We spent the remainder of the evening searching and assisting the battered township.
20. As we entered the township of Grantham, I used the appliance spotlight to locate two surviving residents in a two storey house. I advised them to remain at their house, as we were unable to transport them to a flood relief centre at this stage.
21. They were later evacuated and transported by the Queensland Police Service. Moving further into the township we were approached by a group of people who were able to self evacuate in a 4x4 vehicle. I spoke to a man who advised he was a member of the local Rural Fire Service.
22. This volunteer member indicated that his fire appliance had been inundated by water while trying to evacuate and furthermore that it contained the bodies of three members of his family who were unable to get out of the vehicle.
23. I advised him of the refuge centres and we then proceeded to locate the rural appliance vehicle and confirmed the vehicle did in fact contain the bodies of a woman and two children.
24. I advised Station Office PAFF and we then made entry and checked for signs of life, however there were none. Station Officer PAFF remained with the rural vehicle and advised the Incident Control Centre and awaited the arrival of Queensland Police Service.
25. I continued to search multiple vehicles and residences systematically up the street. During this search I then located another person, which appeared to be an elderly lady in a lowset residence.
26. She also showed no signs of life and appeared to be deceased. I conveyed this information to Station Officer PAFF who advised the Incident Control Centre and the on site Queensland Police Officers. I remained here until Station Officer Paff and The Queensland Police Officers arrived a short time later.
27. I then took up with Station Officer PAFF and we continued the search using only torches, but otherwise in darkness. We searched through the township, negotiating various hazards. Visibility was extremely poor and the water was still fast flowing.

28. Movement was hazardous with mud and silt regularly at knee depth and occasionally we ended up in situations where water was up to neck height. We were extremely vigilant looking for survivors and maintaining my own and one another's safety. Our focus was still on rendering whatever assistance, in the trying circumstances, we could to the people of Grantham.
29. We searched numerous houses and vehicles and located several more survivors and assisted them to safety over the course of the evening.
30. At approximately 0100 hours on Tuesday, 11<sup>th</sup> January 2011, I returned to the Rosewood Fire Station and booked off duty after performing various tasks and rescues between Gatton and Grantham for the past ten and a half hours.
31. At approximately 0630 hrs on Tuesday, 11<sup>th</sup> January 2011, I returned to duty at the Rosewood Fire Station and Captain [REDACTED] also of Rosewood Auxiliary and who is a Swift Water Technician qualified, as flooding had just commenced in this area.
32. As an Auxiliary, we are responded by pager and/or SMS to our mobile phones. However, no message had been sent yet, all staff from Rosewood attended the station by 0730 after being in the Grantham area the previous night and into the early hours of that morning. In my opinion, the station and town were about to be inundated. This would be the second station flooding in three years.
33. Before receiving the first turnout for this day, 11<sup>th</sup> January 2011, we had commenced sand bagging the station. This would prove to be to no avail, as the water would pass through the station at approximately 30cm in depth.
34. We responded to numerous calls to people stuck in the flood waters in their vehicles as well as closing roads so as to stop other incidents from occurring in the Thagoona and Walloon areas.
35. For most of the day we remained isolated by rising and dangerous flood waters. We assisted with the implementation of an Incident Control Centre and Refuge Centre, which was established at the Rosewood High School. Our crew later assisted in the evacuation of over sixty elderly aged care residents from the Cabanda Aged Facility.
36. I used my private car, a 4x4, to transfer a kidney dialysis patient to the Warrego Highway where she was transferred to a Queensland Ambulance Service vehicle, as they were unable to access Rosewood by road. I assisted Captain [REDACTED] in performing several swift water rescues.
37. At approximately 1310hrs, 673Y was turned to a swift water rescue with a woman and a child stuck in a house with rising flood waters on Haigslea -Amberley Road at Walloon. We were confronted with a lowset house completely surrounded by approximately 100cm of fast flowing floodwaters.
38. I made access from a neighbouring property with the flow of water while Captain [REDACTED] [REDACTED] made access via the driveway of the property involved, against the flow of the water. After assessing the situation we decided both occupants, with our assistance would be able to wade through the water via the driveway to the appliance. Once in the appliance we were able to drive them to safety and their awaiting family members.

39. Later that afternoon I was part of another swift water rescue which involved a 90 year old woman from a farmhouse surrounded by floodwaters on Rosewood-Laidley Road at Lanefield. After driving down a driveway approximately 1km in length covered by a large expanse of water, I was forced to stop the appliance as the depth became impassable.
40. Captain [REDACTED] continued on foot through approximately 100 metre of fast flowing floodwaters in depths of up to approximately 1.8 metres to access the house. During this time I drew the attention of a passing rescue helicopter, I believed to be Rescue 500, and motioned to them that we were attempting to access and remove one person from the house.
41. Rescue 500, then lowered a rescue technician from the helicopter, located her and raised her to the aircraft. She was then relocated to the Rosewood Refuge Centre. Captain [REDACTED] then made his way back through the waters to the appliance.
42. After the completion of the day's events, all staff replenished the appliances to an operational standard and began cleaning the station. This resulted in two hours of removing waste and flood debris and then hosing out our own station, removing mud, silt and of flood debris.
43. We remained on duty until approximately 2030 hrs that evening, whereby I terminated duty until the following morning.
44. After returning to duty on 12<sup>th</sup> January, 2011, I was again involved in a retrieval of a deceased person from the location known as Campbells Gully. This location is near the ANI foundry at Karrabin. The person was entrapped in the vehicle, which had driven off the road into the gully.
45. A member of the public, who noticed the underside of a motor vehicle after the water had receded sufficiently enough to expose the vehicle, initiated the call. Attending to the scene along with my crew from Rosewood, was 645Y a light attack vehicle from Ipswich Fire Station.
46. The motor vehicle was removed from the gully with the assistance of staff and a crane from ANI. The motor vehicle was approximately 50 metres down from the gully, from the point that the motor vehicle appeared to have left the road.
47. The vehicle was assessed with forced entry and a male occupant was located. The person was visibly deceased. This person was left in the hands of the attending Queensland Police Officers. The person was left insitu for their later removal.
48. This is when the town clean up began and we commenced with hosing out homes, community buildings and facilities both in Rosewood and Ipswich over the coming days.

[REDACTED]  
Signature  
Name/Rank

10/4/11

[REDACTED]  
Witness Signature  
Name/Rank

10/4/11