Witness Name: Norman Parker
Statement No.: WITN4219001
Exhibits: **WITN4219002**
Dated: 22-09-2020

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF NORMAN PARKER

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 13 August 2020.

I, Norman Parker, will say as follows: -

Section 1. Introduction

1. My name is Norman Parker. My date of birth is GRO-C 1951 and my address is known to the Inquiry. I currently live with my wife. I have two, now grown up, children with my ex-wife.

2. I was in the Army for 9 years between 1972-1981. I then moved into lorry driving. I am now retired, but I drive a bus for a local school for autistic children. After I left the Army, I lived in Manchester where I stayed with my brother. I then moved to Essex for a short while before moving to GRO-C in 1986.

3. I intend to speak about my Hepatitis C infection. In particular, the nature of my illness, how the illness affected me, the treatment I received and the impact it had on my family and our lives together.

4. I can confirm that I am not legally represented and I do not require anonymity. I understand that any criticisms I make may be the subject of a right of reply. The events I am about to recount took place a good number of years past and I will provide an account to the best of my recollection but dates should be taken as approximate.

Section 2. How Infected

5. To this day I cannot be certain of how I became infected with HCV. However, I will outline the following events which detail how I believe the infection occurred. I sustained an injury to my back in the army and I was treated at the Military Hospital in Hanover, Germany. I was treated although no surgery was involved and reclassified as fit for duty. It wasn't until after I had left the army that the injury developed more fully.

6. In 1983/1984, I was diagnosed with a curvature in my spine which was extremely painful. I couldn't sit or stand, and underwent various types of treatment. There were no scans available in the 1980s, so I had an injection of fluid in my spine where it was found that I had cracked vertebrae and a ruptured disc.

7. The only option was to operate. If I left it, I would be crippled. I signed consent forms to go ahead with the operation and that I understood the risks involved. I recall there being a question asking whether I was ok with accepting blood transfusions.

8. When I came around I had two drips in me. One was clear and the other looked like lager. There were about 2 inches of liquid left in the bags as I remember. The bags were removed the next day after the surgery. I first remember seeing the bags in recovery then I was transferred to the

ward. I have no idea what I was given, whether it was blood, plasma or a bi-product. My ex-wife visited me when I came out of surgery. We were not married at the time, so the hospital initially wouldn't let her in to visit as she wasn't technically my next of kin but they eventually relented.

9. The operation was a success. They fused my vertebrae and that, together with the treatment removed the curvature and the pain. I was treated at Black Notley Hospital, Braintree, Essex. I have no recollection of the medical professionals who treated me.

10. It wasn't until after I gave blood in 1991 that I became aware that I had HCV. There was a blood drive for the first Gulf War, so I went with my wife to the National Blood Transfusion Service in Dunstable. Following my donation, I received a letter from NBTS Edgware. I don't recall how long after the donation it arrived. It was a standard A4 page letter saying that I had HCV and stating; 'don't give blood and go visit your GP'. The letter included symptoms of HCV and a warning that it was possible to die from the disease.

11. The first thing I did was call my (now ex) wife. I was in a state of panic as the letter said HCV could be transferred via sexual contact. I didn't have any of the symptoms it listed for HCV, so the diagnosis came as a real shock. I was totally stunned but I wanted my wife to know as soon as possible as I was extremely worried for her health. I do recall that I was suffering a lot from nose bleeds at the time and although I didn't think anything of it I am now aware that this is a symptom for some of HCV. As mentioned I went into panic mode and I called my GP straight away.

12. I later submitted a letter of complaint to the National Blood Service about how they informed me about the infection. There was no thought, no compassion. Such devastating news should not be communicated by post under any circumstances. The letter of complaint was drafted by my

ex-wife. For them to say 'you could possibly die from the disease' was terrifying.

13. I then got a call from the National Blood Service hospital at Edgeware asking me to attend an appointment. I believe this was after I made a complaint about their letter.

14. At the appointment I was asked by the NBS, where I thought I'd been infected from. They asked me if I had served in Africa. I had served in Kenya around 1979, but I was posted in the middle of nowhere. I did not come into contact with anyone and I was never hospitalised. There were no opportunities to socialise and nothing occurred that would have led to me contracting HCV.

15. When I was on duty in Northern Ireland in the '80s I was hit by a sharpened coke can that was lobbed at us by kids. It lodged into my hand. I had a Tetanus shot. But I don't believe that could have caused HCV.

16. I have never been an intravenous drug user or been in prison. I was happily married to my first wife at the time and I had at that time had no other operations that required blood transfusions. I was very fit and in robust health. I do have tattoos. I have one on my right forearm and another on my left forearm. I got my first tattoo in Portsmouth on a Navy Day as I was going to join the navy in 1970. My friend and I visited a professional tattoo parlour. My friend who I was with when we got the tattoos has never had any problems with HCV. In 1972 I was in the Army with my brother in Aldershot when I got the second tattoo. GRO-C GRO-C If I got infected by this tattoo then surely so must have the whole brigade. Everyone used the same parlour.

17. I may have had some further blood tests at Edgeware but I can't be sure. I do know that I was given no information on the virus nor what

precautions to take in everyday life nor what to expect afterwards or how best to proceed with my life. No leaflets – nothing.

18. I was then referred to Northwick Park Hospital for a liver biopsy. I asked a doctor why I was not ill, as surely if I had been infected I would be sick. He said that I had the antibodies but I didn't have HCV. I've always remained confused by the information I was given by the doctors concerning my diagnosis. I was told that HCV is a virus in the blood and I have antibodies which could develop into full blown HCV at any time. It felt like I had a ticking time bomb inside me. I lived with that thought until my treatment. It was always in the back of my mind that I may suddenly be struck down by the infection.

19. After the liver biopsy in 1991/1992, I was told by the doctor at Northwick Park that my liver was operating at 87-90 per cent. Which isn't bad for a man of my age and having lived in the Army. The doctor told me to just live my life. I asked if there was anything I shouldn't do and he said 'No'. Again, I wasn't given any information to read nor any information about how to manage the condition going forward. I am unable to remember the names of the consultants from Northwick Park.

20. I had another liver biopsy around 1993 at Northwick Park. I was told there was no development in the deterioration of my liver. I should mention that the biopsies themselves are very invasive and quite painful to undergo but what can you do when that was the only way to check on the health of your liver.

21. My GP in GRO-C Dr Dry from Lake Street practice was very good and that's where I got all my information from. My GP said she had never heard of HCV being transferred sexually. GRO-C

GRO-C

GRO-C Everyone I've ever come into contact with has been ok. She also told me not to drink but if I did, just keep it limited.

22. I was warned not to give blood by the NBS but I found neither the NBS nor Northwick Park was very helpful or caring. Their approach was cold and hard hearted and it seemed wrong considering it may have been the Blood Service that was responsible for my situation. The biopsy in 1993 was my last contact and there was no monitoring of my condition for the next 16 years.

Section 3. Other Infections

23. I am not aware that I was infected with anything other than Hepatitis C. My wife and I attended an appointment with the NBS and were interviewed separately. They told me that they would like to test for HIV and other viruses. I consented to the tests. GRO-C GRO-C

Section 4. Consent

24. As I mentioned earlier, the only option was to have the operation for my back otherwise I would have been crippled. I signed the consent forms to go ahead with the operation confirming that I understood the risks involved. As already stated I recall there being a question asking whether I was fine with accepting blood transfusions.

25. In relation to the testing for HCV by the Blood Service that led to my diagnosis, I was not informed that this would be specifically tested for but I respect that there is a need to carry out such tests.

26. I do not believe that I have been treated or tested at any other stage without my knowledge or consent, or for the purposes of research.

Section 5. Impact

27. My children weren't born when I was first diagnosed. My diagnosis put a strain on the relationship between my wife and I. We wanted children and we thought that we may not be able to have them. She was asking me questions about it that I couldn't answer. How did I get? When? For many it is a disease associated with drugs and prostitution and my wife was suspicious. That we wanted to have children and didn't know if we could have compounded the matter.

28. My wife said it put a strain on things for quite a while until it was explained to her how the HCV was contracted and that it was unlikely to be passed sexually. I had my GP to thank for that. I explained to her that I'm not being believed and I don't know how I got it. I went to the GP with my wife to allay my wife's worries and for the GP to explain the virus and how it would impact having children. We had a conversation about the various ways I could have contracted it and this seemed to settle my wife's mind.

29. I had never been ill and never had the symptoms of HCV. I went through training, was posted in Northern Ireland twice. During my time in the Army, I had a couple of minor injuries, but I was fit and healthy. When I came out of the army, I could run 10 miles in 48 minutes in a full Army kit. I never had so much as a cold.

30. When my daughter was born in GRO-C 1993, my wife was treated differently by the maternity ward at Milton Keynes Hospital. GRO-C GRO-C on one of the questionnaires she filled out she declared that I had HCV. She was then treated like she had the black death. She was moved to the end of the ward and they put an A3 paper sign up on the toilet door that said "Mrs Parker to use only - Hep C". I insisted that the nurse take it down. The other women on the ward were

asking questions. I think the ward sister took it upon herself to do that, I don't think it was protocol.

31. I told my family not to broadcast that I had HCV. I was very aware if I cut myself. I used my own towel and flannel and washed the bathroom down thoroughly once I used it. I was overly cautious about my hygiene. If I cut myself I was careful not to touch the kids. It wasn't nice having this always in your thinking, especially when you have young kids that you want to play with and entertain.

32. My wife and I separated about a year before my treatment. The house I was renting was between my kids' school and their home. I would look after them after school. The more ill I became the less I was able to do. The children were 12 and 15 at the time so they were old enough to look after themselves, but I would cook for them. When I started the treatment, itself it did curtail the activities that we could do together - I couldn't drive. It got to a point where my ex-wife would do my shopping for me. Not that I ate much. I lived off Ready Brek cereal which I mixed with a protein supplement to get my nutrients. I felt there was no point eating much as I couldn't taste it.

33. I don't believe my having HCV and treatment impacted the children. They have done very well for themselves.

34. I have since re-married. When I told my new wife that I'd had HCV she was fine.

35. I was a lorry driver at the time I was undergoing treatment and this opened up a can of worms. I had to enlist the help of Dr Collier, my physician during treatment, so I wouldn't be found out as having the HCV and treatment. They introduced a hand scan system at work in replacement of cards. People were complaining about having to touch the screen 'in case someone has a cut and they had AIDS'. HCV was also mentioned at this point. Dr Collier wrote me a certificate stating that

I was unable to drive due to the side effects of medicine that she prescribed for me. She worded it cleverly to avoid any mention of HCV and I was signed off work.

36. At the time of treatment, GRO-C GRO-C I was renting a house and paying maintenance so I had to take out a loan for £10K. The financial impact was huge for me once I stopped earning money thus the loan was a necessity. There was no other support available.

37. I was paid hourly at the time. In the 1980s and 90s, until the law changed, I could work up to 90 hours per week and I was averaging 75 hours per week. I would start work on Monday, and by Wednesday I was being paid overtime, where I would earn more money and holiday pay was based on the previous six weeks earnings. Financially, there was a cost to undergoing treatment as I lost around half my annual wages.

38. I don't think it really impacted my social life, but I've never told anyone about it because of the stigma. People don't understand. There's a perception that it's a dirty disease. No one knew at my work. Anytime I went for a drink with workmates I would simply have to hold back and decline rounds.

39. Prior to my treatment, if I had a drink, the alcohol would affect me quite significantly. This wasn't all the time, but I would be at a function or have people for dinner and I'd have a glass of wine and would drop into a deep sleep. I'd have to be shaken awake. This was never the case in the past before my operation. I asked a doctor (either my GP or Dr Collier) about this who told me that I wasn't sleeping but my body was actually going into a coma. It was explained that the virus was like a wave in my body and sometimes the virus would impact me more than normal. So sometimes if I had a drink I would be fine, but other times I would be strongly affected. My wife would think that I was drunk and get annoyed

so it did impact our social life to an extent as we didn't undertake all the engagements we could have.

40. I found trying to get travel insurance and declaring HCV was a bit awkward. I don't declare it now, but at the time if you don't declare it and something happens....well you can't take the risk, so I was always honest. A couple of times I was asked a whole new set of questions. Have you ever suffered from a whole raft of other things? I wouldn't say it stopped me from doing anything, but it certainly produced more hoops to jump through.

41. It didn't stop me undergoing other treatment including going to the dentist, but I would always have to be treated at the end of the day. Nothing was ever explained as to why but I wasn't really bothered by this.

Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support

42. Through my GP I was asked if I wanted to undergo treatment at the John Radcliffe Hospital ("JRH"). The offer of treatment was out of the blue. I don't know for sure but it may have been some type of trial. I went on the course of treatment in 2007 and I was treated by Dr Jane Collier who is still at JRH. The treatment lasted for a year. I received 2 forms of medication, 1 was an injection of Interferon in the stomach once a week, and then tablets of Ribavirin to be taken daily.

43. I would return to JRH once per month to be monitored and I saw the same nurse, named Jane, and Dr Collier.

44. They warned me that I would start experiencing side effects from the treatment. No matter what I ate it tasted like metal, I was tired and lethargic, I lost my hair. I lost a lot of weight. It just dropped off me as I had no appetite. I lost around 2 stones. I didn't experience anything that would cause me to be bed-ridden but it was an effort to climb the stairs.

I was constantly tired and would doze off in my chair. I would lie on the settee and sleep for 3-4 hours and then go to bed at 10 pm and not wake up until 10 am the next day. It was like I could never get enough sleep. For me the side effects of the treatment were much worse than anything I experienced whilst having the virus undetected in my body.

45. I had to stop work because it would have been too dangerous to drive. I was told by the GP when I could no longer do it, that they would sign me off work. It would be too dangerous to put others' lives in danger. I was off work for nearly 6 months. Sick pay was 20 weeks at full pay, then 6 weeks half pay. It was a total of 26 weeks then I moved onto statutory sick pay.

46. The treatment was successful. I received a phone call from a nurse at JRH who told me that all my results had come back clear. No trace of HCV. I may have had a follow up appointment to test and confirm that but I'm not sure.

47. I've had no further contact with Dr Collier since I've been cleared, but would go back to JRH once per year for an appointment. I'm not currently aware of the state of my liver. I'm currently happy with that, ignorance is bliss.

Section 7. Financial Assistance

48. I made an application to the Skipton Fund in 2011. I believe I was told about the Fund by either my doctor or nurse at JRH as I had to go back once per year after the treatment. One of them said you are entitled to claim compensation if you have been infected with an NHS product.

49. I emailed or phoned the Skipton fund and was sent an application form. I can't really remember the process. But it asked about my medical records. I know that I made efforts to retrieve my records from Essex Health Authority but I was unable to obtain any documentary proof and I

was told they'd been destroyed. I have never seen my medical records. I called around and tried to obtain information but was unsuccessful. My GP at the time said they only had records of when I moved to GRO-C GRO-C in 1986. I have been shown a copy of my application which I confirm I have signed and dated on 21.02.11 **(See WITN4219002)**

50. I received a rejection letter to my initial application. I didn't undertake any formal appeal process that I recall although I must have written to say that I disagreed with the decision. I am aware that my ex-wife wrote a letter supporting my claim. The upshot was I received nothing.

51. I remember feeling like they were looking for any reason not to pay out. The government don't like parting with money if they can help it. They must have known it would be difficult to find information about events that were so far back in the past.

Section 8. Other Issues

52. As a child, I had a rupture operation, whooping cough and had an appendix taken out.

53. I have had multiple operations on my shoulder that was severely dislocated. The first operation was in 1991 or 1992. They didn't have keyhole surgery at the time so they had to cut into my shoulder. I have since had a couple of replacements. The damage to my shoulder was attributed to physical exertion from the army. I woke up with a drip in my arm but I was told that it was saline to stop dehydration. My wife had asked at the time. None of these above operations involved a blood transfusion.

54. I should mention that I had a stroke in 2013 and therefore my memory isn't as good as it used to be.

55. I have also had several keyhole surgeries on my knee. I think I've had about three operations, flushing out the knee. I remember mentioning to the doctors that I had HCV, but it didn't stop the procedures. This was before my knee replacement surgery in 2018.

56. I now have Osteoarthritis. I spoke to the consultant who said it was likely due to my years in the Army as it takes it's toll on people who adhere to fitness regimes. However, I do wonder if the HCV impacted on that as joint problems are one of the many side effects it can leave you with.

57. I have always had a very slow heart rate, which was a benefit when I was younger. I have since been diagnosed with Atrial Fibrillation. I'm undergoing treatment for that now. That has only started in the last 18 months to 2 years and as far as I am aware there is nothing to link it to my HCV.

58. I used to donate blood all the time. I started donating blood when I joined the Army. I still have my original blood donation card with the stamps. I regularly gave blood to the German Blood Cross at the barracks. I feel guilty that I could have infected people who could have died because of me. That's a guilt I carry with me all the time. I often think about it. I hope that my blood was screened and was never used, but I don't think that was the case. I don't think they started testing until the early 1990s.

59. I was donating regularly in the UK as well after I left the Army. I donated at GRO-C Hall in GRO-C Dunstable the last occasion being the one that brought forth my diagnosis in 1991.

60. I have been asked if I recall ever receiving information about vCJD and the answer is I do not.

61. The whole affair has left me feeling that I am unable to trust the Government. Who sanctioned the use of contaminated blood? Why did it get that far? The same applies to the NHS. My treatment has in the main been good over the years but this whole episode does put that little dent in your faith in the system. For me, I'm just as baffled now as I was when I was first diagnosed. I never had any real symptoms of HCV that I noticed, not like some I have heard of and if truth be told, I am still confused and perplexed as to how I got it.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed GRO-C

Dated 22-09-2020