



Submission No 40

Inquiry into RAAF F-111 Deseal/Reseal Workers and their Families

Name: Mrs Eileen Bate & Mr Malcolm Bate

[REDACTED]
From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, 25 June 2008 2:30 AM
To: Committee, JSCFADT (REPS)
Subject: Deseal/Reseal - Christopher William Bate

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24th June 2008

To the Defence Sub-Committee

Our Son, Chris Bate, died on the 7th April 2006, he had Kidney Cancer. He joined the RAAF in 1985 & after his training he spent all his service at Amberley Air Force Base, Qld - he was an Airframe Fitter. When he told me, years ago, that he had been working inside a fuel tank without any protection, not even a mask, I thought it was dangerous. Of course, service personnel do what they are ordered to do.

When he told us, in 2004, that he had terminal Cancer & had been given 6 months to live we were devastated. A few months before we had been in Qld for a month, over Christmas & New Year. We had a wonderful holiday with Chris, our daughter -in-law Karen & our grandchildren - we are so grateful we had that time before he got sick. He was having trouble with his back at the time & his doctor was treating him for Sciatica, but it was much more serious than that. When he told us he had cancer I advised him to see another oncologist & when he did his immediate future looked a little brighter. He had an operation to remove a Tumor from his spine, which gave him more time thanks to a wonderful neurosurgeon. He would get very tired & he was taking painkillers, walking was difficult, he couldn't work & felt very frustrated. A lot of the time he was positive that he was going to beat this disease, he tried so hard until the end, he had a lot of courage.

Life changed completely for him & his family. He was in & out of hospital & a lot of his days were spent in hospital outpatients. His dad, brother & I went over to Qld for Chris & Karen's 40th birthday in Jan 2005 for a month. I went over at the end of June 2005 for 6wks then went back again in Jan 2006. His dad joined me in February. In February Chris developed Meningitis & was rushed to hospital. Thankfully he recovered & came home. They changed his medication, Karen & I gave him his injections through a port in his arm. St Lukes nurses also came every day to change a pump he had to administer medication. Two weeks later he was rushed to hospital again, Karen, his dad & I were told he didn't have long to live. We slept overnight in his room a lot of times & so did Karen. She slept there the night he died & we stayed the two nights before that. He said his last words to us & didn't speak again after that morning. Our darling son passed away on the 7th April 2006 - he was 41 yrs old. He went through so much, the Kidney Cancer spread to his spine (he got more tumors on his spine over the two years) his shoulders, & a large

tumour was eating into his hip joint. His stomach, legs & face swelled up so much & he was very conscious of it. There was so much he wanted to do & will never get the chance. Chris won't be here to give his daughter away when she gets married & that upset him. He adored his children & they him.

All Chris' medical bills were paid by the Airforce & also the aids he had to have, a wheel chair, walker etc. He received some compensation in November 2004 after they had been worrying about how they were going to manage for months. He received some more near the end of 2005 & Karen received a payment for her & the children when Chris died. Karen has been left to cope with two teenagers & it isn't easy at the best of times. Sean & Jordan have both been through a lot over the two years when their dad was ill they were very fearful for him most of the time & when he died they were inconsolable. Jordan goes to a private school & so did Sean until he started TAFE in Jan. Chris told me that the children's school fees would be paid when he died but Karen is finding it a struggle. We think our grandchildren deserve better. We also wonder about their health & will what happened to their Dad affect them. They were both born when Chris was in the Airforce.

As for us, because we travelled back & forth to Australia when Chris was ill & stayed for quite a while we are having difficulties with finances. We didn't care at the time, all we wanted to do was get over there to support him & his family. My husband lost a lot of wages because he had a lot of time off work & even when we came back, sometimes he couldn't go to work because we were grieving for our son & he couldn't function. I am 68yrs old & my husband will be 66yrs old in September. He is still working & will have to work for a few years yet as we have a large bank loan to pay back. We didn't owe very much before Chris became ill because Malcolm was getting near to retirement age. We always worked to a budget, but you don't budget for your son having a terminal illness. It isn't right when your children die before you, it isn't meant to happen. We have a good relationship with our grandchildren & speak to them over the 'phone & on the computer with messenger, but we do worry what will happen in the future if we can't get over there. Chris' brother Andrew lives in Canada (he married a Canadian) & Chris' illness & death has affected him terribly. When Chris was first diagnosed Andrew was tested for bone marrow suitability & he was a match but Chris' new oncologist didn't want to do it, because he said it could kill him.

I know that Karen & her parents have a Lawyer to speak for her but we wanted to have our say as well. Neither Karen or ourselves have had an apology or condolences from the RAAF or anyone in authority. There has been very little media coverage & it has been almost like the previous Government wanted to forget it happened. I wrote to the previous DVA Minister but didn't even get an acknowledgment. We won't be able to get to the inquiry but Karen will tell us what is happening.

Yours Sincerely,

Eileen & Malcolm Bate.