



Submission No 5

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

Name: Mr Barry Gray

Quintus-Bosz, Donna (REPS)

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, 11 June 2008 12:55 PM
To: Committee, JSCFADT (REPS)
Subject: Emailing: F111 inquiry June 2008

Defence Sub-Committee Secretariat
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2602

Further to my telephone conversation with your Office of today's date, please find enclosed,
as requested, the following:

(1) attached letter for the Submission in regard to Deseal/Reseal Inquiry

In addition I have forwarded hard copies of correspondence/emails that transpired between
myself and other previous
Government departments by express mail for your consideration.

Regards

Barry Gray
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

11/06/2008

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10th June 2008

Defence Sub-Committee Secretariat
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2602

Sub-Committee,

RE: F-111 DESEAL/RESEAL INQUIRY

Please find enclosed a plethora of emails and documents that transpired between myself and various Ministers in the Howard Government and others associated with the health issues and ex-gratia payment for the original F111 DS/RS applicants.

I registered a claim to DVA and MCRS in December 2004 at RAAF Base Amberley as a participant in F111 fuel tanks repairs. Early 2005 DVA sent me to five medical practitioners of different disciplines; this was to do with my application in the DS/RS programme. From those medical examinations it was determined that I had Chronic Lymphocytic Leukemia (CLL) and Major Depression which I claimed as service related conditions caused by the many years of fixing F111 fuel tank repairs at 482 Squadron.

These conditions were rejected as being service related by DVA and MCRS as the SOP's did not cover jet fuel and the various chemicals and sealants we used in the tank repairs as being the cause. Those Departments were not interested in the documented evidence in the SHOAMP report to the contrary. As you can see in my emails I lobbied the Ministers at the time to review the relationship between my medical conditions and the SHOAMP documents all to no avail.

Then it was announced that all those involved in tank repairs could apply for the ex-gratia payment if certain conditions were met, e.g. length of time spent in the fuel tanks etc which I exceeded at Operational Squadron level at 482 Squadron. The document that the applicants had to comply with was heavily weighted to those working in the official DS/RS hangar at 3AD as I believe the criteria to be recognized as being in fuel tank repairs was set by 3AD and those people at the administrative level at 3AD. There was no allowance for those airmen in the Operational Squadron as they had been working in the fuel tanks doing "pick and patch repairs" well before the DS/RS programme was initiated. In fact the conditions we worked under at 482 Sqn were far worse than those in the DS/RS area.

We had no PPE, no air conditioning apart from ground carts that supplied air conditioning to the F111's, no instructions/training on mixing goop (sealant) and the health hazards, no mention on the hazard of spitting on your fingers to smooth the goop out in the tanks, no training in using MEK and other chemicals to remove goop from the aircraft skin, from your hands and skin and breathing the fumes from chemicals, goop and fuel, the list goes on and on.

When we entered the fuel tanks we first defuelled the F111 as far as the aircraft would pump out from the onboard fuel pumps, lift the access panel to the tank put the ground air conditioning cart in to blow some fresh air in, hopped in the tank that still had a few inches

of fuel in the bottom of the tank and used sponges to soak up the remaining fuel. In the meantime our shoes and shorts would be soaked in fuel and our bodies would be wet from the fuel tank and just being wet from fuel let alone dripping from the aircraft skin and pipes. If we had to disconnect fuel pipes to get access to a suspect area in the tank then we would be wet with fuel again. All the time we had no breathing equipment and the smell of fuel and chemicals etc would be up your nose to the point that you would get a headache and have to get out of the tank to let your head clear and then go back in again. This method of repair went on and on, on a daily basis, for five to six years with no let up. As an example, I can recall working on one aircraft at Amberley that was to go to Malaysia on an exercise but was reliant on repairing bad fuel leaks F1 tank. I was given the task of repairing the leak along with another airman. I started defuelling the aircraft mid afternoon and had the leak repaired as the sun came up the next day. In that time we refueled and defueled the aircraft several times to get all the leaks, using the same process mention previous. At that time we had access to a quick drying sealant, which was later removed from service because of the carcinogenic effect it had on humans, and if we placed heat in the tank through the airconditioning cart we could get the sealant to dry faster. I estimated that I had spent in excess of 15 hours taking turns in the tank with the airman to fix the leaks. This was not a "one off" as this would happen at least once or twice a week and with several workers working two or three aircraft at a time night and day.

Keep in mind all this happened for approximately five/six years from 1973 so we were into repairing fuel tanks leaks at 482 Sqn well before the original DS/RS programme began. Some F111's were so bad that we would only fill them so far with fuel to allow them to fly a reduced sortie. Being in an Operational Squadron meant that we had to get the job done as quickly as possible to meet flying commitments whether it was in Australia or on exercises overseas. If we were overseas and had a fuel tank leak then the conditions to

repair the leak were exacerbated by the lack of being able to get a fresh air source.

After I submitted my claim for the ex-gratia payment it was extremely difficult to get any sense out of those who were looking at the application. For instance I spoke to DVA and asked how the claim was going and was told they were waiting for me to submit further details which I was unaware of, so I supplied what they were after. Following up on this they said that the claim was ok. So I let time progress and called again and was told I had to supply further information as I had to prove that I had worked in the fuel tanks. I did this by having two of my squadron fellows write letters, one was a sworn Statutory Declaration to which I was told was not worth zip. I told Tony Behm that we are looking at 32 years ago and information was limited and the RAAF should have all records for him to pursue. He was after information that is available in today's ADF not way back then. The method of work and training today far surpasses 32 years ago but he would not listen. At this point I was very frustrated and stressed to the stage that I was being very blunt to him and when he rang me and told me that I did not qualify for the payment I gave him a mouthful as I believe I was led up the garden path by him.

In conclusion the SHOAMP document was ignored by DVA / MCRS as the SOP's did not reflect SHOAMP findings on medical conditions and the document to define those who had worked in F111 fuel tank repairs was heavily biased towards 3AD DS/RS workers and excluded those at 482 Squadron performing "pick and patch repairs" whilst in an Operational environment.

The copies of emails I have included give you an insight into what I went through to be told "no" by DVA / MCRS and those connected with assessing the claim for the ex-gratia payment. I do have a Gold Card and receive 100% General Rate, for other disabilities to which I am grateful. I will admit that I was very naïve in 05/06 on how the DVA system

worked and the granting of a TPI pension, but then again no one in DVA would give me any advice or where to go to get it. The TPI pension would make life a bit easier but I would be struggling to get there with current rules.

I pursue F111 fuel tank repairs because of the discrimination I have suffered by being in an Operational Squadron doing fuel tank repairs and not be recognized, rather than be at 3AD doing the same repairs, and by those who make the decision to grant service related medical conditions having ignored the findings shown in the SHOAMP document concerning the exposure to fuel and chemicals etc.; in addition to the fact that some people received the payment/recognition and have never been inside the fuel tanks such as fuel tanker drivers, store men and some administration workers that were in the vicinity of an aircraft undergoing DS/RS at 3AD.

In fact, two of the retired RAAF members who were ratifying the airman that worked in fuel tank repairs had no idea what went on at 482 Sqn and how we repaired the tanks. I did say to them if they did not know those that worked in the fuel tanks I am sure that if they asked me or other Airframe Fitters that served at 482Sqn from 1973 -1979 we would be able to tell them so. We feel so wronged and forgotten for not being recognized as being in F111 fuel tanks repairing fuel leaks.

I am still under going medical supervision/treatment for the CLL which is incurable, and the Major Depression, and suffer each day from these conditions.

I am also aware the contents of the emails I have enclosed to you are sometimes repeated in emails I have forward to others.

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I look forward to a positive outcome for myself and all those 482 Squadron mates of mine and to those mates that have passed away from cancer related conditions from working in F111 fuel tank repairs at 482 Squadron.

Please feel free to contact me should you require further information.

Regards

Barry Gray

