



Submission 26

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

Name: **Name withheld**

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
Ph: [REDACTED]

TO PARLIMENTARY INQUIRY

RE: STORY OF [REDACTED]

WRITTEN BY: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] and I were married in 1982 and the man that I married then was very gentle, caring, considerate, polite, never raised his voice and never got angry. He was a very fit man and enjoyed his work in the RAAF. During the first few years [REDACTED] would sometimes come home with a foul smell on him and on a few occasions would say that he was feeling nauseated and a little heady.

One Friday, while working on F111's, [REDACTED] came home from work and passed out. The rest of the weekend he said that he felt really shocking. The reason was that after purging the tanks the guys complained that there was still a strong smell of AVTUR, the Sergeant at the time came up an idea to hook up, the one that was working inside the tanks, in this case [REDACTED], with a face mask to the hanger air, which made him very nauseous, he had a headache and a heady feeling, he has had this problem ever since. I remember that every time [REDACTED] went near the hanger and Avtur and even the petrol station he said it would make him feel ill, so I would put the fuel in the car most times after that.

[REDACTED] was beginning to become moody and would go off the beam about small things. I remember that when our son was about three or four [REDACTED] found him drawing in a book and [REDACTED] went berserk it was the 1st time I had seen him do this. It was a shock for me to see. There were times that if I said things that he did not like he would get stroppy with me it got to the stage that I would be out when he came home from work as it would give him time to de-stress and get showered. Our social life started changing, I would organise to go out to friends or have friends over and [REDACTED] started to get cranky about this and say that I should ask him if it was ok. I had never had to do this before as he never seemed to have a problem going out, I thought that he was getting old and cranky before his time.

[REDACTED] started suffering from headaches while he was working on the F111's. He very rarely would say much about anything so when [REDACTED] said that he had a headache it meant that his head really hurts, if he said that he felt sick he really felt sick and at times would go to medical with his symptoms, which he did not do very often as he said that they made you feel like you were "slackers", and did not seem to help other than say drink more water as you were dehydrated.

[REDACTED] skin was another obvious thing that happened while we were in Amberley. Over the years his face, chest, back and anus would flare up. It was red and sometimes it would bleed. This skin disorder is sometimes quite large and can be painful he would get cream from work to try and help sooth

it. This is something that he did not have when we got married, and it still flares up now.

█████ also had bleeding from the bowel RAAF medical sent him to a surgeon and he had tests, that we did not get a diagnoses for an no follow up.

I remember that when █████ went for his " 5 year medical" The doctors were concerned about his heart and he was sent for tests and sent to a Cardiologist. We were never given any results and he was just told that he had to maintain his standard of fitness, which was very high, which he has done until things in his body got worse and he had to slow down. He is still having problems with his heart and we are in the process of having more tests.

By the time that I had been RAAF wife for a few years I had noticed that the RAAF medical did not do things like "the rest of us" The RAAF men and woman were expected to go to work feeling very ill , then go to medical and if they were lucky they were allowed to go home, I know this what █████ had to do because I had to drive him down on occasions, this could be a bit difficult when you had to get 2 little children out of bed first.

I have to say that █████ not only worked on the F111's he also worked on the F18's straight from Amberley also as a Airframe/engine fitter, so he was still in contact with chemicals and jet fuel and during this time he seem to get worse, his mood swings became more frequent and angry out bursts became more common even to the stage that his friends became concerned about his behaviour. He also started to have more obvious memory problems. It was at this time he started training really hard and I found out later that he did this because it was the only way he could deal with his anger and mood swings, he said that he thought that he was going mad.

As the years went by and █████ moved to Point Cook there was other symptoms that he started to notices like the tingling in his hands and face and different sensations in the hands, loss of vision, dizziness and the list goes on.

█████ was then due to be posted out of Melbourne and I said to him that the he could go but all things considered myself and the children would stay here, █████ then applied and got a Department of Defence job and retired for the RAAF..

Not long after the Board of Inquiry █████ body decided to shut down he ended up in hospital not being able to talk or walk that happened a few times. At this time we had come into contact with █████ who was very helpful. He organised for █████ to go to numerous doctors and specialist over the next few years who all had DIFFERING IDEAS of what █████ problems were. █████ also helped putting DVA claims through that was 2003 and that was the time that █████ had to stop working for Department of Defence as his head was getting worse he also stopped driving as his reflexes has slowed down and he could not work out the colour of the lights quick enough so then I became the only driver and I had to keep changing my work around to take █████ to doctors appointments etc. █████ then became TPI in 2006. I also ended up getting power of attorney in 2004 has he found things hard to deal with so it was all left up to me to keep control of.

Then we had a big blow when Angus Houston moved on and the RAAF had a guy called Sheppard take the reigns he advised [REDACTED] and his team to not help us (the ex RAAF members) anymore we were then left high and dry with no idea what was going to happen. I had to try and work out what to do with [REDACTED] and everything else that happens in a family. [REDACTED] still had not been put on any decent medication he had only had some natural stuff the Prof Bowling had advised him to take and with the RAAF not helping us anymore we did not hear back from Prof Bowling either. I was getting very tired of feeling like I was walking on egg shells around [REDACTED] and the children were very stressed. It got to the stage that I had to send my son overseas on an exchanged programme to get him out of the house and give me some space, I had also had counselling for numerous years by then as well, and I had managed to get [REDACTED] to go to counselling too. We did finally managed with the help of our counsellor and our local doctor to get [REDACTED] to take anti-depressants which have helped immensely. He is also on other medication for other symptoms.

Since then I have had to deal with DVA (which is a fight on its own), and I found that it was not easy, you would think that a guy that is classified as a tier 1 on the DS\RS programme and that was ill with symptoms similar to others in the same situation would not have to fight for a pension but I had to go to tribunal end of last year. While I was there I was told by the referee's that they were here for the service member and they also gave me a copy of a SOP - Chronic Solvent Induced Encephalopathy and said they believe that after reading [REDACTED]'s history that this suited [REDACTED]'s situation better. What makes me angry about this is that we sent in a claim in 2003 this SOP came out in 2005 and we had the claim declined in 2007. Now if DVA were there for the members like they said there were surely they would have advised the members who had claims in before 2005 to resubmit their claim so they could benefit earlier I find that this is a lack of duty of care for the defence members. I have now had to resubmit the claim after going back to Professor Helme the professor that [REDACTED] has seen over the past 3 years for another letter and he says that [REDACTED]'s neurological problems are due to his work on F111's I also gave a copy of this claim to Julia Gillard who is my local member who I believed has sent it onto Alan Griffin.

In summarising [REDACTED] suffers from fatigue, impaired concentration, irritability, depression, sleep disturbance, headaches, forgetfulness, dizziness, incoordination, unsteady and wide gait, depressed reflexes, muscle weakness, blurred vision, and various neuro-behavioural problems. He has lost his fitness and independence and is having to rely on the family to get him anywhere he needs to go. He can no longer work, (we have lost between \$30-\$40 dollars a year in pay) and was made TPI in 2006 that was 3 years after he stopped working and believe it or not my husband is now only 46 years old, this is a gross injustice in the defence force as he started in the RAAF when he left school as a very strong and fit young man. This situation has not only changed my husband's life but mine and the children as well. We have become old before our time which I am finding hard to live with.

I will finish here. Thanks for taking the time to listen to all of us and about our lives.