



Submission 111

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

Name:

Name withheld

Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
Defence Sub-Committee

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, 22 July 2008 6:38 PM
To: Committee, JSCFADT (REPS)
Subject: Fw: DSRS Submission Letter [REDACTED]

----- Original Message -----

From: [REDACTED]
To: DS/RS Submission
Cc: [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, June 24, 2008 9:38 PM
[REDACTED]

To Whom It May Concern:

I [REDACTED] joined the RAAF July 1976 a very fit and healthy 26year old man. I remustered to MBB and was posted to Amberley in April 1980, and was there until June 1989. I retired from the RAAF in July 1998.

I have not received, nor have I been offered any compensation. Initially I was told I was a Tier 1, then I was told I was a Tier 2 and now I have been told I am now a Tier 3. Even though I was not involved in tank entry, most of my duties was the Rag Hangar for more than way more than 60 cumulative working days during the period of 1980 – 1989.

I did not volunteer to work on the Rag Hangar, I was ordered by my superiors.

My duties were to:

- Move and repair structural components of the Rag Hangar
- Removal of the old rotting canvas and erection of new canvas to the Rag Hangar Frame
- Collapsing and erecting of the Rag Hangar
- Emptying the rain water that collected on the canvas roof, often being drenched in the water as it poured off the canvas
- General cleaning up of the Rag Hangar site
- Moving debris from around and in the Rag Hangar
- Removal of the 44 gallon drums, which were black in colour, some were not empty of chemicals that was used for the DS/RS of the F111, with no PPE's..
- Inspected, cleaned, de-scaled, welded and repaired components of the Rag Hangar, this was done over a period of months. There were Pallet after Pallet loads of Rag Hangar components that I personally had to inspect, clean, de-scale, weld and repair.
- I inhaled the smell of the chemicals also, the stench was atrocious, and words cannot describe the smell that permeated your clothes, skin and hair. We worked in shorts and T Shirt in summer and Overalls in winter. Personal Protective Equipment was not available or provided, or even suggested.
- As an LAC I personally initiated the installation of a washing machine & dryer for our section as I felt even then that it wasn't safe to take my clothes home to the family wash. I had to go over my superiors head to initiate this and they were not very happy about it. I received a lot of flack about

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it.

- There were no warning signs that Hazardous Chemicals were in use.

Today I suffer from Memory Loss, Lack of energy, Major Depression, Chronic Bronchitis, Lack of Libido, Irritability, Mood swings, Headaches, Personality Change, Scaling skin on my hands where I handled the structural components of the Rag Hangar and 44 gallon drums with no PPE. I get nauseous and headaches when exposed to solvents.

During the period from 1980 to 1989 I developed severe headaches. I also had elevated Liver enzymes that was diagnosed as Glandular Fever and was given 4 weeks off on sick leave. I began to suffer from lethargy that I am still suffering from today. I used to be an extremely hard and conscientious worker, I enjoyed work and loved being busy and occupied with hobbies and activities.

Today I can barely get out of bed. I suffer from a severe skin condition on my hands that causes me great humiliation and discomfort. I have been diagnosed and treated for Major Depressive Disorder for the last 10 - 15 or more years. This has progressively worsened to the point where most days I am unable to work.

Medication has been of limited benefit. I have lost complete interest in my hobbies and socializing with friends. All of which I used to derive great pleasure from. I have become very irritable and I am not an easy person to live with. I suffer with memory loss that distresses me greatly and I rely on my wife and family to remind me of names of people, appointments etc.

I am severely disadvantaged compared to other men of my age as my quality of life, my financial security and my independence is severely diminished due to being exposed to toxic chemicals. I have rarely compared myself to other men, but I have noticed that other men (outside the RAAF) who are my age and older are on the whole far better off health wise, financially and a far better quality of life. I had to be at my peak, physically and mentally to have even been considered to join the RAAF back in 1976.

I feel demoralized as I was once a very confident, happy, hard working and well adjusted man. Sadly this is no longer the case. My wife has to go with me to appointments as I find it difficult to remember directions or dates, medication I am on, even illnesses that I suffer from. I and my wife have to write messages down, as I cannot remember appointments, I also find it impossible to fill out forms or do any bookwork. I used to manage our finances, pay the bills etc, now I am totally unable to do this. I find this emasculating.

Due to my irritability and irrational behaviour I have alienated several of my wife's family members and friends that I have had for almost 30 years or more. This has distressed me and put enormous pressure on my marriage.

Pain is a common part of my everyday existence, it is unrelieved by any medication. At any given time I experience this overwhelming ache all over my body, with it I experience this weakness and I have to lie down. It lasts for ½ - 2 hours, sometimes it can last all day. It is impossible to work through it.

My income is greatly reduced as I am unable to work. I feel a disgrace and a dishonour to my family name. I grieve for the person I once was, I used to be easygoing, hardworking, happy, loved life, had fun, and loved socializing with family and friends. I feel that person has long gone and I would give anything to be that person again.

Also the stigma of being diagnosed with depression is humiliating. I feel so ashamed that I am unable to control my happiness and enjoyment of life. I also feel disgraced and disappointed as I know that my moods affect my loved ones as well. I am disillusioned with my life and where I am going.

I feel I have failed my family, friends and myself. I am ashamed by the fact that I have not been a good role model for my two sons and daughter and haven't been for the last 20 - 25 years of their life. This

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fills me enormous regret and disappointment, as I feel this has affected their lives as well. I find it extremely difficult to complete complex tasks, even simple every day tasks, and have difficulty coping with several things at once.

My marital life has been very much affected by my lack of libido. I have been unable to be intimate with my wife for over 4 months, my sex drive is non existent, and therefore this greatly affects my intimacy with her, and her with me. We had a very happy, active and regular sex life until approximately 15 - 20 years ago where it slowly decreased to now where it is almost non existent.

My wife and I have been married for 33 years and I love her and I still find her attractive. She is only 54 years. My wife has stood by me and she tries to be understanding, but it is very difficult for her also.

The embarrassment of my skin condition makes it difficult making new acquaintances as when you shake hands, often people comment on the roughness and unsightliness of my hands.

I was a very keen player of Lawn Bowls, and I used to be quite good at it. I started playing around 1980 and played for approximately 15 years. I was President, Games Director, Pennant Champion, played for Australia in Interservice Bowls and

was held in high esteem as a talented Lawn Bowler. I was very competitive and won many trophies.

Now I have absolutely no interest in it whatsoever. I really loved the game and even thought I would go on to play professionally at one time. I have no motivation now to do any exercise or join in any formal sport in any way.

I have been a Christian for 25 years and used to be a strong Church attendee, I have even been unable to attend most church functions as I have lost enjoyment of most of these activities as well and I find it difficult to relate to people.

In closing I feel I am exceedingly disadvantaged by my health, my ability to provide for my family with financial security and I have no future career prospects. I must say I am quite fearful for my future and my family's future. Where would I find employment that would let me work for only 1 - 2 hours a day, some day's not at all and let me lie down when I am unable to work? My wife and I had so many great plans for when I retired from the RAAF in 1998, but sadly I am now too ill to do most of them.

I have two distinct periods in my life. My life before I went to Amberley and my life after. It is like I am two different people.

I believe our superiors in the Air Force had a duty of care to cause us no harm, particularly as it was during peace time. I feel betrayed that they failed us then, and they are still failing us now.

[REDACTED]