



Supplementary Submission 105a

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

Name: Mr Ian Richards

Supplementary Submission
To the Joint Standing Committee on Defence Foreign Affairs & Trade
Inquiry into RAAF F-111 Deseal-Reseal Workers and their Families

Non Recognition of the Exposure to Chemicals of Support Trades
Before, during, and after F-111 Deseal Programmes

By Ian Richards A225915 Warrant Officer Ground Support Fitter Retired

To Whom It May Concern

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am most concerned that many support trades, like my old mustering of General Fitter, now GSE Fitter, have not been given the proper consideration and recognition for their involvement in the F111 Deseal/Reseal and Wing process. This includes their very intimate involvement through engineering support in technique development of the various processes leading into those programs and the cleaning up after, and through this their exposure to the various chemicals linked to the programs, this also includes maintenance and repair of the furnace used for burning the chemicals

Whilst in no way am I suggesting that the people inside the fuel tanks did not have a very tough time. There are also many support trades who were working right along side those workers who have not been considered at all in this inquiry or during the previous DVA considerations. This is despite being recognized during the original RAAF BOI as having considerable exposure to the chemicals of the processes.

As examples of the above I give the following –

Those of us involved in equipment maintenance at 3AD worked directly along side the aircraft trades in all areas of the programs. Our hangar was directly alongside the main Deseal hangar and our normal place of duty was wherever the equipment that needed servicing and repair was.

Towards the end of the first program when an aircraft was going through the rag hangar and crews were working shift work a General Fitter was on call 24hrs a day for equipment and chemical rig breakdowns and at times arrangements were made for a member to sleep on site so as to be immediately available if needed.

Boiler Attendants were specified by DVA and I have worked right alongside them for extended periods when trying to get the furnace working correctly and in the process getting covered in SR51 chemical with no PPE

I understand that it has been stated that no chemicals were burnt past the end of 1982. That may be correct for the open fire pits but we were still trying to burn SR51 in the furnace in the latter half of 1983. The DVA accepted dates for Boiler Attendants are between 1976 and 1986 but did not accept any maintenance trades as having been exposed to the chemicals.

I realize that there is almost no documentary evidence to say who was involved with what and for how long. Most trade statements were generic with very few specialities listed, but surely logic should dictate that if someone was employed in support and was for an extended period of time working hand in hand with the members of the DS/RS programs and during clean ups that a minimum level exposure must have been reached.

As for further evidence I enclose a copy of the letter from Canberra relating to the Suggestion Scheme Award for modifications to the DS/RS Water Pick nozzles. This letter, although addressed to FLTLT Eames, lists at the bottom, myself along with Woff Coles and FSgt Townsend as being involved. This new evidence continues to show how closely we were involved with the programs.

As a matter of completeness and to help with your greater understanding of the support personnel issues I will also attach the statement I gave DVA for my rejected ex gratia claim. I am also willing and available to answer any question that may arise from this submission.

Thank you
Yours sincerely

Ian Richards

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Attached: RAAF Suggestion Scheme Award Letter
Statement for Ex Gratia Payment

DM84/22109
Suggestion No 84/173

24 January 1985

Flight Lieutenant T.J. Eames
No 3 Aircraft Depot
RAAF Base
AMBERLEY QLD 4305

Dear Flight Lieutenant Eames,


Your suggestion concerning a water-pick spray nozzle for the deseal/reseal programme for F111 fuel tanks has been evaluated and is to be adopted.

The evaluators agreed that the nozzle is a significant improvement over the existing item and a reduction of 50% of time spent on a monotonous task should occur, following its implementation. Further, USAF could make use of the nozzle in their deseal/reseal programme and action has been taken to refer the suggestion to them.

In recognition of your ingenuity and initiative the Suggestions Committee has pleasure in granting you a shared award of \$1,700. The award is taxable and a group certificate will be forwarded at the end of the financial year. Meanwhile arrangements, which may take some weeks, are being made to have the cheque for the net amount presented to you.

On behalf of the Suggestion Committee I wish to thank you for participating in the scheme and it is hoped that you will submit further ideas for consideration.

Yours sincerely,


J.R.K. Owen
for Assistant Secretary
Administrative Services

similar letters to:

WOFF G. Coleo, 3AD

FSgt R.H. Townsend, 3AD

~~Sgt J. Richards, 3AD~~ A2259/2

**Statement by Ian Richards in Support of
Claim for Lump Sum Payment as a
F-111 Deseal/Reseal Participant**

My exposure to the many chemicals and working environments of the F-111 Deseal program extends across all areas of the program covering 3 1/2 years from Jan 1983 until Aug 1986. I worked on GSE in the Rag Hangar and was heavily involved in the Chemical Disposal at the Base Incinerator site. I was also very heavily involved in the Sealant Rework (Pick and Patch) and the Wing Tank programs through the maintenance and development of GSE including the Hydro-Lasers (Water Picks). My work base was directly beside the main Deseal hangar and we worked closely with Deseal personnel to ensure timely servicing and availability of the equipment they needed.

I was employed at 3AD as a general engineering supervisor, responsible for the preventative and breakdown maintenance of ALL mechanical equipment that was used on the Deseal program as well as the rest of the Depot. This equipment was called Ground Support Equipment (GSE). My mustering was known at that time as General Fitter (GENFITT) and my rank was Sergeant, I was posted into the No 3 Aircraft Depot Ground Equipment Maintenance Flight (GEMF) Ground Support Equipment Maintenance Section. This section was responsible for the periodic and breakdown maintenance of all mechanical equipment (GSE) used throughout the Depot. I was one of three Sergeants working under the direction of a Flight Sergeant and I was responsible for general engineering type servicing. My team comprised of myself and two to three other fitters. The other two Sergeants and their troops were responsible for electrical and motor transport servicing. The GSE maintenance hangar, Hg 279, at that time was located directly beside the main Deseal hangar, Hg 277.

Rag Hangar

I arrived at 3AD in Jan 83. At this time no aircraft were being put through the Deseal program at the Rag Hangar. However, all the GSE and chemicals were still in place at the hangar, as no decision had yet been made that there would be no further aircraft processed. Chemical residue covered everything; it was the sort of stuff you could not get rid of very easily.

I attended the Rag Hangar regularly with other fitters on my team to carry out periodic maintenance, I had only just arrived and as a supervisor I needed to become familiar with the specialized equipment very quickly. At this time it was not unusual to work at the hangar for various times 2 to 3 days a week. As the year moved on and GSE was relocated our time at the hangar reduced. However, I believe we were still maintaining GSE at the hangar in early 84. I cannot recall ever being told that there would be no more aircraft put through the hangar and whilst there was GSE located there we would service it.

The types of GSE included the chemical pumps and rigs. One water pick was there for the first part of the year with the other located back at the main Deseal hangar. Any work in the rag hangar involved being exposed to the chemicals and any handling of pumps, rigs and hoses resulted in particularly heavy exposure.

Ian Richards

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Disposal of SR51- The Base Incinerator

Boiler Attendants from Base Squadron Amberley staffed the Base Incinerator. It was supposed to be serviced by Dept of Works as it was a Base asset, but the civilians who were supposed to do the work did not like the chemicals and would rarely attend breakdowns. 3AD Ground Support Equipment Maintenance Section was passed the responsibility for looking after the Base Incinerator by 3AD management, this was to try to speed up the chemical disposal.

The Base Incinerator was of an unsuitable design and would not burn hot enough to correctly burn the chemical. Also the chemical, which was fed into the burners, had a lot of solids or residue in it that would continually block the nozzles.

Initially, as I was unfamiliar with the equipment, I didn't attend breakdown calls but I did attend regularly with other maintenance personnel from my team to familiarize myself with the Base Incinerator as quickly as possible. As I quickly gained experience and began to understand the urgent need to dispose of the chemical, I recognized the man-hours that the Base Incinerator maintenance was drawing from my section and to offset this I became more involved myself.

I regularly attended breakdowns at the Base Incinerator over the next year. These call outs were intermittent but on average were at least 6 to 8 times a month and would last anything from 2 to 4 hours at a time. Also because of the urgency to burn the chemical and the unreliability of the Base Incinerator I would drop in most other days to ensure everything was functioning correctly.

The chemical was burnt in the Base Incinerator two ways. Firstly by direct feed from a header tank sprayed through nozzles and ignited. Secondly, foam blocks called Tech Blocks were used to soak up hydrocarbons and chemical from the overflow dam. These blocks were passed by hand into the Base Incinerator as a method of disposal. It was not unusual to pick these blocks with bare hands, especially if you were already covered in chemical from other servicings.

When the nozzles blocked (which was all the time as there were a lot of solids in the chemical) you would have to dismantle the nozzle and in doing so you would be sprayed with chemical that would flow from the feeder pipe, even though the chemical header tank had been isolated. It was impossible to work on the nozzles without coming into direct contact with the chemical. There were no safety instructions and the only protective equipment provided were pink plastic "washing up gloves" which fell apart after chemical contact. The job called for dexterity in dismantling the nozzles, the gloves were unsuitable and not worn.

Sealant Rework (Pick and Patch) and the Wing Tank Programs

Both these programs ran throughout my time at GEMF Jan 1983 – Aug 1986. As the GSE hangar was at that time located beside the main Deseal hangar we developed a very close working relationship with the members of the program. We regularly worked throughout all the Deseal work areas servicing and repairing equipment. That was our normal job.

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We did a lot of work on the Hydro Lasers (Water Picks) that were used to remove sealant from tanks and wings. We regularly had to modify guns for improved access and performance. This required you to work directly with the operators on the aircraft in the tanks, or on the wings for an extended time to develop and perfect a functional design. Whilst I did not do any tank entries, it was quite normal at times to work with head and shoulders in an entry hole observing an operator in the tank or being shown a problem. We did this to develop a design for modification to equipment. Also at this time the Water Picks were old machines and they were giving a lot of maintenance problems. At times we even worked shift to ensure maintenance was available on a back shift.

As an indication just how closely I worked on the program I was awarded recognition from the RAAF Suggestion Scheme for developing, in tandem with Deseal Senior NCO's, especially shaped nozzles for the water picks to improve the sealant removal process during Pick and Patch and the Wing Program.

After I had been at GSE for about a year or a bit more the GSE hangar was relocated from Hg 279 to another GEMF flight hangar just down the road. This move in no way changed the close working relationship that had developed between the two sections. In Aug 1984 I was moved within GEMF from the SNCO GSE position into the General Engineering Manufacturing Workshop (FITTWELD).

Even after that rotation I still continued the close working relationship with Deseal. I had developed a high expertise in understanding the maintenance and operation of the Hydro Lasers (Water Picks) and continued to regularly attend the Deseal hangars to assist with problems.

The old Hydro Lasers continued to give problems when the full Wing program started. I am sure Wings were being worked on throughout 84 or at least in the second half of that year. Another example of how closely I continued to work with Deseal is my deep involvement (testing, trailing and measuring pressure output of various types of machines) in the purchase of the new Hydro Lasers (Water Picks) for the Wing program and the development and modification of splitters to enable better two-gun operation. Also the design and manufacture by my section of four (4) wing rollover stands. All this was to assist with the Wing program and again requiring extended time working within the Deseal hangars to perfect specifications.

My major exposure to Deseal decreased from Jul 85 with another internal transfer into GEMF HQ, but I was still visiting and working in Deseal areas as described above until Aug 86

Exposure to the Deseal Chemicals and Working Environments

After 20 years plus it is impossible to identify the amount of time spent in a particular place or the amount of exposure experienced whilst working across the many facets of the Deseal program. Suffice to say that as the maintenance supervisor with the responsibility for the

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serviceability of ALL Deseal mechanical equipment over a period of 3 1/2 years I spent a very long time in all the areas and on all the programs, post 1982, listed in the your definition guide on the DVA web site

A normal working day might start working in the Hg 277 and move to HG 278 then get a call to go out to the Base Incinerator. When finished at the Base Incinerator because you were next to the Rag hangar you would pick up a couple of servicings there before returning back to the section, located beside Hg 277 in Hg 279 to finish up for the day. The next day may start at Hg 410, move to another section at the other end of the base and after lunch move back into the various Deseal areas, travel out to the Rag Hangar to finish off a repair and because you were next to the Incinerator you would check it out to ensure it was working correctly. So it went on, it was quite normal and easy to build up extended periods in the various Deseal areas any day of the working week

The above scenario is not unusual. Keeping the Deseal equipment serviceable was a major priority, and working in those areas I have mentioned was all in a days work.

Our usual place of duty was wherever the equipment was that we were looking after. In this case a lot of it was in the Deseal hangars, the Rag hangar, and at the Base Incinerator

It can be seen from the above description that it was quite easy for myself as a maintenance provider to move around the Depot and in the normal course of my duties and spend at least a couple of days a week if not more in a defined Deseal area working right along side the people carrying out the Deseal programs and chemical disposal.

A normal working year is approximately 230 days, this allows for weekends, holidays and public holidays. Given my on strength time at 3AD GEMF of at least 2 1/2 years of intensive involvement across the program and a further year of lesser involvement. A total of 575 days followed by another 230 days. I believe that that my cumulative time spent in the applicable Deseal areas and working on the recognized Deseal activities far exceeds the days listed in all the applicable post 1982 areas, as shown in the definition statement on the DVA website, excluding tank entry.

I therefore request recognition under Tier 1 of the Deseal Reseal guidelines for a Lump Sum Payment as a Deseal / Reseal Participant

I enclose in support of the above a statement made by my supervisor at 3AD from Jan 83 – Aug 86

MR Lloyd Eagle - RAAF Warrant Officer Retired. This statement was made in Sep 2001 during the RAAF Board of Inquiry

Ian Richards

Sep 05

DESEAL / RESEAL STATEMENT
BY LLOYD EAGLE - RAAF WARRANT OFFICER RETIRED
RE THE EXPOSURE OF IAN RICHARDS TO THE CHEMICAL SR51
DURING 1983-84

I Lloyd Eagle of [REDACTED] hereby state the following:

In 1983 I was the Warrant Officer in charge of No 3 Aircraft Depot (3AD) General Engineering and Maintenance Flight (GEMF). Within GEMF was a subsection for the maintenance of Ground Support Equipment (GSE). Early in 1983 Ian Richards, who at this time was a Sergeant of the General Fitter mustering, was posted into this section as the Senior Non Commissioned Officer in Charge (SNCOIC) of the General Fitters. This mustering carried out the mechanical maintenance and repair on GSE throughout sections at 3AD. The GSE Team was expected to comply with the usual directions issued by that section to safeguard their personnel.

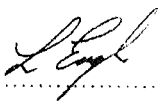
First Deseal / Reseal Program

Members of Ian Richards' section carried out preventive and breakdown maintenance on the GSE used on the Deseal Reseal program at the "Rag Hangar" near the engine test cell. Ian Richards was involved in this work. At the time of his arrival the first program was in the process of finishing up. However, there was a continuing requirement for ongoing maintenance of the Deseal / Reseal GSE, as no decision had been made on what to do with the equipment. Ian Richards was exposed to SR51 through supervising and assisting with this maintenance on the tanks and pumps used to pump the SR51 chemical around the F111 fuel tanks.

Disposal of SR51

There was a large amount of SR51 to be disposed of following the end of the first program. The chemical was to be burnt in a furnace but the furnace would not work correctly and a backlog of chemical had built up during the program. Drums of chemical were pumped to a header tank on top of the Engine Starter Test Cell where it was fed into the furnace through a nozzle. Chemical from spills in the "Rag Hangar" was held in a holding dam not far from the furnace. The furnace nozzle would block continually, and when fired not enough heat was developed to burn the chemical correctly. Chemical from the dam was soaked up with "Tech Blocks" (a foam type material) and these blocks were carried from the dam to the furnace for test burning.

Maintenance on the furnace was supposed to be carried out by Base Squadron Amberley Facilities and Dept of Works. However, by the end of the first program they would not attend call outs in a timely manner. Deseal / Reseal arranged for GSE to provide assistance with the furnace as they attempted to clear the backlog of chemical for disposal.



Lloyd Eagle

25 Sep 2001

This maintenance required the stripping of the furnace nozzles and the carrying of the "tech blocks" from the dam to see if the furnace was operating at a high enough temperature to burn them. As a result of this maintenance it would not be unusual for the team to suffer splashes or spills on their bodies or clothing and carry the aroma for a considerable time.

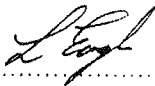
Towards the end of 1983 I believe that the use of the furnace to burn SR51 was stopped as it was recognized as not being effective.

Wing Program

The GSE maintenance section was also involved in the support of the GSE used in the Wing Deseal /Reseal program. Although it is my understanding that SR51 was not used in this part of the program, members of the GSE section were exposed to the sealant chemical being removed from the wings with the water picks. Ian Richards and his team worked very closely with personnel on the wing program. In fact their work areas were next door to each other.

As an example of how close this involvement was Ian Richards and SNCOs from the wing program were awarded recognition from the RAAF suggestion scheme for their ideas in developing specially shaped nozzles to improve the operation of the water picks.

Ian Richards was transferred in mid 1984 from the GSE section to the Fitting and Welding Section as the SNCO in charge.



Lloyd Eagle

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