



Submission No 73

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

Name: Mr Tony Brady

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From: Tony Brady [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, 27 June 2008 11:11 AM
To: Committee, JSCFADT (REPS)
Subject: Deseal/Reseal Parliamentary Inquiry

Good Morning,

I am an ex-deseal worker and was involved in drafting the initial terms of reference submission, however, due to a disagreement with the Support Group over the direction the committee was taking I resigned.

This led to my being completely ostracised from the group and as such, despite watching for the tendering of submissions, I have missed the cut-off date.

I had emailed Jim Dalton about 2 weeks ago and asked for an update but received no response.

Is it too late for submissions?

I feel the two person led Deseal/Reseal Support Group is not fairly representing the concerns of all Desealers and that the agenda is being pushed to include fringe workers, who's primary employment was not Deseal work as well as Civilians who unlike RAAF Desealers, had the right to decide if they would or would not carry out the work. Although these parties have a genuine claim it should not be considered as part of the main Deseal issue as it will have the potential to "water-down" any fair compensation and benefits "true desealers" should be receiving.

As a RAAF Deseal/Reseal worker in 1985-87 I spent every single day working on Deseal operations, most of this working shift work from 11pm – 7 am. I was banned from the Cinema, had to drink outside in a far corner of the Airman's mess and had my meals delivered to my work, all due to bans over the odour we produce from our deseal work.

I was at this time a single, 23 year old male. Weekends would normally be taken up clubbing and pursuing girls.... Mine and other Desealers did not, quite simply for nearly two years I smelt so bad that I could not hold down normal social functioning and at this critical time of development found women did not want to associate with me despite the 'Airforce advantage'.

The moment I started to sweat in the slightest the stench was unbearable, described as a rotting, burnt flesh smell, making social and especially sexual encounters non-existent. By the time I had left Deseal and my normal body odour had returned the impacts of both the physical and mental consequences had taken their toll. I was now suffering from erectile dysfunction, had next to no energy and would get a range of infections that slowly ate away at my health. I am married for the third time, both previous marriages ending for reasons directly associated with problems linked to my Deseal work.

I watch as most of my ex-workmates proceed down a path that is very familiar, the noticing of symptoms through their 30's-40's, the exasperation of these symptoms into a series of consistent conditions in their late 40's and then the development of the life-threatening or fatal illnesses in their mid-50's. I am now 44 years old, my father died aged 48, after becoming too ill to work at 39, from Army related work, most likely nuclear exposure, I look at the impact this had on our family, the impact the deaths of my deseal friends has on their families and wonder how you can ever compensate us sufficiently, but compensate us you must.

I was sent to this section, like many at my time, as a form of punishment. Deseal was considered the worst posting position on Amberley, and probably within the RAAF as a whole. An issue between me and the new Engineering Officer at Rotary Wing section bought about this move. I called him by his Christian name when I met him at a civilian social event. This is the type of simple situation that, in my time could lead to a posting to Deseal. This 'punishment' was as it turned out to be more severe than he would have expected.

During my time at Deseal /Reseal many of us, including me, refused at one time or another to do certain tasks; be it entering the chemical dam to clean the scrubbers; or go into tanks that required difficult and lengthy entry; or work on seed-blasting and water-picking operations. These refusals were met with differing responses depending on the supervisor at the time; we were either ridiculed and told one of our mates would have to do it instead; ordered to do it and in some cases charged for disobeying a lawful command; or left to the bullying of those we worked with to make us do it.

27/06/2008

As I have stated many of us were at Deseal as a 'punishment posting' due to discipline or work performance issues. Although no hard evidence exists to the fact Deseal was used for this purpose a vast amount of circumstantial evidence exists in the perception and knowledge of Airforce personnel of the day this could easily be substantiated by a review of Airman's Evaluation Reports (AER's) for those at Deseal compared to those never sent to Deseal.

The SHOAMP studies have clearly established that Deseal workers suffered both severe Physical and Mental pain as a result of this employment.

This seems to bring the operations of Deseal/Reseal within the realms of breaching the International Bill of Rights; specifically the

Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

Article 1

1. For the purposes of this Convention, the term "torture" means any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions.

If the Government can, under media pressure, substantially compensate a woman for being 'wrongfully' detained in a migrant detention centre, despite this being partly her responsibility from lies told, then why can they not substantially compensate Desealers for their loss of health and wellbeing as well as the physical and mental anguish from lives unfulfilled due to Deseal employment

This is what defines and separates 'True Desealers' from those that did pick and patch operations and those that chose this employment as civilians.

I also believe that the testing of Deseal workers for signs of chemical poisoning, via Medical Section conducting **Liver Function Tests**, is a clear indication that the Airforce was aware that the work environment they were placing us in was unsuitable.

I base this on three main concerns;

LFT's were originally conducted yearly, during my 18 months at Deseal the frequency of testing increased to 6 monthly and then to every 3 months.

Medical studies of the day clearly state LFT's are a measure only of chronic or acute overexposure and not of risk. These studies state risk is best accessed by the assessment of numerous similar health complaints from a defined work group. Medical section should have been aware of these studies and seen the situation that was unfolding 20 years before they finally stepped in.

No environmental section study was ever conducted, despite a memo suggesting it should be, into the contaminant levels within the hangar or the confines of the tanks. The only conclusions you can draw from this is that it was a case of **Gross Neglect** or a **Deliberate Avoidance** to circumvent the problems that would arise if a study were to be conducted.

Airmen that had suspect LFT tests were removed temporarily from the section and then re-tested, the first tests were then noted as a mis-read or removed from their medical files, I have such an annotation in my medical files.

When these points are considered and weighed against the decision making processes of the Military in the 1970's - 1990's it is not hard to surmise that the Airforce used Airmen, most of whom had been disciplinary problems, as a highly at-risk workforce. They had a new multi-million dollar aircraft that formed, at a critical

defence time, our major strike and reconnaissance weapon. Without the deseal operation the aircraft would have been rendered unserviceable decades before its due retirement date and left Australia with a Defence and Appropriations hole that it would struggle to fill.

It is my contention that the Airforce knowingly and willingly subjected Airmen at Deseal Reseal section 3AD Amberley to a work environment that did not meet even the loosest definition of workplace health and safety, that they manipulated medical staffing and documents the facilitate this process.

I also contend that the previous government used the association of many of those Airmen with Angus Houston to control the outcomes surrounding the Board of Inquiry and to "keep us on the line" with promises of fair treatment and fair compensation leading up to the Howard Governments announcement of the ex-gratia payment.

We, as a group, were told by Angus Houston, that the ex-gratia payment was approved and that the amount was being discussed. He then went on to inform us "not to go out and buy a new house over Christmas, but that the amount was 'substantial and life-changing', and we would need to seek financial advice to ensure it was properly invested to secure our futures". This was then reinforced by the provision of funds to go towards financial advice for members receiving the ex-gratia payment. This 'keeping us on the line' had a two-fold effect of reducing the number of litigation claims and severely reducing the timeframe left before the statute of limitations requirements.

I feel that the manner in which we were treated was reprehensible and that the Government engaged in a deliberate act of deceit to reduce the impact of claims from Desealers.

I have a massive amount of other issues including the failure of MCRS and DVA to fully address losses faced through my business falling when I was unable to continue School Photography or Weddings after having a series of panic attacks, followed by depression and then a divorce, with the consequential lose of full custody of my children. These issues are not mine alone and will be addressed by many, many other I am sure.

I hope this submission can be included in the inquiry process as I feel it will raise point that need to be further investigated and addressed in order to fully put this issue to rest.

I can be contacted via any of the following means:

Phone
Mobile
Email



Kind Regards

Tony Brady

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