



Submission No 10

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

Name: Mr Doug Steley

Jeanroy, Paul (REPS)

From: Quintus-Bosz, Donna (REPS) on behalf of Committee, JSCFADT (REPS)
Sent: Friday, 13 June 2008 11:43 AM
To: Jeanroy, Paul (REPS); Ali, Muzammil (REPS); Nothard, Paul (REPS); Kerley, Margot (REPS)
Subject: [REDACTED] Kerley



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

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, 13 June 2008 11:40 AM
To: Committee, JSCFADT (REPS)
[REDACTED] Submission D-Ste...

I would like to have this lodged as a submission to the enquiry. Due to my illness and disability it is difficult for me to make a more formal submission but these are my personal experiences of the process. I am happy to answer questions either by phone or at the hearings.

I feel a number of people in various other RAAF musterings were missed by the original enquiry and are suffering because of this oversight.

Yours Sincerely

[REDACTED]

Inquiry into RAAF F-111 Deseal-Reseal workers and their families.
Submission from Doug Steley A123778 RAAF Photographer 1974 to 1981

Doug Steley

[REDACTED]

I was not considered a Deseal Reseal worker as part of the original inquiry. I would like to detail my participation in the process as many other RAAF musterings had contact with the chemicals and to my knowledge this has not been effectively recorded.

I do not feel the Health Care Scheme effectively covers people like me because we were either not included or payouts were minimal because of the time spent actually working inside the F-111 fuel tanks.

As part of my duties as a base photographer I was required to photograph the deseal reseal process in the F-111 main and wing fuel tanks in the large 3AD hanger.

This would usually take place over a series of days with myself or another photographer being present to document the process. From my recollection photographer was usually assigned to cover the process over a period of time and would stay with the aircraft during the process to photograph any faults or problems as they occurred.

The usually clothing for the job was either blue issue overalls or stubby shorts and T-shirt in hot weather; shoes were removed before entering the tanks to prevent damage to the coating.

As the flash units we were supplied with (Metz 202 and later Metz 404 electronic flash units with lead acid 9 volt batteries) were not suppressed there was also a risk of a spark causing a fire or explosion in the tanks, at the time this was our main concern.

We would enter the tanks with one of the senior NCO's working on the project. He would point out the areas to be photographed and then exit the tanks. We would be left alone in the tanks to photograph the areas while other staff stood by with 50KG BCF fire extinguishers in case of fire.

The areas were cramped and difficult to work in and filled with fumes and on occasions wet sealant that had just been applied. My overalls and the overalls of others working in the tanks would reek of chemicals for days afterwards this made working in poorly ventilated darkrooms quite unpleasant at times as we would share cramped air-conditioned darkrooms for many days while processing and printing our photos.

It could take some time before we were sure we had covered all the areas required as our cameras and lenses were quite unsuited for working in that kind of area compared to modern equipment.

After leaving the tanks you would wait for the next step in the process before re entering and repeating your job again.

This could last over several weeks as all tanks were cleaned and resealed.

On one occasion I developed a rash and cough after working in the tanks for a series of days in a row (Probably over a 2 week period) I advised the flight sergeant in charge of the process and he informed my sergeant. Another photographer replaced me while the rash and cough cleared up. I asked if I should bother reporting to medical section and was told this was not necessary as it was just a reaction to the chemicals and I would be OK in a few weeks. Many other workers reported odd rashes or symptoms that medical section either did not seem to think were important at the time so there was little point in reporting on sick parade for a rash. We preferred to keep working if we could.

It was some months later after the rash had cleared that I was required to re enter the tanks.

If I recall correctly ventilation in the tanks was supplied by a yellow air hose running from a piston air compressor, I wondered about this at the time as I was a SCUBA diver and we went to great lengths to check the purity of our compressed air supply before filling our tanks. We would never have considered using air from an oil filled ordinary compressor for breathing purposes. I did mention this to the Flight Sergeant in charge and was told it was just fine for what they were doing; being an LAC at the time I did not wish to question a senior NCO over safety.

The RAAF at the time gave the impression of being very safety conscious with many posters and lectures warning us to keep our work environment safe and free from hazards.

I now find this quite ironic under the circumstances.

I do not recall specific dates for any of these photographic assignments only that they were repeated over my time at Amberley 1976 to 1979.

I now suffer from episodes of depression and anxiety that I believe may have been caused by exposure to the sealant SR51. I have had episodes during my RAAF service since leaving the RAAF in 1981. As I become older these episodes are becoming more frequent and severe. I also suffer from fatigue and occasional mild skin psoriasis.

Note:

I am quite badly dyslexic and I am currently suffering a severe depression anxiety episode that I am receiving treatment and medication for. Please contact me by phone if you require more information and I will attempt to supply it to the best of my ability. I would be happy to attend the hearings in Brisbane and give further information if required .