



Submission 74

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

Name: Ms Susan Coss



23 June 2008

Defence Sub-Committee Secretariat
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2602

Dear Sir/Madam

F-111 DESEAL/RESEAL INQUIRY

Please find enclosed my submission for the parliamentary inquiry into the above.

Yours sincerely

S. CoSS

SUSAN COSS

MY STORY

by

SUSAN COSS

We are a family of a RAAF member of the Deseal/Reseal Programme. Unfortunately on 12 November 2002, my husband Kevin passed away at the age of 48 of a massive heart attack.

The Air Force was Kevin's life and he would have done anything asked of him. He enjoyed working on the Iroquois Helicopters - serving his country by going to the Sinai as well as working on the F111's but, unfortunately, he seemed to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. He has paid the ultimate price for the life he chose.

We could not understand what was happening to Kevin over the years, until we were confronted with a story on TV in late 2001, explaining medical problems a number of Air Force Personnel were suffering from. Both parents rang us regarding this news story and we agreed that this was the answer to all the medical problems that he had been suffering for many years, as the programme listed all the same symptoms that he suffered. **They were being attributed to the chemicals they had used in the Deseal/Reseal Programme.**

Here is a list of the medical problems that Kevin developed during and after working in the RAAF:

Pernicious Anaemia; Blood Pressure Fluctuation; Haematological conditions; Congestive Heart Failure; Stomach Ulcers; Bowel Problems; Deteriorated Eye sight; Skin Rashes (Seborrhoeic Dermatitis); Anxiety and Depression with Panic Attacks; Post Traumatic Stress; Mood Swings; Short Term Memory Loss; Sleep Disorder; Fatigue; Impotence. Arthritis developed in both feet after a Motor Vehicle accident in 1977.

The mood swings worsened in 2001 and were more prominent in 2002. During Easter of 2002 my son and I had to leave for a many days at different times, as the mood swings became so bad. It was hard to leave as Kevin could not be left alone for any length of time. The things Kevin said were the most hurtful and he was bordering on becoming violent. At the time we knew that this was not the person we knew and loved, but that the chemical poisoning had affected his mind and was taking over. At this time we contacted Veterans' Affairs who arranged a series of Counselling session for the three of us which were starting to help.

The memory loss was slowly getting a hold in 2001, but had greatly worsened in 2002. Leaving written messages everywhere was the norm. He was finding it hard to even work the remote control for the TV. One time he left a pan on the stove, went to do something else and forgot the pan was on the stove, came to bed. When I got up and went to the kitchen the pan was white hot. This was really hard for someone to cope with who had been an aircraft engineer.

Kevin also suffered blood pressure and heart problems. His blood pressure would just drop considerably when he stood up, and at times he would collapse on the floor, at one time for 10 minutes. On one occasion he had 12 stitches in his chin where he blacked out going to the toilet; another time he had a broken nose from falling, from a sitting position, onto the floor face first. On another occasion he fell backwards through the front window of our two storey house, breaking the window, with his body half out the window and half in the house, luckily no cuts or broken bones this time. What made this more important is that my husband

was over 6ft tall and I am only just a little over 5ft.

Kevin had sleeping problems, he would be awake all night and sleep during the day. This had a negative effect on our home life.

As you can imagine, these incidents, and many, many more like it, took a toll on our family life. Unlike some people who lose weight when stressed, I am different, I put it on. This had an adverse effect on my health and I now suffer from high blood pressure. I would wake up every morning feeling physically sick at not knowing what the day would bring. Whether there would be fights or arguments, one did not know.

Stephen is our only child and I know that this has had a dramatic adverse effect on his life and schooling. Kevin's medical problems always seemed to worsen around school exam time and this, unfortunately, had a negative effect on Stephen's marks.

Kevin's health made it difficult for us to visit family and friends for fear of the mood swings. It was hard for everyone to understand what was going on, especially people outside the family. If we had arranged to go out anywhere, we were always late because Kevin was reluctant to go anywhere and be with people, no matter who they were. This was due to the depression and panic attacks he suffered. It got to the point where I would decline invitations so as not to embarrass Kevin or anyone else. We all knew that it was not under Kevin's control as the chemicals had changed a once happy-go-lucky NICE person into an uncontrollable shadow of the person he once was. Our life had changed dramatically.

We had to invest in a reverse-cycle air conditioner for the lounge, which helped Kevin keep cool and somehow ease the bowel problems he had. These problems did get worse during the hot summer months.

It was Kevin's belief, and I still believe, that his promotion prospects whilst in the RAAF were seriously affected by his medical problems - namely his bowel problems and definitely his depression and mood swings.

It has been difficult since Kevin's passing for Stephen and myself because we thought we would have had more time together as a family. The life we planned had gone and Stephen will not have his father around for many of the milestones he will achieve in his life. It was terrible to watch this once wonderful father become someone we hardly recognised.

When we married I did not expect at the age of 40+ I would become my husband's carer. We should have lived a full life together and grown old together.

I was not eligible to receive the ex-gratia payment, even though Kevin received some compensation after his death which was related to deseal/reseal, as I was not able to produce any documentation to say that Kevin had worked in deseal/reseal section. I am not alone in this, there are many other personnel who are in the same situation as I am.

Susan CoSS

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