



Submission 76

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

Name:

Name withheld

SUBMISSION BY [REDACTED] TO F-111 DESEAL/RESEAL INQUIRY.

My name is [REDACTED] and I am a member of the F111 Descal/Reseal Support group.

I served with the RAAF from April 1965 until April 1977. My trade was Airframe.

I went to America in April 1973 to do acceptance, pre delivery checks, training and to ferry the first six F111's back to Amberley, arriving on 1st June 1973. I worked on the F111's until my discharge in 1977.

Enquiry statements state the F111's developed fuel leaks soon after their introduction to service in 1973. I was a member of 482 squadron which maintained and rectified the F111 fleet including 'Pick and Patch' procedures so there was enough serviceable aircraft to meet flying schedules.

The conditions we worked in from 1973 to 1977 would not be allowed today. There was no PPE (personal protection equipment), no LEL meters to measure the explosive level or oxygen percentage inside the tanks, no system to purge the tanks of fumes, no training for tank entry and confined space and no back up system in place. You often worked in a tank by yourself with no one there for back up in case something went wrong. The common work clothing worn inside the tanks was a pair of shorts and T boots or the old blue service overalls.

Sometimes, to get an aircraft back on line in a hurry to meet flying requirements, we would only defuel a tank to just below the leak area, then enter the tank and work to remove reverted sealant, clean and prepare the area with solvents, prime and reapply sealant while crouching or kneeling in fuel. In tanks which were refueled we would mop up residual fuel by using rags and then wring them out into buckets.

No PPE was used when mixing or applying the sealant or preparing the areas to be resealed. It was not uncommon to lick your fingers to smooth out the sealant. There was no training for the hazards involved in using these products. The sealant was stored, some with the lids off, in the same fridge as our lunches were stored.

During the four years I worked on the F111's I made numerous tank entries. To be told that I did not meet the criteria to receive a tier level amazed me especially when personnel who never entered tanks or worked with the chemicals could attain a tier level.

I participated in the board of inquiry and gave a written, signed statement. The Board of Inquiry informed me I was Group 1 but DVA told me it was insignificant and had no bearing to my claims.

I have had surgery for malignant neoplasm of maxillary sinus which required removal of teeth on my top left hand jaw from my canine back, removal of some palate and jaw which was then reconstructed from bone, skin and blood vessel from my right hip area. I

had six weeks of radiation treatment. I lost 50% of my saliva glands. I also suffer from depression and have been suicidal. I am currently under treatment from a psychiatrist and a psychologist. I also suffer from specific phobia of confined spaces, tension headaches, mood swings and anger.

I am no longer able to read books and have trouble with concentration. My family life has suffered. My wife has had to endure my mood swings, cruel things I say, my depression, self doubt and sexual relationship problems. I have trouble getting to sleep. I also abuse alcohol. My social life suffers as a result of my depression and anger.

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