



# **Supplementary Submission 10a**

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

**Name: Mr Doug Steley**

**Supplementary submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the F-111  
Deseal Reseal workers and their families**

**By Doug Steley**

While listening and reading the submissions of others at the enquiry other matters were raised that I had not covered in my statement or subsequent oral submission. I wish to raise those points here.

(1) While I appreciate the time and effort being put in by this enquiry I would like all members to ask themselves one simple question "If this was a chemical spill found in Parliament house that affected the health and families of Parliamentarians and Senior Public Servants, Do you think it would have taken this long and been this difficult for those affected to gain help and compensation?"

As a member of the Australian Defence Force I had sworn an oath to offer my life in the defence of Australia if required. If asked any one of us would have served our country in active service anywhere anytime. We were well aware of those risks when we signed up and were willing to do our duty. What we were promised in exchange for this was if we were wounded or injured in this duty that we would be cared for. Much of my anger comes from the fact that we kept our side of the promise we did as we were told and kept the aircraft flying.

(2) The treatment of veterans By DVA as you have heard is lacking in many cases.

I have had no personal experiences but have listened to many horror stories by close relatives and friends of bad experiences and a very adversarial methods used by DVA to deny claims. As I have said before every man and woman who has served in our defence forces has sworn a solemn oath to offer their lives if necessary to defend our country and it people. I think the fact of this offer should be reflected in the way the department deals with veterans. Veterans should be believed unless there is sound evidence to the contrary.

At the moment it is the onus on veterans and their families to prove cases and the department has used its massive resources to hire legal teams to oppose many claims. Delaying them and having them forced through the court system. While this is a good way to minimise claims it is not a good way to assist veterans. Perhaps the bonuses and promotions of the senior public servants in DVA should be linked to the number of veterans they assist to make successful claims rather than how much money they save from their budgets?

(3) The effects of all this on families has been extreme, on the day I gave my submission my wife stayed at home in fear because she could not face seeing me going through what had happened, she could not face a room and an enquiry for fear it went badly for me. (you were kind and understanding but the fear was you would not be) 2 other witnesses also said their spouses could not face the enquiry with them as it was just too much stress.

I have been married for 27 years, I married just after leaving the RAAF so my wife [REDACTED] and my children have not had to suffer the physical effects of the chemicals but they have had to cope with my depression, anxiety mood swings and at times extreme lethargy and chronic fatigue. I know I have not been the father and husband I would have liked to be.

This is the slow insidious poison that we live with day by day and are still forced to live with.

(3) I support in principal the suggestions of Mr Mal Wheats from VVA compensation should be paid for the effects of the chemicals on those who worked with it. Compensation should be paid to their families for the damage and disruption caused to normal family life by the effects of these chemicals.

Justice and compensation should be both swift and fair.

Claims that have been rejected should be assessed by an eminent and independent legal team who are impartial and not paid connected, to or supported by DVA in any way.

(I would also suggest that a team be set up to review all rejected claims to DVA made in the last 10 years as I feel many of them desperately require an independent review)

(4) On many occasions I have heard of DVA employees questioning the honesty and truthfulness of those making claims, I find this practice totally repugnant. If someone is found to be rorting the system then they should face the full force of the law and all penalties for making a false claim should be imposed on them but if a veteran is making a claim then he or she should be believed unless sound legal proof exists otherwise. Also all those who dealt with the chemicals and suffered ill effects should be compensated fairly equally and quickly regardless of where they worked. We were all in the RAAF we should all be treated equally. While I have no proof I suspect that in the past groups have been set against each other during the process to try to minimise the payments made by DVA.

(5) A small matter, we were issued with 2 pair of overalls and were required to return an unwearable pair to obtain a new pair so at any time we would wear one pair for 2 days and one pair for 3 days before washing them on the weekend. To get a new set of overalls from the equipment store the old pair had to be falling apart from chemical burns or other damage before a US tag would be issued. Overalls were "Working Dress" and did not have to be in good condition like dress uniforms. We were issued 5 pair of socks and they would have to be totally rotted out before new ones were issued. On many occasions we bought new socks from disposal stores as it was impossible to get new ones from the equipment store.

(6) In my original submission I did not mention the work done at the 482sqn hangers including the "Rag Hanger" it was common for photographers including myself to go down to these areas and photograph in and around the aircraft being serviced. I had only thought of the 3AD areas in my original submission, as I did not know the same chemicals were being used in these areas. I can recall photographing inside aircraft on many many occasions we usually did not ask any questions other than "What areas do you want photographed and what do you need to show?" We would be told what and where but never really why we took the photos. As long as they showed the defects that was our job done. On thinking back I can recall a job including the rear tank of the aircraft and that it was small enough to photograph by lying on the outside of the aircraft and lowering the camera inside the tank to take a photo without getting in the tank itself by using a waist level viewfinder to look down into the tank.

(7) Please excuse my lack of skills with words I am not really sure how to express my feelings here. What I want to say is that I am proud of my service, including the that I worked in the tanks, If it was necessary to do the same again to help defend either Australia or innocent and helpless people anywhere I would do the same again without hesitation.

My grandfathers and great uncles fought at Gallipoli and the Western Front, my father and uncles fought in WW2, relatives fought in Malaya and Vietnam. My wife was an Army Nursing Officer for some years and my son served with SASR in Perth and overseas. I am extremely proud of my family's history of service to Australia.

If it became necessary for my old bones to pick up a rifle to defend these things again I would have no hesitation either.

I have no problem that the work was dangerous or uncomfortable we had signed up and were more than willing to do that kind of work. My problem lies in the denial of care after we were injured in our service. We were promised better than that and I would expect better treatment. We signed up to fight for Australia. We did not sign up to fight with the Australian Government for assistance. I think the fact that we have been forced to fight for compensation for injuries caused by our service to this countries defence is a very sad indictment of the whole system of care for veterans. I think a rich country like Australia can do better.

(8) In conclusion

I make note again I am a depressed, dyslexic who was expelled from school for not being able to read or write, so my skills with words are not as good as yours. I would again like to thank you for your time and efforts. You have given people hope of an outcome this time. I would like to make this one point again you the members of this enquiry are about the same age as us who worked in the fuel tanks.

Please keep with you the though:

“What if this happened in Parliament House in Canberra? What if it was my family or myself that had been affected? What would I want and expect from my Government for my service to Australia”

Yours sincerely

Doug Steley