



Submission No 34

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

Name: Mr Barry Willis

[REDACTED]

From: Barry Willis [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, 24 June 2008 1:32 PM
To: Committee, JSCFADT (REPS)
Subject: F111 Deseal/Reseal Enquiry/ Personal Submission

To Defence Sub Committee Secretariat
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2602

Terms of Reference:

Personal Submission Barry D Willis WOFF RTD RAAF/RAN

Dear Sir/Ms

My Name is Barry D Willis, I am a retired WOFF Engineering and wish to forward for consideration my personal submission into the Inadequate Legibility of the former Deseal/Reseal Board of Enquiry.

Firstly I would like to offer the board an insight into the non attendance of myself and numerous members affected with various medical conditions during my 13 years of working on F111 Aircraft. When the original enquiry was heard, numerous of members directly involved with F111 aircraft tank repairs were reluctant to appear at the enquiry for fear of subordinates seeking personal litigation against individual NCO for ordering maintenance to be carried out on fuel tank repairs, this applied most directly to the Maintenance Squadron area of 482Sqn, 1Sqn and 6 Sqn.

At no point in time was there ever any point in the terms of reference under the F111 Deseal/Reseal enquiry legal obligation to exclude unequivocally a litigation challenge from one member on another. This of course prevented numerous persons from the Squadron Area of Maintenance from appearing at the enquiry. Therefore consideration of the new board members should include to offer individual testimonies such as mine.

I would like to offer a copy of a statement requested by DVA that was forwarded to the Department of Veterans Affairs from myself during the time for compensation and ex gratia payment, I refer to the information required to be considered for Compensation and the EX Gratia payment.
Time of Service RAAF Base Amberley. Arrived December 1970
Posted to 1BOCU
Posted to 2 SQN
Posted to 482SQN January 1976-October 1979
Posted to 486SQN November 1979-March 1981
Posted to 482 Sqn 1981 to March 1985
Posted 1SQN June 1985-1988

During this time my duties were as follows.

Airframe Fitter servicing F111 Aircraft, Fuel Tank Entries and other Flight Line Maintenance.

*** Exposure to Chemicals**

Fuel Tank entries, which involved Defueling F111 aircraft fuel tanks, entering the leaking tanks for investigation and report, cleaning with solvents, repairs to sealant and tank barriers. Mixing of Sealant and handling of chemical cleansing agents in a confined space. The ventilation systems offered were a Hok Hanson which is a commercial air-condition unit. This was plugged into the aircraft tank and the tank was purged to a level of breathing acceptability, at no point in this operation were gas meters used to define the air quality.

Periods of Expose

* Periods in F111 fuel tanks could vary from a minimum time of 4 hours to 11 hours per shift, not excluding the overtime outside shift times, it was not unusual to spend 11Hrs per shift and 5-6 day weeks up to several

24/06/2008

weeks at any one time.

Effects to Health

During my F111 Fuel Tank duties Deseal/reseal the fuel leaks, noticeable effects included dull headaches, giddiness, skin irritation, breathing difficulties, loose bowel motions, continuous leaching of chemical odours from my body, sexual inactivity, mood swings, bowel and testicular swelling.

Inadequate safety clothing

* Entry to aircraft tanks were carried out does night and day with extreme temperatures of heat and cold. Common clothing include nothing but a pair of Stubby Shorts, Blue singlets, and T Boots, tanks were enter wet with Fuel and dried out with white rags before commencing any repairs. At other times when the leak was in the upper sections of the tanks the lower flour of the tanks could contain up to 25mm of Aircraft Fuel.

Employment on F111

* Whilst employed by the Royal Australia Airforce, my first introduction to having a career on F111 aircraft was my initial exposure to chemicals and sealants. Our area provided for the crew smoko room was housed in the non ventilated sealant facilities. A communal lunch refrigerator that contained our lunches of the day had also been the storage facility to opened cans of sealants, and chemicals. The use of the refrigerator was to house opened cans of sealant for reuse at a later period, this would extend the user life of the opened can. The area was poorly ventilated and no extraction fans were provided.

Entry into fuel tanks conceded to poor standards of ventilation for me and others, when using sealants and cleaning agents, typically in earlier periods of the maintenance white communal overalls were used that were handed down from shift to shift for tank entries. these in most cases had been denied a dry cleaning or sanitised process.

Spending up to 11 hours in any given one shift in these confined spaces caused considerable personal discomfort with body cramping, inhalation of the cocktail of fuel, sealant and chemical fumes, absorption through the skin and eyes, let to sweating of the skin and the excretion of a yellow fluid. During the end of my shift I would shower before bedtime but even after the yellow fluid excreting from my body stained the bed clothes. Breathing during sleep was noticed by my wife to have bad odours coming from my sleep including comments to the effect that have you had a shower.

Work clothes even after washing still hosed the smell of the chemical cocktails used in the tanks, this also caused predisposed continuation of skin irritation, continual use of eye drops was used to overcome the irritation problems.

My career was changed forever, I learnt to adapt to this way of life, as the committee may well not know to be successful and be opportunist for promotion through the ranks, these promotions were firstly decided and reported on twice yearly, if you didn't conform to the practices required to generate Aircraft Serviceability, such as I, two of senior NCOs pulled me aside and asked me what the problem was with my attitude, the answer was I do not like fuel tank repairs.

Statement then was from the Senior NCO's how far do want your career to extend, after that I conformed,

TERMS OF REFERENCE

* DVA did not accept any person for compensation, that was not a resisted Deseal/ Reseal maintenance worker as per the Terms of Reference they instigated during the first enquiry It should also be noted that that Statutory Declarations by myself and others witnessed by an independent signatory of the crown were not considered admissible for the EX Gratia payment. The answer from the department was they do not recognize Statutory Declarations.

I request that the terms of reference of these such documents should be consider as legal evidence in assessing members who provide them.

* Substantiation of claims due to lost documentation, to clarify a number of the time frames and tank entries carried out by Squadron members is not on the onus of the member, I RAAF are totally responsible for collating these, it is not the responsibility of the Department of Veterans Affairs, there fore how is it possible for DVA to set the terms of reference for EX gratis payment with Tier Levels. Tier levels were not even discussed during the perlimery meetings with then the Chief of Air Staff Angus Houston. This occurred when the government decided to promote the Chief of Air stall to a Parliamentary position to excavate him from looking after his men and women, for which he gave an unequivocal assurance that he would personally ensure we would be taken care of, this was not to be.

I request that the terms of reference be extended to include the Statements of Chief of Defence Angus Houston to clarify his and our promises for a fair outcome for all EX service members not included in the past Compensation and EX Gratis claims.

*Overall handling of the EX gratia payments, these were substantiated with use pre determined Tier 1.2.and 3 levels, and the administration and the compensation claims were sorted and carried out by two EX retired service members under the strict instruction by DVA if the claimant does not have a document in his or her position with an authentic entry stamped Deseal/ Reseal were to be denied.

The fairness of this was totally lopsided, persons who received payment on the EX gratia side who had a authentic entry in their service records received payment even though these people never ever carried out Deseal/Reseal activities in side a fuel tank, where is the fairness in the DVA Terms of Reference Eligibility?

I request that the committee consider persons from the Squadron level are able to offer further input to prove the authenticity of persons denied this process.

I trust this is acceptable and offer my services to the committee as a independent witness to ensure the full accounts of Squadron Fuel Tank Deseal/Reseal activities.

Yours Sincerely

Barry D Willis A119996 WOFF RTD RAAF/RAN

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24/06/2008