



Submission No 71

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

Name: Mr Antony Ramsden

ANTONY J RAMSDEN

I ANTONY JOHN RAMSDEN (A59266 FSgt. MBB RETIRED), Knowing what I know now would have refused to work on the RAG HANGAR.

The working environment we had to endure was horrendous to say the least. We had no proper safety equipment and endured the unpleasant smell and discrimination because of the contamination of our bodies and clothes from working on the RAG HANGAR. (SR51). We were discouraged from using the Mess(s) because of the aforementioned odour.

Part of my duties as NCO/IC of TRADE was to supervise the maintenance of the RAG HANGAR and the personnel maintaining it, as well as take a hands on position during those maintenance periods. 3AD BODY SHOP was tasked to assist the CPL MTRIM in continuous maintenance. This was not only the re-cladding, but continuous ongoing maintenance as well.

I spent 9-5 years at AMBERLEY from JULY 1978 to FEBRUARY 1988, and during this time I worked on the RAG HANGAR numerous times. On many occasions we would eat our smoko or lunch sitting on the drums that were stored beside the RAG HANGAR not knowing what SR51 was. (I most certainly do now).

We had to replace the canvas because the chemicals made the canvas rot and that's why it had to be replaced so many times. The roof panels of the hangar would fill up with water when it rained and this meant we were waist deep in contaminated water while we bailed each panel.

The aluminium frame work was always covered with a white powdery substance which would make the skin dry, especially the hands? We then had to replace parts of the alloy frame work which were damaged or corroded. Then the white powder had to be hosed off by fire section before the new cladding was fitted.

Removal of the contaminated canvas panels from the hangar was done by cutting them with Stanley knives, they were then pulled away from the rooftop by means of a truck or tow motor and dragged to the nearby pits where fire section would burn them along with some of the SR51 and liquid fuels.

On more than one occasion, during the burn off, we would still be up in the roof cutting away the next panels even though the smoke and fumes would be blowing through our work area. Therefore we were inhaling all the contaminated air. At times unable to see enough to get down out of the framework.

Work clothes were brought home to be laundered with the normal family wash which subsequently caused cross contamination of family clothing.

Perspiration leaves an offensive odour to this day and stains the bed linen to such an extent that I even laundering every other day does not prevent the stain or the rotting. Therefore linen has to be replaced frequently.

During this time I started getting aches in my joints which were contributed to arthritis, however blood tests, scans and x-rays failed to confirm the condition for which I was being treated, but

in latter years has been proven. Also during this period I developed a persistent cough which still remains with me today.
Doctors cannot find a cause.

Although a health study has not been undertaken on wives and dependants, there appears to have been a larger percentage than the national average of wives who have contracted Breast Cancer, including my wife.

On the last cladding of the RAG HANGAR conditions changed demountable cabins were set up complete with showers and washing machines. We were instructed to shower and replace our disposable overalls before eating. The used overalls were then destroyed. Before returning to our normal work area we had to shower and change into standard working dress. Why was this change invoked only at the last re-cladding?

I have attended all the doctors and specialists appointments that VET AFFAIRS have sent me to and received some of the reports. However, because I do not have any proof of actually working on the RAG HANGAR over my 9-5 years at Amberley, apart from Stat. Decs from my fellow workers, I don't meet the requirements for the Ex- Gratia Payment. If I had the documents required to prove my presence (i.e. time sheets, job sheets, work requisitions) I would more than likely have been in jail for stealing.

Post Air Force my medical problems increased until it became impossible to hold even part time employment. (Cancer, constant headaches, breathing problems, sore joints, sleeping difficulties, major depression, memory loss, skin rash etc.)

I cant put a dollar value on the quality of life we have lost. Surviving day by day is enough of a challenge, however some compensation would ease our burden of day to day living and would be an acknowledgement of hazardous services rendered.

From the earliest meetings that we all attended the (CHIEF OF AIR STAFF) told us all that there would be no discrimination as to whether you worked inside the tanks or not and that we all have contamination and would all be well looked after.

I believe this was a ploy to get the chief promoted, because he dumped us like a hot potato once he got there.

I AM A MEMBER OF F111 DESEAL /RESEAL SUPPORT GROUP

ANTONY JOHN RAMSDEN