



Submission No 25

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

Name: Mr Clive Cust

Dear Sir,

I was involved in the F111 deseal/reseal program in 1975 and early 1976. The first F111 to undergo a major service at No.3AD Amberley was A8-127 which was in the hangar for over 15 months (Late 1975 to early 1976). I was involved with much of the fuselage tank repairs on this aircraft due to my relatively small build. The OH&S requirements were minimal with breathing masks and hoses unable to be used in the confined space within the tanks unless plumbing and tank supports were removed. This did not occur due to the complexity of the aircraft's design and the relative inexperience of senior management in this type of major servicing. I followed the outcomes of the Board of Inquiry and attended most of the meetings chaired by the then Chief of the Air Force Air Marshall Angus Houston and later applied for counselling and medical treatment available under the F111 Deseal/Reseal Health Care Scheme for RAAF Amberley maintenance workers. I was sent a letter confirming my involvement in the deseal/reseal program.

I was diagnosed in 2003 with several disabilities through the Department of Veteran Affairs (Veteran's Entitlement Act) including psychological disorders attributed to my involvement in the fuel tanks and have been issued with a gold card and Special Rate Pension (TPI). I applied for the ex-gratia payment of the \$40,000 for workers that were exposed to chemicals and solvents while repairing the fuel tanks of the aircraft. I received a phone call from a staff member who was administering the compensation requesting proof that I was in the fuel tanks for 30 consecutive days. My memory was unable to recall the precise events of what occurred over 30 years ago but I do recall that I was involved with fuel tank repairs for a long period during the servicing of A8-127.

I could not provide the proof required for the 30 consecutive days so I then assumed that I would be entitled to the lesser amount of \$10,000. This was not the case as I was informed by a Warrant Officer who was on the compensation panel that the "goal posts were moved so that only those in the rag hanger would be eligible". Many of us were affected the same as those that worked in the rag hanger, the same foul smell, stained bed sheets, trouble with breathing and digesting and the mental trauma of being stuck in a confined contaminated space with the same toxic chemicals and residual aircraft fuel.

I was given a 1800 to ring with the letter that was sent to state that I did not fit Tier 1,2 or 3. A young airwoman answered and stated the decision is final and no redress would be entered into and that came from the DVA Minister at the time. There has been a lot said in forums and the press regarding the amount of compensation offered and a lot needs to be done about the unfairness and inequity of the decisions of whom were affected more than others and who should be paid and who should be knocked back. A few friends that were on the program after me were granted the compensation based a nominal roll found by a member of the compensation board who was able to state who was in the hanger at the time, not necessarily in the aircraft fuel tanks. All these workers received the \$40,000 payment without having to provide further proof.

I was told back then to contact the Commonwealth Ombudsman to state my case, but like most of us suffering ill health, it all got too hard and was dragging us down, affecting our wives and children and general well being. It became a fight for one's own survival to avoid the onset of a heart attack or stroke or major depression/post traumatic stress. It was not a matter of **if** this could happen but **when**.

I can be contacted on email [REDACTED] to discuss any matters relating to the above as I have kept all the files since the initial findings by the BOI.

Yours faithfully

Clive Cust

[REDACTED]
Warrant Officer Engineer (retired)

[REDACTED]