

Djinnang Health Survey of ex Technicians and Operators.

– Russ Walker



The Djinnang Association (ex 3TU staff and associates) has been conducting a health survey of ex technicians and operators for nearly two years now. There has been a concern among members that, particularly those who did not serve overseas have been ignored by DVA in relation to numerous health issues.

At the 2007 Djinnang Association meeting in Brisbane we had a straw poll of members who had claims rejected by DVA. A majority responded. We then did a show of hands survey which indicated that the prominent issues were skin problems, eye problems and a range of skin cancers (BCC, SCC and Melanomas). However the major concern expressed was the significant number of our contemporaries who had died of cancer or cancer related illness. The whole spectrum of illness is covered in the responses to the survey but some are one-offs. Establishing the significance of each illness or type of illness is beyond my limited resources and skills.



It is probable that there is an underlying problem that caused the most common illnesses.

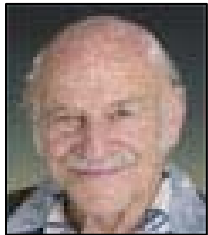
After the 2008 meeting I wrote and distributed (through Ernie Gimm) a paper that outlined a more [detailed survey/questionnaire](#) which would include predominantly people who had worked in commcens as operators or technicians. Scope was available for technicians who worked in Depots, workshops, TX, RX or Radar sites to also respond as well as people from Navy and Army. The intent of the survey was to identify the range and types of illnesses experienced and to see if there was any clustering of particular illnesses or symptoms. Interestingly, we have received three responses from Navy staff (TelsTech equivalents) that were exposed to [TurcoSolv](#) and exhibit similar illnesses and symptoms to the RAAF personnel.

Perhaps, by good fortune, the survey has covered both a period and people with whom I was either familiar or closely acquainted. To me that makes the survey all the more realistic and somewhat personal. To date the database contains 50 cases many with multiple illnesses. The most chilling statistic is that 29 persons recorded a cancer related illness that had required medical treatment and in many cases on-going treatment. The other sad statistic is that of the 50, there are 22 deceased - the majority from some form of cancer or another. With the exception of a couple of the operators, I knew each person personally. For a number of them I had worked in the same or similar environments at the same time periods. In some ways this tends to validate the scope of the sample i.e. a group of people who worked together in a particular environment, at a particular time, and were exposed to the same working conditions. Unfortunately a number of that particular population is now deceased.

The road to truth is long and lined the entire way with annoying bastards.

In my claim to DVA I provided evidence that the solvent cleaner TurcoSolv in the formulation used from 1960 to possibly 1980 was a known and gazetted carcinogenic. I also argued that apart from the direct contact the fumes from the solvent was circulated throughout commcens via single air-conditioning system in use at the time and these fumes were supplemented by PCB

(see note below) fumes from KW26 power supplies (right) and cigarette smoke. I had this theory tested by Dr John Pollak (below) a toxicologist at the Sydney University and he supported the claim. He has written many papers and a book on toxicology and was also involved in studies on Agent Orange and its effects on Australian servicemen. However, DVA would not recognise him as he was a PhD not a medical doctor. They sent me to a Brisbane doctor who did not mention Dr Pollak's findings in his report and predictably



did not agree with a single issue that I had claimed. In disgust I withdrew from the process. The stress of fighting with DVA was making me quite ill.

Since the advent of the F111 de-seal/re-seal claims; Air Force has set up an ex serving members office at Amberley to examine health effects on past serving members. I will be presenting the findings at the Djinnang Association meeting on 30 May 2009 here in Brisbane. Our intention is to try and get some recognition that these statistics show a high incidence of cancer related deaths and a high incidence of skin and eye disorders amongst ex serving members. We will also be seeking to have a more detailed study made of our findings, perhaps by a university. Our long term objective is to have DVA soften its very hard line approach to providing services to people who have in fact been injured because of past unsafe work practices. It seems that the [Statement of Principles](#) used by DVA does not recognise TurcoSolv as a carcinogenic. To be able to change this alone would be a major victory.

The [Australian Cancer Council](#) web site states that there are typically 37,500 deaths from all types of cancer in Australia per year. We have a population of about 21,732,000. That makes the typical death rate due to cancer about 0.2% of the population. Our survey shows cancer deaths in our sample population at close to 30% overall. Even if the sample population and timing is in some way skewed the fact that there were actual people at a particular time and place is hard to refute. However, it still flags that there is an underlying problem that needs to be addressed.

We intend to approach the RAAF ex serving members office at Amberley initially but any other ideas or approaches would be most welcome.

Notes: PCBs [Polychlorinated Biphenyls](#) which were used as an additive to oil filled transformers from the early 1940 to as late as 1980 when it was prohibited because it was identified as a carcinogenic substance. The substance is toxic and as a double

whammy techs used TurcoSolv to wash PCBs off their hands because it was so difficult to remove.

My personal experience was that soap and water was ineffective. Dr Pollak warns in his studies that it is the mix of numerous in-use cleaning solvents that harms the human immune system.

Carbon Tetrachloride (CTC), TurcoSolv and PCBs added to soldering flux removal solvents and Isopropyl alcohol also used for cleaning were used commonly throughout the RAAF from the 1960s to the 1980s and possibly later.

The other key consideration is the effects of unintended exposure to side stream cigarette smoke. As you would know smoking was permitted in all commcens and sometimes it looked a bit like making your way through smog as a high percentage of operators were smokers.

CTC was the main component of the Freon spray cans used to clean electronic components in the RAAF. Unfortunately there were no warnings of their toxicity or potential for long term deleterious health affects.

A man who just died is delivered to a local mortuary wearing an expensive, expertly tailored black suit. The female blonde mortician asks the deceased's wife how she would like the body dressed. She points out that the man does look good in the black suit he is already wearing.

The widow, however, says that she always thought her husband looked his best in blue, and that she wants him in a blue suit. She gives the blonde mortician a blank cheque and says, 'I don't care what it costs, but please have my husband in a blue suit for the viewing.'

The woman returns the next day for the wake. To her delight, she finds her husband dressed in a gorgeous blue suit with a subtle chalk stripe; the suit fits him perfectly. She says to the mortician, 'Whatever this cost, I'm very satisfied. You did an excellent job and I'm very grateful. How much did you spend?' To her astonishment, the blonde mortician presents her with the blank cheque. 'There's no charge,' she says. 'No, really, I must compensate you for the cost of that exquisite blue suit!' she says.

'Honestly, ma'am,' the blonde says, 'it cost nothing. You see, a deceased gentleman of about your husband's size was brought in shortly after you left yesterday, and he was wearing an attractive blue suit. I asked his wife if she minded him going to his grave wearing a black suit instead, and she said it made no difference as long as he looked nice.'

'So I just switched the heads.'

Russell presented a report to the 2009 Djinnang annual meeting/reunion, and you can read a copy [HERE](#). If you have a health problem that you feel results from your time in the service, and you are having a job getting any help or support from DVA, you should complete the questionnaire and return it to Russell. The RAAF have set up a special cell at Amberley which

could make things a lot easier for you and Russell is about to make representation to them. If you want your situation argued for you, you should complete the survey/questionnaire and return it to Russell ASAP. You can access the questionnaire [HERE](#).

Your health is your most important asset – don't mess with it.....

Common Sense.

Today we mourn the passing of a beloved old friend, Common Sense, who has been with us for many years. No one knows for sure how old he was, since his birth records were long ago lost in bureaucratic red tape. He will be remembered as having cultivated such valuable lessons as: Knowing when to come in out of the rain; Why the early bird gets the worm; Life isn't always fair; and maybe it was my fault.

Common Sense lived by simple, sound financial policies (don't spend more than you can earn) and reliable strategies (adults, not children, are in charge).

His health began to deteriorate rapidly when well-intentioned but overbearing regulations were set in place. Reports of a 6-year-old boy charged with sexual harassment for kissing a classmate; teens suspended from school for using mouthwash after lunch; and a teacher fired for reprimanding an unruly student, only worsened his condition.

Common Sense lost ground when parents attacked teachers for doing the job that they themselves had failed to do in disciplining their unruly children.

It declined even further when schools were required to get parental consent to administer sun lotion or an Aspirin to a student; but could not inform parents when a student became pregnant and wanted to have an abortion.



Common Sense lost the will to live as the churches became businesses; and criminals received better treatment than their victims.

Common Sense took a beating when you couldn't defend yourself from a burglar in your own home and the burglar could sue you for assault.

Common Sense finally gave up the will to live, after a woman failed to realize that a steaming cup of coffee was hot. She spilled a little in her lap, and was promptly awarded a huge settlement.

Common Sense was preceded in death, by his parents, Truth and Trust, by his wife, Discretion, by his daughter, Responsibility, and by his son, Reason.

He is survived by his 4 stepbrothers;

- I Know My Rights.
- I Want It Now.
- Someone Else Is To Blame.
- I'm A Victim.

Not many attended his funeral because so few realized he was gone.

WRAAF Telsop Course, 1966.



Rear L-R:- Lynn Perring, Ruth Heeding, Mal Tait, Terry Cable, Ann Gledhill, June Ford
Front L-R:- Sandra Guy, Lillian Weber, Gerry Dradge, Pauline Davis, Leonie Kelly, Andy Rutherford

Does anyone know where any of these girls are today.



Allan George reckons that Father's Day is just around the corner and he wants one of these. He reckons this is a BBQ that is guaranteed to get everyone's attention.....he thinks it should be towed with the barrel facing backwards....you wouldn't have to worry about anyone tailgating you....

There's just enough religion in the world to make mankind hate one another,
but not enough to make mankind love one another.