

ACT VETERANS ADVICE & ADVOCACY SERVICE

“Veterans Helping Veterans”

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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN.

Reference: DVA Decision by Elizabeth Pawlak dated 14 November 2005

The following deposition is forwarded in support of a disability claim for Prostate Cancer by Mr Barry Edwards, NSM06008 which may be dependent on a link to contaminated water on ships operating in and around Vietnam.

STATEMENT BY COMMANDER P.J BURN OAM RAN Retd.

Service background. Joined the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) on 8th February 1948 as a Stoker, progressed through the ranks until retiring on 30th March 1982 as an Engineer Commander from a last sea posting as Squadron Engineer of the 4th Destroyer Squadron.

During the above career I served in HMAS Sydney on a number of occasions and in various postings. On my last series of postings the “Sydney” undertook a number of trips to Vung Tau supporting our forces there. On one of these trips I was personally responsible, among other responsibilities, for the distillation system and in my final posting as Senior Engineer was responsible for all machinery and associated systems throughout the ship.

The above details should be sufficient to ensure that the following statement is accepted as that of an expert in the field of Marine Engineering with a wealth of experience and knowledge of the various distillation methods throughout the RAN. Particularly those as fitted in the Daring Class destroyers, Destroyer Escorts and the Carrier/Troop-ship HMAS Sydney. As far back as November 1950 I was awarded the “Auxiliary Machinery Watchkeeping Certificate” , a section of which was the operation and maintenance of the Distilling plant.

STATEMENT WITH REGARDS TO DISTILLATION OF WATER ONBOARD HMA SHIPS THAT SERVED IN VIETNAMESE WATERS WITH RELATION TO THE FOLLOWING FACTOR WITHIN STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLE 28 OF 2005 RELATING TO MALIGNANT NEOPLASM OF THE PROSTATE.

- 5 (b) being:
- (i) on land in Vietnam; or
 - (ii) at sea in Vietnamese waters; or
 - (iii) ***onboard a vessel and consuming potable water supplied on that vessel, when the water supply has been produced by evaporative distillation of estuarine Vietnamese waters;***

for a cumulative period of at least 30 days, at least five years before the clinical onset of malignant neoplasm of the prostate; or

I have been involved with the problems relating to the contamination of water as distilled while in Vietnamese waters even prior to the raising of the issue at the forum in 2001. As a result of my study of the problem I believe that the statement in the reference requiring 30 days in Vietnamese waters is refuted by statements in the report put out by The National Research Centre for Environmental Toxicology (ENTOX) (NRCET) in December 2002. My interpretation of the factor is that the claimant had to spend “30 days onboard a ship where the water had been produced by evaporative distillation of estuarine Vietnamese waters.

The report highlighted the build up of contamination of made water by the manner of distillation. It further stated that it would be a number of days after leaving the area before the continued distillation of water would have diluted the water in the ships to either a negative state of contamination or at least lower it to a safe level of contamination. See statement below.

Page 35 of the NRCET Report. *“the drinking water that was produced during the periods in contaminated waters lasted for a significant portion of the return trip.* If we assume that a 14 days reserve was produced during such a trip, the total body burden of dioxin through direct consumption of water that originated from distilling in Vietnamese waters are estimated to be between 10 ng and 190 ng per journey. For a 70 kg person the body burden would be in the range of 12 – 200 pg/kg bw per day for a 14 day period in addition to the background exposure through TCDD and other dioxin-like chemicals in the food and the environment.

Of the 100% of the estuarine water taken into the evaporative process only approximately 15 to 20% of this was carried over and condensed into potable water. During laboratory experiments this distilled water was shown to have accumulated between 60 and 80% of the dioxins from the raw water, and the longer the distillation process was carried out the more highly contaminated the made water in the tanks became.

In HMAS Sydney, due to the requirement to maintain sufficient potable water for all purposes of the crew, and the additional troops carried one distillation plant was continually on-line for the purposes of making potable water. Due to the need to maintain ships stability the output would be led to the various ships tanks throughout the ship. As the contamination was not known at this time it was not thought necessary to inhibit distillation while in estuarine waters. The same principle would have been carried out on all escorts and the ships which served on the gun-line.

To date the SOP's for Hodgkins Lymphoma, non Hodgkins Lymphoma and Malignant Neoplasm of the Prostate have been amended to include the contaminated water factor and Malignant Neoplasm of the Lungs, Larynx and Soft Tissue Sarcoma are under review.

In conclusion, in my opinion, it is apparent that if taking into account the contaminated water in the ships tanks when leaving the area this should be taken into the calculation of the required 30 days as determined by DVA and Mr Edwards disability should be accepted as service related..

Yours Sincerely

P J BURN

Commander P J Burn OAM RAN Rtd
Advocate Veterans Advice & Advocacy Service (ACT)