



Soldiers exposed to dangerous chemicals



CHEMICAL WARFARE ARMOURERS: RAAF "sniper" crew (above, back from left) Flight Lieutenant Trompf, Tom Faram, Ian Bond, (front) Neil Brown (uncertain), Frank Burkin and Jack Ennor at Talmoi, 40km west of Richmond in Queensland in January 1946. **RIGHT:** Frank Burkin at his Brassall home in Ipswich. Mr Burkin's story is featured in a new book *Chemical Warfare in Australia*.

Photo left: Supplied



Frank fights on for duty justice

FRANK Burkin wants justice and recognition like any other serviceman.

Mr Burkin was one of 123 young men who joined to fight the enemy during World War II, but instead was forced into a secret Chemical Warfare Unit.

Now after 66 years of working with liquid mustard gas and phosgene, better known as the choking gas, Mr Burkin is one of the lucky ones. He suffers only from emphysema and has had a gold card for four years.

"I'm happy that it's come out at last, but I'm disappointed the Government has done nothing and bitterly disappointed that these men haven't been given a gold card. They are just as worthy of a gold card as the guys that went overseas due to the nature of the beast," Mr Burkin said.

The beast – chemical warfare – was investigated when Japan



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entered the war and swept towards Australia with chemical weapons already used in China.

Mr Burkin and his colleagues handled about 700,000 barrels of liquid mustard gas in a disused railway tunnel in Glenbrook, New South Wales, one of many Australian storage sites.

Dressed in a plastic suit and respirator, Mr Burkin vented mustard gas drums for eight hours a day. Later he went to North Queensland where he made and tested liquid mustard gas bombs.

"They wanted to find out how mustard gas in a liquid form would operate in the jungle (Papua New Guinea)," he said.

"It was no use because it

wouldn't dissipate in the jungle as there was no breeze. As a consequence it fouled the ground and it would have been horrific if our troops would have ever been involved with it.

"That's the one saving grace of it all – it (testing) saved our troops."

However, the 123 men in the Chemical Warfare Unit suffered mustard burns and itchy spots that swelled into blisters, and its long-term effects included cancer and emphysema. Only 19 of the 123 men are alive today.

Department of Veterans' Affairs acting secretary Ed Killesteyn yesterday said: "If a veteran has contracted a medical condition due to exposure to mustard gas during their war service, they are eligible to claim for compensation. The Department has sought to publicise this on many occasions."