

Letters

your views behind the news

Truth coming out

At last some of the truth is coming out about mustard gas in the war (TV Turn for Glenbrook, BMG 26.11.08).

My husband Francis Bourke was in Ground Force RAAF stationed at Richmond, NSW 1942-43. He was to go overseas when the wharfies went on strike and would not unload the ships that came into Sydney loaded with mustard gas.

The boys from Richmond were offered leave before they went overseas, so were told they just had to unload the ships to get the leave.

There were about 12 of them took up the offer. They were all around 18, he was amongst them.

They were sent down the hold with just overalls and a small gas mask. They were very badly burnt and it was in the Daily Mirror on the day some of the boys died.

My husband was put into Concord hospital and was given last rites. He did recover, the government hushed it up and scattered the boys all over the place and they were forbidden to talk about it.

My husband was sent to Darwin. He always had a bad rash and suffered all his life with it.

When he would do heavy work when the war ended he would get pains in his chest. He used to go to the doctors at Repat and they would say he had allergies or he was just upset and nerves did it, they said. No such thing as mustard gas in Australia! He is dead now.

When he was in Concord the medical team did take a film of his burns at the time.

Pauline Bourke, Springwood.