

UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE FEDERAL CIRCUIT

Williams v. Shinseki

358 F. App'x 160 (Fed. Cir. 2009) · Decided December 17, 2009

SUMMARY

The United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit dismissed Fred R. Williams’s appeal from a decision of the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims concerning service connection for a right-hip disorder. The court held that it lacked jurisdiction to review the Veterans Court’s determination regarding the Department of Veterans Affairs’ notice requirements under 38 U.S.C. § 5103(a), and it declined to consider arguments not raised below.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Per curiam; Linn; Michel; Schall
JURISDICTION	Federal
DECIDED	December 17, 2009
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Williams appealed from a decision of the United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims affirming the Board of Veterans' Appeals' denial of service connection for a right-hip disorder. The Secretary moved to dismiss the Federal Circuit appeal for lack of jurisdiction.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The Federal Circuit's review of decisions of the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims is limited by 38 U.S.C. § 7292. It may review rules of law, the validity or interpretation of statutes and regulations, and constitutional issues, but generally may not review factual determinations or the application of law to fact.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Nonprecedential Federal Circuit decision reported in the Federal Appendix
PARTIES	Fred R. Williams v. Eric K. Shinseki, Secretary of Veterans Affairs

TOPICS

- appellate jurisdiction
- appellate procedure
- veterans benefits
- judicial review of agency action
- military discharge

PRACTICE AREAS

Veterans benefits

Administrative law

Federal appellate jurisdiction

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the Federal Circuit had jurisdiction to review the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims' determination that the Secretary satisfied the duty-to-notify requirements of 38 U.S.C. § 5103(a).
2. Whether Williams's arguments concerning the merits of his disability claim and his dishonorable discharge were properly before the Federal Circuit when they had not been raised below.

HOLDINGS

1. The Federal Circuit lacked jurisdiction to review the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims' determination concerning 38 U.S.C. § 5103(a) because the challenge presented only factual issues or the application of law to fact.
2. Arguments not raised before the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims were not properly before the Federal Circuit on appeal.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“The court’s jurisdiction to review decisions of the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims is limited.” (161)

“We are also without jurisdiction to review the court’s § 5103(a) determination, which raises solely issues of fact or application of law to fact and are therefore outside this court’s review authority.” (161)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Williams served honorably in the U.S. Army from August 1963 to May 1966, reenlisted in August 1966, and was discharged under dishonorable conditions in July 1967. In 2002, he sought VA disability benefits for a right-hip disorder allegedly related to an in-service injury. The VA denied the claim, and the Board and Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims upheld that denial.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Williams applied for VA disability benefits based on a claimed right-hip disorder. A VA regional office denied the claim, and the Board of Veterans' Appeals sustained that decision. The Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims affirmed, rejecting Williams's argument that the Secretary failed to satisfy the duty-to-notify requirements of 38 U.S.C. § 5103(a). Williams then appealed to the Federal Circuit, which dismissed the appeal for lack of jurisdiction.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- Forshey v. Principi, 284 F.3d 1335, 1338 (Fed. Cir. 2002) (en banc)
- Mayfield v. Nicholson, 444 F.3d 1328, 1335 (Fed. Cir. 2006)

OPINION

PER CURIAM.

ON MOTION PER CURIAM. ORDER The Secretary of Veterans Affairs moves to waive the requirements of Fed. Cir. R. 27(f) and dismiss for lack of jurisdiction Fred R. Williams's appeal from a decision of the United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims affirming the Board of Veterans' Appeals (Board) decision that denied Williams entitlement to service connection for a right-hip disorder.

Williams served honorably in the U.S. Army from August 1963 to May 1966. He reenlisted in August 1966 and was discharged under dishonorable conditions in July 1967. In October 2002, Williams filed an application for disability benefits, claiming that he currently suffered from a right hip disorder stemming from an injury while he was in service. A Department of Veterans Affairs regional office (RO) issued Williams a letter notifying him of what evidence or information he needed to submit in order to substantiate his claim.

In April 2004, the RO denied Williams's claim for entitlement to service connection for his right-hip disorder. The Board sustained the RO's determination and Williams appealed to the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims. Williams's sole argument on appeal was that the Secretary failed to satisfy his duty-to-notify requirements pursuant to 38 U.S.C. § 5103(a).

The Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims rejected that argument and affirmed. Williams filed an appeal seeking this court's review. The court's jurisdiction to review decisions of the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims is limited. See *Forshey v. Principi*, 284 F.3d 1335, 1338 (Fed.Cir.2002) (en banc).

Under 38 U.S.C. § 7292(a), this court has jurisdiction over rules of law or the validity of any statute or regulation, or an interpretation thereof relied on by the court in its decision. This court may also entertain challenges to the validity of a statute or regulation, and to interpret constitutional and statutory provisions as needed for resolution of the matter.

38 U.S.C. § 7292(c). In contrast, except where an appeal presents a constitutional question, this court lacks jurisdiction over challenges to factual determinations or laws or regulations as applied to the particular case. 38 U.S.C. § 7292(d)(2). Williams's informal brief raises arguments concerning the merits of his disability claim and his dishonorable discharge.

Those arguments were not raised below and are not properly before this court on appeal. We are also without jurisdiction to review the court's § 5103(a) determination, which raises solely issues

of fact or application of law to fact and are therefore outside this court's review authority. Mayfield v. Nicholson, 444 F.3d 1328, 1335 (Fed.Cir.2006).

Because we agree with the Secretary that this court lacks jurisdiction, we must dismiss Williams's appeal. Accordingly, IT IS ORDERED THAT: (1) The Secretary's motions are granted. (2) Each side shall bear its own costs.