

BRB No. 13-0345

ABDUL RAZZAQ YASEEN)
SADIA ADDAY MHANNA)
(parents of SAJJAD ABDULIRAZAQ)
YASEEN, Deceased))
)
Claimants-Respondents)
)
v.)
) DATE ISSUED: Feb. 27, 2014
SALLYPORT GLOBAL SERVICES)
)
and)
)
CONTINENTAL CASUALTY COMPANY)
)
Employer/Carrier-)
Petitioners) DECISION and ORDER

Appeal of the Supplemental Decision and Order Award of Attorney's Fee of Daniel F. Solomon, Administrative Law Judge, United States Department of Labor.

Agnieszka M. Fryszman and Thomas N. Saunders (Cohen Milstein Sellers & Toll, PLLC), Washington, D.C., for claimants.

Gregory Sujack (Law Offices of Edward J. Kozel), Chicago, Illinois, for employer/carrier.

Before: DOLDER, Chief Administrative Appeals Judge, McGRANERY and BOGGS, Administrative Appeals Judges.

PER CURIAM:

Employer appeals the Supplemental Decision and Order Award of Attorney's Fee (2010-LDA-00540) of Administrative Law Judge Daniel F. Solomon rendered on a claim filed pursuant to the provisions of the Longshore and Harbor Workers' Compensation Act, as amended, 33 U.S.C. §901 *et seq.*, as extended by the Defense Base Act, 42 U.S.C. §1651 *et seq.* (the Act). The amount of an attorney's fee award is discretionary and will not be set aside unless shown by the challenging party to be arbitrary, capricious, an

abuse of discretion or not in accordance with law. *See Muscella v. Sun Shipbuilding & Dry Dock Co.*, 12 BRBS 272 (1980).

Sajjad Abdulirazaq Yaseen (decedent), along with eight of his co-workers, died on October 29, 2006, while in the course of his work as a translator for employer in Iraq. Employer, through its carrier, conducted an investigation into potential survivors who might be entitled to compensation under the Act. Based on employer's representations, the district director found, pursuant to Section 9 of the Act, 33 U.S.C. §909, that decedent did not leave any eligible survivors.¹ However, investigations had discovered decedent's parents (claimants) to be decedent's dependents and despite assurances from the investigator, no compensation had been paid as of 2009, prompting claimants to file claims for death benefits.

By Order dated May 12, 2011, the administrative law judge, *inter alia*: 1) denied employer's motion for summary decision; 2) granted partial summary decision for claimants, establishing the timeliness of the claims and claimants' status as decedent's dependents entitled to compensation under the Act; and 3) referred claimants' Section 31(c), 33 U.S.C. §931(c), claim to the district director for further investigation. Order Granting Partial Summary Decision at 10-11. After employer withdrew its controversion of the claim, *see* 20 C.F.R. §702.531, the parties stipulated to decedent's average weekly wage and the administrative law judge canceled the formal hearing and remanded the case to the district director. The administrative law judge retained jurisdiction to entertain a petition for attorney fees.

On October 19, 2011, claimants' counsel filed with the administrative law judge a petition seeking an attorney's fee of \$42,446.60, representing 154.74 hours at hourly rates ranging from \$140 to \$435, plus costs of \$7,658.48, for work performed before him in this case. Employer requested several extensions of time in order to file objections but did not submit a response to the fee petition. After reducing the \$140 hourly rate to \$100 and denying itemized entries found to be clerical, in an Order dated March 15, 2013, the administrative law judge awarded claimants' counsel an attorney's fee of \$40,149.60 and costs of \$7,658.48.

¹ The district director issued an Order on March 20, 2009, for employer to pay funeral expenses and \$5,000 into the Special Fund pursuant to Section 44(c)(1) of the Act, 33 U.S.C. §944(c)(1). Employer complied with the district director's Order and subsequently applied for and received reimbursement under the War Hazards Compensation Act, 42 U.S.C. §1701 *et seq.*

In the interim between the filing of the fee petition with the administrative law judge and the issuance of the administrative law judge's fee award, the parties engaged in negotiations to settle the claims for death benefits, commutation thereof, *see* 33 U.S.C. §§908(i), 909(g), and claimants' counsel's fee, 33 U.S.C. §928(a). The parties ultimately reached agreements and submitted applications for approval of Section 8(i) settlements to the district director. Under the proposed agreements, decedent's father was to receive a lump sum payment of \$22,940.04 and decedent's mother was to receive a lump sum payment of \$45,925.01. Claimants' attorneys would receive a fee of \$29,098.66 in each claim. The parties requested that the fee petition pending before the administrative law judge be dismissed as moot. Three months after the agreements were submitted, and after the administrative law judge had issued his fee award, the district director disapproved the settlement agreements because the parties had failed to provide claimants with a translated version of the settlement agreements or to obtain claimants' signatures. *See* 20 C.F.R. §§702.242-702.243.

On appeal, employer challenges the administrative law judge's award of an attorney's fee. Claimants respond, urging affirmance of the administrative law judge's award. Employer has filed a reply brief. The issues employer raises on appeal are the same as those raised and addressed by the Board in *Khudhaier v. Sallyport Global Services*, BRB No. 13-0342 (Feb. 7, 2014). For the reasons stated therein, we vacate the administrative law judge's award of an attorney's fee and remand the case for further proceedings consistent with *Khudhaier*.

Accordingly, the administrative law judge's Supplemental Decision and Order Award of Attorney's Fee is vacated, and the case is remanded for further action consistent with this opinion.

SO ORDERED.

NANCY S. DOLDER, Chief
Administrative Appeals Judge

REGINA C. McGRANERY
Administrative Appeals Judge

JUDITH S. BOGGS
Administrative Appeals Judge