RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS

PHYSICAL DISABILITY BOARD OF REVIEW

NAME: BRANCH OF SERVICE: air force

CASE NUMBER: PD0900045 COMPONENT: regular

BOARD DATE: 20090715 SEPARATION DATE: 20050615

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SUMMARY OF CASE: This covered individual (CI) was a Staff Sergeant Communications Computer Systems Controller Journeyman medically separated from the Air Force in 2005 after over eight years of service.

This CI has received psychiatric care for multiple problems starting in 1997 but was previously able to perform her duties at appropriate levels. She was an outstanding Airman with top level evaluations through 2004 and was Squadron NCO of the year in 2003. However, her ability to perform in a military environment sharply declined and culminated in a hospitalization for suicidal ideation in February 2005. After discharge she returned to work for one day and was then readmitted to the psychiatric ward. She received appropriate care, complied with all treatment recommendations, and did improve. However, she never regained the ability to perform the duties of her rank and position and she was referred to the Air Force Physical Evaluation Board (PEB). The Informal PEB determined she was unfit for continued military service and she was then separated with a 10% disability for 9432 Bipolar disorder, type I using the Veterans Affairs Schedule for Ratings Disabilities (VASRD) and applicable Air Force and Department of Defense regulations.

Using an evaluation completed five months after the time of separation from the Air Force; the Veterans Administration (VA) rated this disability as 9432 Bipolar disorder at 10%. The VA also rated 5003-5260 Right knee, status post anterior cruciate ligament reconstruction and 7828 Acne at 0% each for a combined total of 10%.

The CI contends that her condition continues to be a large challenge to my daily life and that she was unable to hold a job for two years after separation.

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BOARD FINDINGS: IAW DoDI 6040.44, the Board used the Veteran’s Affairs Schedule of Rating Disabilities (VASRD) as the most favorable basis for rating. After careful consideration of all available information, the Board unanimously concluded that the CI’s condition is appropriately rated at a 30% for 9432 Bipolar disorder, type I using the VASRD general rating formula for mental disorders.

While the Air Force PEB rated her bipolar disorder at 10%, the board determined that the PEB had underrated her disability based on the signs and symptoms documented in her mental health evaluations and outpatient visits. From the time of her hospitalization to the time of her separation, the CI had depression, blunted affect, and suicidal ideation and was not able to perform the functions of her job. She missed a lot of time from work for medical appointments, was unable to deploy, and was unable to properly supervise and lead her subordinates. Her Global Assessment of Functioning (GAF) was 40 soon after discharge from the hospital and ranged from 55 to 60 in the months prior to her separation. The board opined the appropriate rating was between 30% and 50% but was less than half way to 50% and voted unanimously to rate at 30%. At the time of the VA evaluation four months after separation, she was presumably under less stress. She was not employed so there can be no determination of her ability to establish or maintain effective work relationships. She did appear to have fewer symptoms at the time of this evaluation but with bipolar disorder symptoms wax and wane and there can be relatively symptom-free periods during transitions. Also her manic episodes appeared to be less disabling and she could be fairly functional during these episodes. She may have been in transition or in a manic phase during the VA evaluation. It would not be appropriate to lower the rating based on this one evaluation.

The board also examined each of the other conditions rated by the VA and did not find any to be unfitting.

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RECOMMENDATION: The Board recommends that the CI’s prior determination be modified as follows and that the discharge with severance pay be recharacterized to reflect disability retirement, effective as of the date of her prior medical separation.

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| Unfitting Condition | VASRD Code | Rating |
| Bipolar disorder, Type I | 9432 | 30% |
| Combined | 30% |

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The following documentary evidence was considered:

Exhibit A. DD Form 294, dated 20090120, w/atchs.

Exhibit B. Service Treatment Record.

Exhibit C. Department of Veteran's Affairs Treatment Record.

 President

 Physical Disability Board of Review

 SAF/MRB

1535 Command Drive, Suite E-302

Andrews AFB, MD 20762-7002

 Reference your application submitted under the provisions of DoDI 6040.44 (Section 1554, 10 USC), PDBR Case Number PD-2009-00045.

 After careful consideration of your application and treatment records, the Physical Disability Board of Review determined that the rating assigned at the time of final disposition of your disability evaluation system processing was not appropriate under the guidelines of the Veterans Administration Schedule for Rating Disabilities. Accordingly, the Board recommended your separation be re-characterized to reflect disability retirement, rather than separation with severance pay.

 I have carefully reviewed the evidence of record and the recommendation of the Board. I concur with that finding, accept their recommendation and determined that your records should be corrected accordingly. The office responsible for making the correction will inform you when your records have been changed.

 As a result of the aforementioned correction, you are entitled by law to elect coverage under the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP). Upon receipt of this letter, you must contact the Air Force Personnel Center at 1-800-531-7502 to make arrangements to obtain an SBP briefing prior to rendering an election. If a valid election is not received within 30 days from the date of the letter, you will not be enrolled in the SBP program. Unless at the time of your separation you were married or had an eligible dependent child, in such a case, failure to render an election will result in automatic enrollment.

 Sincerely

Director

Air Force Review Boards Agency

