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12-9-2005

DEPARTMENT OF SAFETY vs. ONE 1990 Ford
Econoline Van VIN #: 1FDEE14N1LHA29673,
Seized From: Sandra L. Tittle, Date of Seizure:
January 3, 2005, Claimant: Sandra L. Tittle,
Lienholder: None

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**BEFORE THE COMMISSIONER
OF THE
TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF SAFETY**

IN THE MATTER OF:]	
]	
DEPARTMENT OF SAFETY]	
]	
v.]	DOCKET # 19.01-085074J
]	D.O.S. Case # D-8307
ONE 1990 Ford Econoline Van]	
VIN#: 1FDEE14N1LHA29673]	
Seized From: Sandra L. Tittle]	
Date of Seizure: January 3, 2005]	
Claimant: Sandra L. Tittle]	
Lienholder: None]	

INITIAL DEFAULT ORDER

This matter was heard on [December 9, 2005](#), before J. Randall LaFevor, Administrative Judge assigned by the Secretary of State, Administrative Procedures Division, sitting for the Commissioner of the Tennessee Department of Safety in [Knoxville](#), Tennessee. [Mr. Will Lundy](#), Staff Attorney for the Tennessee Department of Safety, represented the State. The Claimant was not present and was not represented by counsel.

The subject of this hearing was the proposed forfeiture of the subject **property** based on [allegations that its possession and/or receipt by the Claimant was in violation of the Tennessee Drug Control Act](#). Upon the Claimant's failure to appear at the hearing, counsel for the State made an oral motion for an order finding the Claimant to be in default, pursuant to TCA § 4-5-309. Upon full consideration of the evidence received at the hearing and the entire record in this case, the State's motion was granted. The Claimant was found to be in default, and the claim filed in this matter was stricken, as supported by the following Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law.

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. The Claimant's [property](#) was seized pursuant to law, resulting in the issuance of a Property Forfeiture Warrant. The Claimant filed a claim seeking the return of the [property](#), and requesting that a hearing be scheduled to consider that claim.
2. A hearing on the claim was scheduled for hearing on [December 9, 2005](#), and the Claimant was notified of the hearing time and location by certified mail.
3. The State's notification was duly delivered to the Claimant's address of record.¹
4. The Claimant did not appear at the hearing,² and was not otherwise represented. Based on the Claimant's failure to appear, the State made an oral motion for the entry of an Order of Default.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW and ANALYSIS

1. Tennessee Code Annotated § 4-5-309(a) provides that "if a party fails to attend or participate in a pre-hearing conference, hearing or other stage of a contested case, the administrative judge . . . may hold the party in default . . ." An order holding an absent party in default at the *second* setting of a forfeiture hearing is authorized by Rule 1340-2-2-.17(1)(a), TENN. COMP. R. & REGS., *Rules of Procedure for Asset Forfeiture Hearings*.
2. Department of Safety Regulations governing asset forfeiture hearings also provide:
 - (d) No default shall be entered against a claimant for failure to attend [the hearing] except upon proof by the filing of the return receipt card, that the legal division has given notice of the hearing per Rule 1340-2-2-.11(3).
 - (e) Upon default by a party, an administrative judge may enter either an initial default order or an order for an uncontested proceeding . . .

Rule 1340-2-2-.17(1), TENN. COMP. R. & REGS., *Rules of Procedure for Asset Forfeiture Hearings*.

¹ See, *Hearing Exhibit #1, Certified Mail Return Receipt*.

² This was the second (or subsequent) setting of this forfeiture hearing.

And, that

Upon a default by a claimant, a **claimant's claim shall be stricken by initial default order**, or, if the agency requests, the agency may proceed uncontested.

See, Rule 1340-2-2-.17(2)(b), TENN. COMP. R. & REGS., *Rules of Procedure for Asset Forfeiture Hearings*. (Bold emphasis added.)

3. The legal impact of striking a claim is to render the claim void *ab initio*, as though it had never been filed.³ Failure to file a claim results in the forfeiture of the property for disposition as provided by law. *See*, Tennessee Code Annotated § 40-33-206(c).

4. In accordance with the law, as set forth above, it is determined that the State's motion is well-taken. The Claimant was notified of the hearing, as shown by the certified return receipt, and failed to appear at the hearing to pursue his claim. Pursuant to the cited authority, the Claimant is hereby found to be in default for failing to appear at the hearing scheduled to consider his claim.

Accordingly, it is hereby ORDERED that the Claimant's claim is stricken from the record, and dismissed. The Claimant's interest in the subject property is Ordered forfeited to the Seizing Agency, the Knox County Sheriff's Department, for disposition as provided by law.

Entered and effective this 21st day of December, 2005.

J. Randall LaFevor, Administrative Judge

³ The effect of striking a pleading "is to posture the action as if [that pleading] had never been made." *See*, *INVST Financial Group, Inc. v. Chem-Nuclear Systems, Inc.*, 815 F.2d 391, 404 (6th Cir. 1987).

Filed in the Administrative Procedures Division, Office of the Secretary of State
this 21st day of December, 2005.

Charles C. Sullivan, Director
Administrative Procedures Division