

Partner of top RAF Cosford officer denied thousands in compensation after his sudden death

The partner of a top RAF Cosford officer who died unexpectedly has been denied his £48,000-a-year-pension because the couple never married.



Jane Langford, left, and Chris Green, right

Jane Langford, aged 67, lived as Station Commander Air Commodore Chris Green's wife, attending official dinners and cutting ribbons at fetes during their 15-year relationship.

They planned to get married and had bought a dress and engagement and wedding rings.

But tragedy struck in May 2011 when the 52-year-old Air Commodore died overnight of a heart attack at their home.

Mrs Langford's grief was compounded when she was then told that, despite her years of service as a 'forces wife', she was not entitled to inherit his pension, worth up to £4,000-a-month.

She also did not receive a £400,000 death in service benefit which instead went to his parents and siblings.

Mrs Langford, who branded the affair a miscarriage of justice, had never divorced her former husband Alan when they split up 17 years earlier.

Speaking outside the High Court, she said:
“I used to believe in British justice, but I don’t now.”

Mrs. Langford had never divorced her former partner Alan, who she had split from 17 years earlier, which meant she was ruled out of taking Air Commodore Green’s pension when he died.

She went to the pensions ombudsman and then the High Court, where the Service Personnel Veterans Agency’s decision was yesterday upheld.

Deputy Judge Timothy Fancourt QC said Mrs. Langford’s existing marriage meant she could not inherit the pension.

Mrs Langford did not receive Commodore Green’s death in service benefit either, with the £400,000 payment instead going to his parents and siblings.

Speaking afterwards, she told of her disappointment at the pension ruling, which leaves her to live on her own modest pension and income from lodgers.

“When the justice system has lost people like me - a middle-class, Anglo-Saxon lady - they have lost indeed.” She said

Despite keeping her married name for work reasons, Mrs Langford was at Air Commodore Green’s side as he fulfilled his duties as station commander at the Shropshire air base.

It was a “full-time job” in more recent years and she was financially dependent on him, having retired herself in 2007, she said.

Mrs. Langford lost her case because rules state that the unmarried spouse must have been free to marry the deceased.

Her existing marriage, despite it having effectively ended almost two decades earlier, meant she failed that test.

On appeal, her barrister Fergus McCombie argued that the pension scheme discriminated against Mrs. Langford by treating her differently to an unmarried person and was therefore a violation of her human rights.