

**Court No. 1**

**ARMED FORCES TRIBUNAL, REGIONAL BENCH, LUCKNOW**

**ORIGINAL APPLICATION No. 497 of 2023**

Friday, this the 25<sup>th</sup> day of August, 2023

**“Hon’ble Mr. Justice Ravindra Nath Kakkar, Member (J)  
Hon’ble Vice Admiral Atul Kumar Jain, Member (A)”**

No. 2977142-A Ex. Havildar Ram Niwas Singh, Son of Late Jaya Karan Singh, Resident of Village – Ahamedpuri, Post Office – Ahmedpuri, District – Meerut-250406 (UP).

..... **Applicant**

Ld. Counsel for : **Shri R. Chandra**, Advocate.  
the applicant

**Versus**

1. Union of India through the Secretary, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, New Delhi-11.
2. Chief of the Army Staff, Integrated Headquarters of Ministry of Defence (Army), DHQ Post Office, New Delhi-11.
3. The Office In Charge, Records The Mahar Regiment, PIN-900127, C/o 56 APO.
4. The Chief Controller of Defence Accounts, Draupadi Ghat, Allahabad (UP).

.....**Respondents**

Ld. Counsel for the: **Shri Kaushik Chatterjee**, Advocate  
Respondents. Central Govt Counsel.

## ORDER

“Per Hon’ble Mr. Justice Ravindra Nath Kakkar, Member (J)”

1. The present Original Application has been filed under Section 14 of the Armed Forces Tribunal Act, 2007. The applicant has sought the following reliefs:-

- (I) *Hon’ble Tribunal may be pleased to set aside the Order dated 04.07.2003 (Annexure N. A-1) and Order dated 30.08.2007 (Annexure No. A-2).*
- (II) *Tribunal may be pleased to direct the respondents to grant Disability Element with effect from 01.01.2003 (Next date of discharge) with the interest at the rate of 18% per annum.*
- (III) *Hon’ble Tribunal may be pleased further to grant benefit of rounding of disability pension @50 Percent in terms of Ram Avtar’s Case.*
- (IV) *Any other appropriate order or direction which the Hon’ble Tribunal may deem just and proper in the nature and circumstances of the case.*

2. The brief facts of the case are that the applicant was enrolled in the MAHAR Regiment of Indian Army on 28.11.1979 and discharged from service on 31.12.2002 in Low Medical Category before completion of terms of engagement after rendering 23 years, 01 month and 03 days of service under Rule 13 (3) Item III (V) of the Army Rules, 1954. At the time of discharge, Release Medical Board (RMB) held at Military Hospital, Jodhpur on 17.08.2002 assessed his disability '**BILATERAL VIRAL KERATITIS 370**' @11-14% for life **attributable to military service**. Applicant’s claim for grant of disability element

of disability pension was rejected vide letter dated 04.06.2003 which was communicated to the applicant vide letter dated 04.07.2003. On 22.05.2007 the respondent No. 3 again took up the applicant's claim for the grant of disability element with respondent No. 4. The respondent No. 3 further took up the applicant's claim for the grant of disability pension with respondent No. 4 vide their letter dated 09.08.2007 on the ground that applicant was discharged from service before completion of terms of engagement, therefore, he was deemed to have been invalided out from service in terms of Regulation 173A of the Pension Regulations for the Army, 1961 (Part-I) but the respondent No. 4 returned the claim of the applicant vide their letter dated 30.08.2007. It is in this perspective that the applicant has preferred the present Original Application.

3. Ld. Counsel for the applicant pleaded that the applicant was fully fit at the time of enrolment and the said disability i.e. "**BILATERAL VIRAL KERATITIS 370**" was assessed by the RMB as attributable to military service. Ld. Counsel for the applicant has relied upon the Hon'ble Apex Court judgment in the case of **Sukhwinder Singh vs Union of India & Ors**, reported in (2014) STPL (WEB) 468 SC and contended that since applicant's services were cut short and he was discharged from service prior to completion of terms of engagement on the rank

of Havildar, therefore his discharge from service should be a deemed invalidation as held in the case of **Sukhwinder Singh** (supra) and applicant deserves to be granted disability element of disability pension.

4. On the other hand, Ld. Counsel for the respondents submitted that although the applicant's disability has been opined as attributable to military service but it has been assessed @11-14% for life i.e. below 20%, he is not entitled to disability element of pension in terms of Regulation 173 of Pension Regulations for the Army, 1961 (Part - I) and his claim was rightly denied by the respondents being disability below 20%. He pleaded for dismissal of the Original Application.

5. We have heard learned counsel for the parties and perused the material placed on record.

6. For adjudication of the controversy involved in the instant case, we need to address only two issues; firstly, is the discharge of applicant a case of normal discharge or invalidation? and secondly is applicant is entitled to disability element of pension being disability below 20% attributable to military service.

7. For the purpose of first question as to whether the discharge of the applicant by Release Medical Board is a case of discharge or invalidation. In this context, it is clear that the applicant was discharged from service before completion of his terms of

engagement in the rank of Havildar in low medical category. In this regard, Rule 4 of the Entitlement Rules for Casualty Pensionary Awards, 1982 defines invalidation as follows:

*“Invaliding from service is a necessary condition for grant of a disability pension. An individual, who, at the time of his release under the Release Regulations, is in a lower medical category than that in which he was recruited will be treated as invalided from service. JCOs/ORs and equivalent in other services who are placed permanently in a medical category other than 'A' and are discharged because no alternative employment suitable to their low medical category can be provided, as well as those who having been retained in alternative employment but are discharged before the completion of their engagement will be deemed to have been invalided out of service.”*

8. Thus, in light of above definition, it is clear that the applicant was in low medical category as compared the one when he was enrolled and hence his discharge is to be deemed as invalided out of service on the rank of Havildar.

9. The law on this point is very clear as reported in (2014) STPL (WEB) 468, **Sukhwinder Singh vs Union of India & Ors.** Para 9 of the aforesaid judgment being relevant is reproduced as under:-

*“9. We are of the persuasion, therefore, that firstly, any disability not recorded at the time of recruitment must be presumed to have been caused subsequently and unless proved to the contrary to be a consequence of military service. The benefit of doubt is rightly extended in favour of the member of the Armed Forces; any other conclusion would be tantamount to granting a premium to the Recruitment Medical Board for their own negligence. Secondly, the morale of the Armed Forces requires absolute and undiluted protection and if an injury leads to loss of service without any recompense, this morale would be severely undermined. Thirdly, there appears to be no provisions authorising the discharge or invaliding out of service where the disability is below twenty percent and seems to us to be logically*

*so. Fourthly, whenever a member of the Armed Forces is invalided out of service, it perforce has to be assumed that his disability was found to be above twenty per cent. Fifthly, as per the extant Rules/Regulations, a disability leading to invaliding out of service would attract the grant of fifty per cent disability pension."*

10. From the above mentioned Rule on disability pension and ratio of law emerging out of above Hon'ble Apex Court's judgment, it is clear that once a person has been recruited in a fit medical category, the benefit of doubt will lean in his favour unless cogent reasons are given by the Medical Board as to why the disease could not be detected at the time of enrolment. In this case, we find that the applicant was placed in low medical category due to his disability '**BILATERAL VIRAL KERATITIS 370**' and disease contracted in service, therefore, the RMB has declared his disability as attributable to military service. The aforesaid law also makes clear that in case of invalidation the disability percentage is presumed to above 20% irrespective of the disability percentage assessed by RMB/IMB.

11. In view of the above, we are of the considered opinion that applicant's discharge vide Release Medical Board held on 17.08.2002 is to be treated as invalidation in terms of Rule 4 of the Entitlement Rules (supra).

12. Additionally, consequent upon the issue of Government of India, Ministry of Defence letter No. 17(01)/2017(01)/

D(Pen/Policy) dated 23.01.2018, Principal Controller of Defence Accounts (Pensions), Prayagraj has issued Circular No. 596 dated 09.02.2018 wherein it is provided that the cases where Armed Forces Pensioners who were retired/discharged voluntary or otherwise with disability and they were in receipt of Disability/War Injury Element as on 31.12.2015, their extent of disability/War Injury Element shall be re-computed in the manner given in the said Circular which is applicable with effect from 01.01.2016.

13. It is also observed that claim for pension is based on continuing wrong and relief can be granted if such continuing wrong creates a continuing source of injury. In the case of **Shiv Dass vs. Union of India**, reported in 2007 (3) SLR 445, Hon'ble Apex Court has observed:

“In the case of pension the cause of action actually continues from month to month. That, however, cannot be a ground to overlook delay in filing the petition. It would depend upon the fact of each case. If petition is filed beyond a reasonable period say three years normally the Court would reject the same or restrict the relief which could be granted to a reasonable period of about three years. The High Court did not examine whether on merit appellant had a case. If on merits it would have found that there was no scope for interference, it would have dismissed the writ petition on that score alone.”

14. As such, in view of the decision of Hon'ble Supreme Court in the case of ***Shiv Dass and Sukhwinder Singh vs Union of India & Ors.*** (supra) as well as Government of India, Ministry of Defence letter No. 17(01)/2017(01)/D(Pen/Policy) dated 23.01.2018, we are of the considered view that benefit of rounding off of disability pension @ 20% for life to be rounded off to 50% for life may be extended to the applicant from three preceding years from the date of filing of the Original Application.

15. In view of the above, the **Original Application No. 497 of 2023** deserves to be partly allowed, hence **partly allowed**. The impugned orders, rejecting the applicant's claim for grant of disability element of disability pension, are set aside. The disability of the applicant is held above @20% for life. The applicant is entitled to get disability element @20% for life which would be rounded off to 50% for life w.e.f. three years preceding the date of filing of Original Application. The respondents are directed to grant disability element to the applicant @20% for life which would stand rounded off to 50% for life w.e.f. three years preceding the date of filing of Original Application. The date of filing of Original Application is 17.04.2023. The respondents are further directed to give effect to this order within a period of four months from the date of receipt of a certified copy of this order.

Default will invite interest @ 8% per annum till the actual payment

16. No order as to costs.

17. Major Uma Yadav, Departmental Representative for the respondents orally submitted to grant Leave to Appeal against the above order which we have considered and no point of law of general public importance being involved in the case the plea is rejected

**(Vice Admiral Atul Kumar Jain)**  
**Member (A)**

**(Justice Ravindra Nath Kakkar)**  
**Member (J)**

Dated: 25 August, 2023

AKD/-