

Court No.1

Reserved Judgment

ARMED FORCES TRIBUNAL, REGIONAL BENCH,
LUCKNOW

Transferred Application No. 1318 of 2010

Friday this the 15th day of January, 2016

Hon'ble Mr. Justice V.K. DIXIT, Member (J)
Hon'ble Lt Gen Gyan Bhushan, Member (A)

Ex. No.3183420-N Sepoy
Surinder Singh, son of Shri Sahadev Singh, r/o
Village: Kachura, Post Office: Achnera,
Teh: Kirawali, District: Agra.

..... Petitioner

By Legal Practitioner Shri Anand Dubey, Advocate

Versus

1. The Union of India, through The Secretary
Ministry of Defence, South Block, New Delhi.
2. Chief of the Army Staff, Army Head
Quarters, South Block, New Delhi.
3. The Chief Controller of Defence Accounts
(Pensions) Draupadi Ghat, Allahabad.
4. Officer Incharge Records, the Jat
Regiment, Bareilly

..... Respondents

By Legal Practitioner Shri Mohd. Zafar Khan, Learned
Counsel for the Central Government

ORDER

“Hon’ble Lt Gen Gyan Bhushan, Member (A)”

1. Initially, the petitioner had filed writ petition No.15650 of 1998 before the Hon’ble High Court of Judicature at Allahabad, which after constitution of the Armed Forces Tribunal has been transferred to this Bench of the Tribunal and registered as T.A. No.1318 of 2010. The petitioner has claimed the reliefs as under:-

- “i) issue a writ, order or direction in the nature of Certiorari quashing the rejection order of Ministry of Defence dated 10/3/97 Annexure 3 to the writ petition;*
- ii) issue a writ, order or direction in the nature of Certiorari quashing the rejection order passed by the CCDA and intimated by respondent no. 4 vide letter Dt: 29/12/94 Annexure 2 to the petition;*
- iii) issue a writ, order or direction in the nature of Mandamus directing the respondent no. 1 to pay his service element as well as disability element of his pension to the petitioner;*
- iv) issue any other and further order as this Hon’ble Court may deem fit and proper under the circumstances of the case;*
- v) to award the cost of this petition to the petitioner.”*

2. The factual matrix of the case is that the petitioner was enrolled in the Indian Army on 16.12.1988 and was discharged from service under 13 (3) III of the Army Rules, 1954 with effect from 31.03.1994 (afternoon) in low medical category **“BEE”** (P) for the disease **“PUJ Obstruction with multiple Renal Cal-culli (LT) (Optd) 592”**. The disability of the petitioner was considered as not attributable to but aggravated by military service and it was assessed as 20% for 02 years. Claim for disability pension

of the petitioner was rejected vide order dated 13.12.1994. Appeal of the petitioner against rejection of disability pension was rejected vide order dated 10.03.1997. Aggrieved, the petitioner filed writ petition in the Hon'ble High Court of Judicature at Allahabad on 30.04.1998, which subsequently stood transferred to this Tribunal and registered as Transferred Application.

3. Heard Shri Anand Dubey, Learned Counsel for the applicant, Shri Mohd. Zafar Khan, Learned Counsel for the respondents and perused the record.

4. Learned Counsel for the petitioner submitted that at the time of enrollment, the petitioner was enrolled after he was examined by the medical board and was found mentally and physically fit for a service in the Indian Army and there is no note, whatsoever, in the service documents that he was suffering from any disease. Learned counsel for the petitioner further submitted that petitioner was entitled for disability pension in view of Regulation 173 of the Pension Regulations (Part-I) 1961.

5. **Per contra**, the Learned Counsel for the respondents submitted that the medical board had assessed disability as 20% for two years and considered it not attributable to but aggravated by military service. In accordance with Para 173 of the Pension Regulations, disability pension is admissible to an individual who is invalided out from service on account of disability, which is attributable to or aggravated by military service and is assessed at 20% or more. Learned Counsel submitted that in this case, though the Release Medical Board accepted the disability as aggravated by military service and assessed the same at 20%, yet the pension sanctioning authority i.e. Chief

Controller of Defence Accounts (Pensions) Allahabad in consultation with medical officer (Pensions) attached to their office and the appellate medical officer attached with Ministry of Defence, who are competent medical authority in exercising powers conferred on them vide Rules 17 & 27 (c) of Revised Entitlement Rule 1982, considered the disability as neither attributable to nor aggravated by military service. The recommendations/findings of the lower medical authority are to be reviewed by the competent medical authority as defined in Para 17 (a) (i) to (iv) of the Revised Entitlement Rule 1982 and their recommendations as accepted by the Chief Controller of Defence Accounts (Pensions)/Ministry of Defence shall be final vide 17 (c) of the Revised Entitlement Rule 1982. Since both the medical advisors have considered the disability as neither attributable to nor aggravated by military service, no disability pension is admissible to the petitioner.

6. Before dealing with the rival submissions, it would be appropriate to examine the relevant Rules and Regulations on the point. Relevant portions of the Pension Regulations for the Army 1961 (Part I), and the provisions of Rules 4, 5, 9, 14 and 22 of the Entitlement Rules for Casualty Pension Award, 1982 are reproduced below:-

“(a) **Pension Regulations for the Army 1961 (Part I)**

“Para 173. Unless otherwise specifically provided a disability pension consisting of service element and disability element may be granted to an individual who is invalided out of service on account of a disability which is attributable to or aggravated by military service in non-battle casualty and is assessed at 20 percent or over.

The question whether a disability is attributable to or aggravated by military service shall be determined under the rule in Appendix II.”

“(b) **Entitlement Rules for Casualty Pensionary Awards, 1982**

4. *Invaliding from service is necessary condition for grant of a disability pension. An individual who, at the time of his release under the Release Regulation, is in a lower medical category than that in which he was recruited, will be treated as invalided from service. JCOs/ORs & equivalents 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.*

5. *The approach to the question of entitlement to casualty pensionary awards and evaluation of disabilities shall be based on the following presumptions:-*

Prior to and during service.

(a) *A member is presumed to have been in sound physical and mental condition upon entering service except as to physical disabilities noted or recorded at the time of entrance.*

(b) *In the event of his subsequently being discharged from service on medical grounds any deterioration in his health which has taken place is due to service.*

Onus of Proof.

9. *The claimant shall not be called upon to prove the conditions of entitlement. He/she will receive the benefit of any reasonable doubt. This benefit will be given more liberally to the claimants in field/afloat service cases.*

Disease

14. ***In respect of disease, the following rules will be observed:-***

(a) *For acceptance of a disease as attributable to military service, the following two conditions must be satisfied simultaneously:*

i) That the disease has arisen during the period of military service, and

ii) That the disease has been caused by the conditions of employment in military service.

(b) *If medical authority holds, for reasons to be stated, that the disease although present at the time of enrolment could not have been detected on medical examination prior to acceptance for service, the disease, will not be deemed to have arisen during service. In case where it is established that the military service did not contribute to the onset or adversely affect the course disease, entitlement for casualty pensionary award will not be conceded even if the disease has arisen during service.*

(c) *Cases in which it is established that conditions of military service did not determine or contribute to the onset of the disease but, influenced the subsequent course of the disease, will fall for acceptance on the basis of aggravation.*

(d) *In case of congenital, hereditary, degenerative and constitutional diseases which are detected after the individual has joined service, entitlement to disability pension shall not be conceded unless it is clearly established that the course of such disease was adversely affected due to factors related to conditions of military services.*

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22. **Conditions of unknown Aetiology:-** There are a number of medical conditions which are unknown aetiology. In dealing with such conditions, the following guiding principles are laid down-

(a) If nothing at all is known about the cause of the disease, and the presumption of the entitlement in favour of the claimant is not rebutted, attributability should be conceded.

(b) If the disease is one which arises and progresses independently of service environmental factors than the claim may be rejected.”

7. We would like to refer to the decisions of Hon’ble The Apex Court in **Dharamvir Singh Vs. Union of India and Ors** reported in **(2013) 7 Supreme Court Cases 316**, in which Hon’ble The Apex Court took note of the provisions of the Pensions Regulations, Entitlement Rules and the General Rules of Guidance to Medical Officers to sum up the legal position emerging from the same in the following words.

"29.1. Disability pension to be granted to an individual who is invalided from service on account of a disability which is attributable to or aggravated by military service in non-battle casualty and is assessed at 20% or over. The question whether a disability is attributable to or aggravated by military service to be determined under the Entitlement Rules for Casualty Pensionary Awards, 1982 of Appendix II (Regulation 173).

29.2. A member is to be presumed in sound physical and mental condition upon entering service if there is no note or record at the time of entrance. In the event of his subsequently being discharged from service on medical grounds any deterioration in his health is to be presumed due to service [Rule 5 read with Rule 14(b)].

29.3. The onus of proof is not on the claimant (employee), the corollary is that onus of proof that the condition for non-entitlement is with the employer. A claimant has a right to derive benefit of any reasonable doubt and is entitled for pensionary benefit more liberally (Rule 9).

29.4. If a disease is accepted to have been as having arisen in service, it must also be established that the conditions of military service determined or contributed to the onset of the disease and that the conditions were due to the circumstances of duty in military service [Rule 14(c)]. [pic]

29.5. *If no note of any disability or disease was made at the time of individual's acceptance for military service, a disease which has led to an individual's discharge or death will be deemed to have arisen in service [Rule 14(b)].*

“29.6 If medical opinion holds that the disease could not have been detected on medical examination prior to the acceptance for service and that disease will not be deemed to have arisen during service, the Medical Board is required to state the reasons[(Rule 14 (b)]; and

29.7 It is mandatory for the Medical Board to follow the guidelines laid down in Chapter II of the “Guide to Medical Officers (Military Pensions), 2002 -“Entitlement : General Principles”, including Paras 7,8 and 9 as referred to above (para 27).

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31. In the present case it is undisputed that no note of any disease has been recorded at the time of the appellant's acceptance for military service. The respondents have failed to bring on record any document to suggest that the appellant was under treatment for such a disease or by hereditary he is suffering from such disease. In the absence of any note in the service record at the time of acceptance of joining of appellant, it was incumbent on the part of the Medical Board to call for records and look into the same before coming to an opinion that the disease could not have been detected on medical examination prior to the acceptance for military service, but nothing is on record to suggest that any such record was called for by the Medical Board or looked into it and no reasons have been recorded in writing to come to the conclusion that the disability is not due to military service. In fact, non-application of mind of Medical Board is apparent from clause (d) of Para 2 of the opinion of the Medical Board, which is as follows :-

“(d) In the case of a disability under (c) the Board should state what exactly in their opinion is the cause thereof.

YES

Disability is not related to military service”.

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33. *In spite of the aforesaid provisions, the pension sanctioning authority failed to notice that the Medical Board had not given any reason in support of its opinion, particularly when there is no note of such disease or disability available in the service record of the appellant at the time of acceptance for military service. Without going through the aforesaid facts the Pension Sanctioning Authority mechanically passed the impugned order of rejection based on the report of the Medical Board. As per Rule 5 and 9 of the Entitlement Rules for Casualty Pensionary Awards, 1982, the appellant is entitled for presumption and benefit of presumption in his favour. In the absence of any evidence on record to show that the appellant was suffering from "Generalised Seizure (Epilepsy)" at the time of acceptance of his service, it will be presumed that the appellant was in sound physical and mental condition at the time of entering the service and deterioration in his health has taken place due to service.*

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35. *In view of the finding as recorded above, we have no option but to set aside the impugned order passed by the Division Bench dated 31-7-2009 in Union of India v. Dharamvir Singh and uphold the decision of the learned Single Judge dated 20-5-2004. The impugned order is set aside and accordingly the appeal is allowed. The respondents are directed to pay the appellant the benefit in terms of the order passed by the learned Single Judge in accordance with law within three months if not yet paid, else they shall be liable to pay interest as per the order passed by the learned Single Judge. No costs."*

8. **In Sukhvinder Singh Vs. Union of India**, reported in (2014) STPL (WEB) 468 SC. the Hon'ble Apex Court has held 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.....”.

9. In the case of **Veer Pal Singh vs. Ministry of Defence** reported in (2013) 8 SCC 83, the observations made by Hon’ble the Apex Court are as under :

“11. A recapitulation of the facts shows that at the time of enrolment in the army, the appellant was subjected to medical examination and the Recruiting Medical Officer found that he was fit in all respects. Item 25 of the certificate issued by the Recruiting Medical Officer is quite significant. Therein it is mentioned that speech of the appellant is normal and there is no evidence of mental backwardness or emotional instability. It is, thus, evident that the doctor who examined the appellant on 22.05.1972 did not find any disease or abnormality in the behaviour of the appellant. When the Psychiatrist Dr (Mrs) Lalitha Rao examined the appellant, she noted that he was quarrelsome, irritable and impulsive but he had improved with the treatment. The Invaliding Medical Board simply endorsed the observation made by Dr Rao that it was a case of “Schizophrenic reaction”.

12. In Merriam Webster Dictionary “Schizophrenia” has been described as a psychotic disorder characterized by loss of contact with the environment, by noticeable deterioration in the level of functioning in everyday life, and by disintegration of personality expressed as disorder of feeling, thought (as in delusions), perception (as in hallucinations), and behavior – called also dementia praecox; schizophrenia is a chronic, severe, and disabling brain disorder that has affected people throughout history.

13. *The National Institute of Mental Health, USA has described “schizophrenia” in the following words:*

“Schizophrenia is a chronic, severe, and disabling brain disorder that has affected people throughout history. People with the disorder may hear voices other people don’t hear. They may believe other people are reading their minds, controlling their thoughts, or plotting to harm them. This can terrify people with the illness and make them withdrawn or extremely agitated. People with schizophrenia may not make sense when they talk. They may sit for hours without moving or talking. Sometimes people with schizophrenia seem perfectly fine until they talk about what they are really thinking. Families and society are affected by schizophrenia too. Many people with schizophrenia have difficulty holding a job or caring for themselves, so they rely on others for help. Treatment helps relieve many symptoms of schizophrenia, but most people who have the disorder cope with symptoms throughout their lives. However, many people with schizophrenia can lead rewarding and meaningful lives in their communities”.

17. *Unfortunately, the Tribunal did not even bother to look into the contents of the certificate issued by the Invaliding Medical Board and mechanically observed that it cannot sit in appeal over the opinion of the Medical Board. If the learned members of the Tribunal had taken pains to study the standard medical dictionaries and medical literature like *The Theory and Practice of Psychiatry* by F.C. Redlich and Daniel X. Freedman, and *Modi’s Medical Jurisprudence and Toxicology*, then they would have definitely found that the observation made by Dr Lalitha Rao was substantially incompatible with the existing literature on the subject and the conclusion recorded by the Invaliding Medical Board that it was a case of schizophrenic reaction was not well founded and required a review in the context of the observation made by Dr Lalitha Rao*

herself that with the treatment the appellant had improved. In our considered view, having regard to the peculiar facts of this case, the Tribunal should have ordered constitution of Review Medical Board for re-examination of the appellant.

18. In Controller of Defence Accounts (Pension) vs. S Balachandran Nair on which reliance has been placed by the Tribunal, this Court referred to Regulations 173 and 423 of the Pension Regulations and held that the definite opinion formed by the Medical Board that the disease suffered by the respondent was constitutional and was not attributable to military service was binding and the High Court was not justified in directing payment of disability pension to the respondent. The same view was reiterated in Ministry of Defence vs A.V. Damodaran. However, in neither of those cases, this court was called upon to consider a situation where the Medical Board had entirely relied upon an inchoate opinion expressed by the psychiatrist and no effort was made to consider the improvement made in the degree of illness after the treatment.

19. As a corollary to the above discussion, we hold that the impugned order as also the orders dated 14.07.2011 and 16.09.2011 passed by the Tribunal are legally unsustainable. In the result, the appeal is allowed. The orders passed by the Tribunal are set aside and the respondents are directed to refer the case to the Review Medical Board for reassessing the medical condition of the appellant and find out whether at the time of discharge from service he was suffering from a disease which made him unfit to continue in service and whether he would be entitled to disability pension.”

10. In Union of India and Ors v Ram Avtar & ors Civil Appeal No 418 of 2012 dated 10th December 2014) in which Hon’ble The Apex Court nodded in disapproval the policy of the Government of India in not granting the benefit of rounding off of disability pension to the

personnel who have been invalidated out of service on account of being in low medical category or who has retired on attaining the age of superannuation or completion of his tenure of engagement, if found to be suffering from some disability. The relevant portion of the decision being relevant is excerpted below:

“4. By the present set of appeals, the appellant(s) raise the question, whether or not, an individual, who has retired on attaining the age of superannuation or on completion of his tenure of engagement, if found to be suffering from some disability which is attributable to or aggravated by the military service, is entitled to be granted the benefit of rounding off of disability pension. The appellant(s) herein would contend that, on the basis of Circular No 1(2)/97/D (Pen-C) issued by the Ministry of Defence, Government of India, dated 31.01.2001, the aforesaid benefit is made available only to an Armed Forces Personnel who is invalidated out of service, and not to any other category of Armed Forces Personnel mentioned hereinabove.

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6. *We do not see any error in the impugned judgment (s) and order(s) and therefore, all the appeals which pertain to the concept of rounding off of the disability pension are dismissed, with no order as to costs.*

7. *The dismissal of these matters will be taken note of by the High Courts as well as by the Tribunals in granting appropriate relief to the pensioners before them, if any, who are getting or are entitled to the disability pension.*

8. *This Court grants six weeks' time from today to the appellant(s) to comply with the orders and directions passed by us.”*

11. When the peremptory direction of Hon'ble The Apex Court is applied to the present case, it would lead us to the conclusion that the petitioner, who was invalidated out of service on account of his being in low medical category, if

found to be suffering from some disability, would be entitled to the benefit of rounding off.

12. In the instant case, sitting over the opinion of the medical board, the medical officer attached to PCDA (P) and Ministry of Defence have expressed opinion that the disease was neither attributable to, nor aggravated by service. It is observed that the respondents have failed to notice that the medical officer had not given adequate reason in support of their opinion. In the case of **Dharam Vir Singh (supra)**, it has been clearly postulated that when there is no note of such disease or disability available in the service record of the applicant at the time of acceptance for Army service, it would be presumed that the applicant was in sound physical and mental condition at the time of entering the service and deterioration in his health has taken place due to service. The stress of the learned counsel for the respondents was on the fact that opinion of these medical officers cannot be lightly jettisoned but this contention does not commend to us for acceptance in view of the decisions of **Hon'ble The Apex Court in Ex. Sapper Mohinder Singh vs Union of India in Civil Appeal No 104 of 1993 decided on 14.01.1993** nodded with approval in **Babu Singh Vs Union of India and others CWP No 3296 of 2003 decided on 26.4.2006**. The observation made in the decision of **Ex. Sapper Mohinder Singh (supra)** being relevant is quoted below:

“From the above narrated facts and the stand taken by the parties before us, the controversy that falls for determination by us is in a very narrow compass viz. whether the Chief Controller of Defence Accounts (Pension) has any jurisdiction to sit over the opinion of the experts (Medical Board) while dealing with the case of grant of disability pension, in regard

to the percentage of the disability pension, or not. In the present case, it is nowhere stated that the petitioner was subjected to any higher medical Board before the Chief Controller of Defence Accounts (Pension) decided to decline the disability pension to the petitioner. We are unable to see as to how the accounts branch dealing with the pension can sit over the judgment of the experts in the medical line without making any reference to a detailed or higher Medical Board which can be constituted under the relevant instructions and rules by the Director General of Army Medical Core.”

13. Having given considerations to the rival submissions made on behalf of the parties’ Learned Counsel, we find that the petitioner had been enrolled in the Indian Army in a fit medical condition and he suffered the disability during his service, therefore, in view of the judgment of the Hon’ble The Apex Court in the cases of **Dharmvir Singh Vs. Union of India & others** (supra) and **Sukhvinder Singh Vs. Union of India** (supra), a presumption has to be drawn in favour of the petitioner. The petitioner cannot be called upon to prove his claim for the disability pension once he was enrolled in fit medical conditions and was discharged in low medical category. It is for the respondents to rebut the claim of the applicant. It is also observed that the medical officer attached to the PCDA (P) has changed the recommendations of the medical board without giving any reasoned opinion, as such in view of decision of Hon’ble The Apex Court in **Ex. Sapper Mohinder Singh** (supra), it is unjust and illegal.

14. In the instant case, no reasoned opinion has been given by the medical officer, on the basis of which, it was concluded that the petitioner’s disability was neither attributable to nor aggravated by the service. There is no note of such disease in the service record of the petitioner at

the time of enrollment in service. Since there is no evidence on record to show that the petitioner was suffering from any disease at the time of his enrollment in service, it will be presumed that he was in good health at the time of entering service and disability occurred due to military service. Therefore, he is entitled to the relief as per the judgments of the Hon'ble The Apex Court cited above.

15. In view of the above, we are of the considered view that the impugned orders passed by the competent authority were unjust, illegal and not in conformity with rules, regulations and law. The impugned order deserves to be set aside and the applicant is entitled to disability pension @20% for 02 years along with interest @ 9% per annum from the date of discharge. We are also of the view that in terms of **Veer Pal Singh's** case (supra), the case of the petitioner be referred to Review Medical Board for reassessing the medical condition of the for further entitlement of disability pension, if any.

16. Thus in the result, the Transferred Application No. 1318 of 2010 is allowed. The impugned order dated 10.03.1997 (Annexure-3) and the order dated 31.03.1994 as communicated vide letter dated 29.12.1994 (Annexures 2) are set aside. The respondents are directed to grant disability pension to the petitioner @ 20% for 2 years, which would stand rounded off to 50% in terms of the decision of Hon'ble The Apex Court in the case of **Sukhvinder Singh vs. Union of India & others** (supra) and **Union of India and Ors vs. Ram Avtar & ors** (supra). The respondents are also directed to pay arrears of disability pension with interest @ 9% per annum from the date of discharge till the date of actual payment. The respondents

are further directed to refer the petitioner's case to Review Medical Board for reassessing the medical condition of the petitioner for further entitlement of disability pension, if any. Respondents are directed to give effect to the order within three months from the date of receipt of a certified copy of this order.

17. No order as to costs.

(Lt Gen Gyan Bhushan)
Member (A)

(Justice V.K. DIXIT)
Member (J)

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Dated : Jan. 2016