

RESERVED
Court No. 1

ARMED FORCES TRIBUNAL, REGIONAL BENCH, LUCKNOW

ORIGINAL APPLICATION No. 602 of 2017

Monday, this the 18th day of February, 2019

“Hon’ble Mr. Justice S.V.S. Rathore, Member (J)
Hon’ble Air Marshal B.B.P. Sinha, Member (A)”

Lt. Col. Brijendra Singh (Retd.), s/o Late Shri Ram Singh, R/o
12B Vrindavan Yojna, PO – Vrindavan, Lucknow-29.

..... Applicant

Ld. Counsel for the : **Shri Virat Anand Singh**, Advocate.
Applicant

Versus

1. Union of India through The Secretary, Ministry of Defence,
South Block, New Delhi-110011.
2. Chief of the Army Staff, Integrated HQ of MoD (Army), DHQ
PO, New Delhi-110011.
3. Addl. Dte. Gen. Personnel Services, Adjutant General
Branch, IHQ of MoD (ARMY), Room No. 11, Plot No. 108
(West), Brassey Avenue, Church Road, New Delhi-01.

.....**Respondents**

Ld. Counsel for the : **Shri V.P.S. Vats**,
Respondents. Central Govt. Counsel

ORDER**“Per Hon’ble Air Marshal B.B.P. Sinha, Member (A)”**

1. The instant Original Application has been filed under Section 14 of the Armed Forces Tribunal Act, 2007 for the following reliefs.

- (i) To issue/pass an order or direction to set aside/quash the Rejection orders dated 09/06/2012 (initial), 08/12/2012 (first), 01/07/2017 (second) passed by respondents.*
- (ii) To pass/issue an order or direction to the respondents to grant of Disability element of Disability Pension to the Applicant from the date of discharge – 01.07.2012 in the light Hon’ble Apex Court Judgment and government letter dated 31/01/2001 for rounding off the disability pension from 30% to 50% with interest of 9% from the same date as per applicable policy.*
- (iii) To pass orders which their lordships may deem fit and proper in the existing facts and circumstances of the case.*
- (iv) Allow this application with cost.”*

2. Briefly stated facts of the case are that the applicant was commissioned in the Army on 17.04.1993 (PC/SL) and was retired with effect from 01.07.2012 on attaining the age of superannuation. The applicant had also rendered service in the ranks from 15.01.1977 to 16.04.1993. At the time of retirement from service,

the Release Medical Board (RMB) held at Military Hospital, Bareilly on 30.01.2012 assessed his disability '**PRIMARY HYPERTENSION**' @ 30% for life but opined the disability to be neither attributable to nor aggravated (NANA) by military service. The initial claim of disability was rejected on 09.06.2012. The applicant preferred First Appeal on 01.07.2012. The same was rejected vide letter dated 08.11.2012. Thereafter, the applicant preferred Second Appeal on 09.12.2016. The Second Appeal was also rejected by the respondents on 01.07.2017. It is in this perspective that the applicant has preferred the present O.A.

3. Learned Counsel for the applicant pleaded that at the time of commission, the applicant was found mentally and physically fit for service in the Indian Army and there is no note in the service documents that he was suffering from any disease at the time of commission in Army. The disease of the applicant was contacted during the service, hence it is attributable to and aggravated by military service. He pleaded that various Benches of Armed Forces Tribunal have granted disability pension in similar cases, as such the applicant be granted disability pension as well as arrears thereof. He further submitted that in similar cases, Hon'ble Apex Court and various Benches of the Armed Forces Tribunals have granted disability pension, as such the applicant is entitled to disability pension and its rounding off to 50%.

4. On the other hand, Ld. Counsel for the respondents contended that disability of the applicant has been regarded as NANA by the RMB, and net assessment qualifying for disability pension with duration was found NIL for life, hence applicant is not entitled to disability pension. He further pleaded that since applicant was discharged from service on attaining the age of superannuation with effect from 01.07.2012 and RMB found that the individual was posted at Ramgarh (Peace) from August 2005 to August 2008 hence his claim for grant of disability pension was rightly rejected. He pleaded for dismissal of the O.A.

5. We have heard Ld. Counsel for the applicant as also Ld. Counsel for the respondents. We have also gone through the Release Medical Board proceedings as well as the records. The questions which need to be answered are of three folds :-

- (a) Whether the disability of the applicant is attributable to or aggravated by military service?
- (b) Whether the applicant is entitled for grant of disability pension or not and if yes from which date?
- (c) Whether the applicant is entitled for the benefit of rounding off of his disability pension?

6. The law on attributability of a disability has already been settled by the Hon'ble Supreme Court in the case of ***Dharamvir Singh Versus Union of India & Others***, reported in (2013) 7

Supreme Court Cases 316. In this case 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)."

7. In view of the settled position of law on attributability, we find that the RMB has denied attributability to the applicant only by endorsing that the disability "**PRIMARY HYPERTENSION**" is neither attributable to nor aggravated (NANA) by military service as the disease originated in peace areas. This reasoning of RMB is unreasonable and opaque and amounts to saying that there is no stress and strain of military service in peace areas. This kind of reasoning doesn't reflect the complete truth on this matter. The applicant was commissioned on 17.04.1993 and the disability was for the first time detected in the year 2006 i.e. after more than 13 years of military service as a commissioned officer. We are therefore of the considered opinion that the benefit of doubt in these circumstances should be given to the applicant in view of ***Dharamvir Singh vs Union of India & Ors*** (supra) and the disability of the applicant should be considered as aggravated by military service.

8. The law on the point of rounding off of disability pension is no more RES INTEGRA in view of Hon'ble Supreme Court

judgment in the case of ***Union of India and Ors vs Ram Avtar & ors*** (Civil appeal No 418 of 2012 decided on 10th December 2014). In this Judgment the Hon'ble Apex Court nodded in disapproval of the policy of the Government of India in granting the benefit of rounding off of disability pension only to the personnel who have been invalidated out of service and denying the same to the personnel who have retired on attaining the age of superannuation or on completion of their tenure of engagement. The relevant portion of the decision 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.

5. We have heard Learned Counsel for the parties to the lis.

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."*

9. 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."

10. As such, in view of the decision of Hon'ble Supreme Court in the case of **Shiv Dass (supra)**, we are of the considered view that benefit of rounding off of disability pension from 30% for life to 50% for life should be extended to the applicant from three preceding years from the date of filing of the O.A.

11. In view of the above, the Original Application No 602 of 2017 deserves to be allowed, hence **allowed**. The impugned orders

passed by respondents rejecting the disability pension are set aside. The respondents are directed to grant disability element of pension to the applicant @ 30% for life which would stand rounded off to 50% for life w.e.f. three years preceding the date of filing this O.A. The date of filing this O.A. is 01.12.2017. The respondents are 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 @ 9% per annum till actual payment.

No order as to costs.

(Air Marshal B.B.P. Sinha)
Member (A)

(Justice S.V.S. Rathore)
Member (J)

Dated: February, 2019

AKD/UKT