

Court No. 1 (E-Court)**ARMED FORCES TRIBUNAL, REGIONAL BENCH, LUCKNOW****ORIGINAL APPLICATION No. 263 of 2020**

Wednesday, this the 3rd day of February, 2021

**“Hon’ble Mr. Justice Umesh Chandra Srivastava, Member (J)
Hon’ble Vice Admiral Abhay Raghunath Karve, Member (A)”**

No. 15342020A Ex. Naik Saurabh Singh son of Late O.P. Singh,
R/o House No. 538KA/1689, Vigyan Vihar Colony, Triveni nagar,
PH-II, Sitapur Road, Post – Triveni Nagar, Lucknow (UP)-226020.

..... Applicant

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

Versus

1. Union of India, through the Secretary, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, New Delhi-11.
2. The Chief of Army Staff, Integrated Headquarters of Ministry of Defence (Army), DHQ Post Office, New Dehli-11.
3. The Officer In Charge, Bengal Engineer Group Records, PIN-908779.
4. The Chief Controller Defence Accounts, Draupadi Ghat, Allahabad-14.

.....**Respondents**

Ld. Counsel for the : **Dr. Chet Narayan Singh**,
Respondents. Central Govt. Counsel

ORDER

“Per Hon’ble Mr. Justice Umesh Chandra Srivastava, Member (J)”

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

- (I) *The Hon’ble Tribunal may be pleaded to set aside the rejection order dated 29/11/2019 (Annexure No. A-1) and order dated 20/05/2020 (Annexure No. A-2).*
- (II) *The Hon’ble Tribunal may be pleased to direct the respondents to grant Disability Element with effect from 01/12/2019 (date of discharge) along with its arrears and interest thereon at the rate of 18% per annum.*
- (III) *Hon’ble Tribunal may be pleaded further to grant benefit of rounding of disability pension @75 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. Briefly stated, applicant was enrolled in Bengal Engineering Group of Indian Army on 28.02.2002 and was discharged on 30.11.2019 in Low Medical Category P2 (P) on completion terms of engagement. At the time of discharge from service, the Release Medical Board (RMB) held at Military Hospital, Jodhpur on 25.09.2019 assessed his disabilities (i) **‘NON OBSTRUCTIVE HYPERTROPHIC CARDIOMYOPATHY – I 42.2’ @20%** for life, (ii)

'HARMFUL USE OF ALCOHOL – F10.2' @40% for life, (iii) **'GOUTY ARTHRITIS – M10.0'** @20% for life and (iv) **'OBESITY – E66.0'** @ 5% for life, composite @63.52% for life, and opined the disabilities to be neither attributable to nor aggravated (NANA) by service. The applicant's claim for grant of disability pension was rejected by the respondents vide letter dated 29.11.2019. The applicant preferred First Appeal which too was rejected vide letter dated 20.05.2020. It is in this perspective that the applicant has preferred the present Original Application.

3. Learned Counsel for the applicant pleaded that at the time of enrolment, the applicant was found mentally and physically fit for service in the Army and there is no note in the service documents that he was suffering from any disease at the time of enrolment in Army. The diseases of the applicant were contracted during the service, hence they are 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, as such the applicant is entitled to disability pension and its rounding off to 75%.

4. On the other hand, Ld. Counsel for the respondents contended that composite disability of the applicant @63.52% for life has been regarded as NANA by the RMB, hence applicant is

not entitled to disability pension. He pleaded for dismissal of the Original Application.

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, and we find that the questions which need to be answered are of two folds:-

- (a) Whether the disabilities of the applicant are attributable to or aggravated by Military Service?
- (b) Whether the applicant is entitled for the benefit of rounding off the 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 first disability '**NON OBSTRUCTIVE HYPERTROPHIC CARDIOMYOPATHY – I 42.2**' @20% for life, is

neither attributable to nor aggravated (NANA) by service on the ground that disease of heart muscle of unknown origin, related to heredity factor and after onset of this disability the applicant has not served in Fd/CI Ops/HAA areas, therefore, applicant is not entitled to disability pension. However, considering the facts and circumstances of the case, we are of the opinion that this reasoning of Release Medical Board for denying disability pension to applicant is not convincing and doesn't reflect the complete truth on the matter. Peace Stations have their own pressure of rigorous military training and associated stress and strain of military service. The applicant was enrolled in Indian Army on 28.02.2002 and this disability has started after more than 12 years of Army service i.e. in April 2014. 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 this disability of the applicant should be considered as aggravated by military service. However, with regard to second, third and fourth disabilities i.e. '**HARMFUL USE OF ALCOHOL – F10.2**', '**GOUTY ARTHRITIS – M10.0**' and '**OBESITY – E66.0**', we agree with the opinion of the RMB as NANA as the second and third disabilities are due to habit of consumption of alcohol and the onset of fourth disability is a life style disease, related to lacks of physical activities and caloric intake in diet.

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. As such, in view of the decision of Hon'ble Supreme Court in the case of ***Union of India and Ors vs Ram Avtar & ors***, 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 the date of discharge.

10. In view of the above, the Original Application No. 263 of 2020 deserves to be partly allowed, hence **partly allowed**. The impugned orders dated 29.11.2019 and 20.05.2020, annexed as Annexure Nos. A-1 and A-2 of Original Application, are set aside. The first disability i.e. '**NON OBSTRUCTIVE HYPERTROPHIC CARDIOMYOPATHY – I 42.2**' of the applicant is held as aggravated by Army Service. The applicant is entitled to get disability element @20% for life which would be rounded off to 50% from the date of his discharge. The respondents are directed to grant disability element to the applicant @20% for life which would stand rounded off to 50% for life from the date of discharge. 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

10. No order as to costs.

(Vice Admiral Abhay Raghunath Karve)
Member (A)

(Justice Umesh Chandra Srivastava)
Member (J)

Dated : 03 February, 2021

AKD/-