

**Court No. 1****ARMED FORCES TRIBUNAL, REGIONAL BENCH, LUCKNOW****ORIGINAL APPLICATION No. 556 of 2022**Thursday, this the 16<sup>th</sup> day of February, 2023**“Hon’ble Mr. Justice Umesh Chandra Srivastava, Member (J)”****“Hon’ble Vice Admiral Atul Kumar Jain, Member (A)”**

No. 774491-R, Sgt. Dharmesh Kumar (Retd.),  
 S/o Shri Jitendra Prasad Singh,  
 Permanent R/o: Village and Post –Gorigama,  
 District – Muzaffarpur (Bihar) -843117  
 and Presently residing at C/o Shri Chandra Kishore Prasad,  
 Village – Naya Rudhi, Tehsil/Block- Bakshi –Ka-Talab,  
 District – Lucknow (U.P)-226202.

..... Applicant

Ld. Counsel for the Applicant : **Shri Shailendra Kumar Singh**, Advocate.  
**Shri Mahendra Kumar Singh**, Advocate.

Versus

1. Union of India, through Secretary, MoD(IAF), New Delhi - 110066.
2. Chief of Air Staff, Air Hqrs, Vayu Bhawan, New Delhi -110011.
3. Dte of Air Veterans, Air HQrs, Subroto Park, New Delhi-110010.
4. PCDA (P) (Air Force), Draupadi Ghat, Allahabad (UP) -212114.

.....**Respondents**

Ld. Counsel for the Respondents. : **Shri Namit Sharma**, Advocate  
 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 :-

- A. *To quash or set aside Order dated 31 Aug 2021 and Speaking Order dated 19 Jan 2015.*
- B. *To issue/pass an order or directions of appropriate nature to the respondents to grant disability element of disability pension to the applicant @70% for life from the date of his discharge from service (01.06.2021) and to pay the arrears along with suitable rate of interest as deem fit by this Hon'ble Tribunal.*
- C. *To grant the benefit of rounding off of the disability element of disability pension from 70% to 75% from the date of his discharge from service (01.06.2021) in terms of Govt. of India letter dated 31 Jan 2021 and to pay the arrears along with suitable rate of interest as deem fit by this Hon'ble Tribunal.*
- D. *Any other relief as considered proper by the Hon'ble Tribunal awarded in favour of the applicant.*

2. Briefly stated, applicant was enrolled in the Indian Air Force on 07.05.1998 and discharged on 31.05.2021 in Low Medical Category on fulfilling the conditions of his enrolment. At the time of discharge from service, the Release Medical Board (RMB) held at Jammu 23 Wing Air Force on 27.11.2020 assessed his disabilities (i) '**PAN BRACHIAL PLEXUS INJURY (RT) (OPTD) (ICD NO S14.3)**' @ 60% (ii) '**TYPE-2 DIABETES MELLITUS (ICD No E11.0)**' @20%, Composite disabilities @70% 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 vide letter dated 31.08.2021. 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 Air Force and there is no note in the service documents that he was suffering from any disease at the time of enrolment in Air Force. The disease/disability of the applicant were contracted during the service, hence they are attributable to and aggravated by Air Force Service. The applicant is physically handicapped with 50% disablement due to disability No. 1 (**PAN BRACHIAL PLEXUS INJURY (RT) (OPTD)**). The applicant preferred first appeal for grant of disability pension to the respondents but the same has not been replied yet. He pleaded that various Benches of Armed Forces Tribunal have granted disability pension in similar cases in terms of the Hon'ble Apex Court judgments, as such the applicant be granted disability element of pension for both the disabilities @ 70% for life and its rounding off to 75% for life from the date of discharge from service.

4. On the other hand, Ld. Counsel for the respondents contended that composite disabilities of the applicant @ 70% for life have been regarded as NANA by the RMB. First disability of the applicant due to injury is NANA as per approved injury report and second disability 'Diabetes Mellitus Type-2' is NANA as it originated in peace area having no stress/strain of service and not related to military service. Hence, as per Regulation 153 of Pension Regulations for the IAF, 1961 (Part – I) the applicant is not entitled to disability element of 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 Air Force Service?
- (b) Whether the applicant is entitled for the benefit of rounding off the disability element of 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 in respect of his second disability '**TYPE-2 DIABETES MELLITUS**' is neither attributable to nor aggravated (NANA) by service on the ground of onset of disability on 06.08.2020 while posted in Peace location in Jammu, therefore, applicant is not entitled to disability element of 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 element of pension to applicant with regard to second disability

is not convincing and doesn't reflect the complete truth on the matter. Peace Stations have their own pressure of rigorous Air Force training and associated stress and strain of Air Force service. The applicant was enrolled in Indian Air Force on 07.05.1998 and the disability has started after more than 21 years of Air Force service i.e. on 06.08.2020. 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 second disability (Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus) of the applicant should be considered as aggravated by Air Force service.

8. As far as first disability (**PAN BRACHIAL PLEXUS INJURY (RT) (OPTD)**) of the applicant is concerned, we are in agreement with the opinion of RMB that injury sustained during off duty in civil market and therefore, it has no causal connection with the military duty, hence, first disability of the applicant is treated as neither attributable to nor aggravated by military service as per recommendations of RMB.

9. 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 10<sup>th</sup> 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 invalided 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.”*

10. As such, in view of the decision of Hon'ble Supreme Court in the case of **Ram Avtar** (*supra*), we are of the considered view that benefit of rounding off of disability element of disability pension for second disability (Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus) @ 20% for life to be rounded off to

50% for life may be extended to the applicant from the next date of his discharge from service.

11. In view of the above, the Original Application No. 556 of 2022 deserves to be partly allowed, hence partly **allowed**. The second disability (Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus) of the applicant is held as aggravated by Air Force Service. The applicant is entitled to get disability element @ 20% for life which would be rounded off to 50% for life from the next date of his discharge from service. The respondents are directed to grant disability element of disability pension to the applicant @ 20% for life duly rounded off to 50% for life from the next date of his discharge from service. 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

12. No order as to costs.

13. Pending Misc. Application(s), if any, shall stand disposed off.

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

**(Justice Umesh Chandra Srivastava)**  
**Member (J)**

Dated : 16<sup>th</sup> February, 2023

SB/Ashok