

Court No. 1

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

Transferred Application No. 1 of 2023

Monday, this the 20th day of February, 2023

Hon'ble Mr. Justice Ravindra Nath Kakkar, Member (J)
Hon'ble Vice Admiral Atul Kumar Jain, Member (A)

Ex. JWO (AUP) Ram Deo Singh S/o Late Sri Sant Vilas Singh, R/o
- Plot No. E-27, KH No. 23, G/F, Pole No. CH - 65, Gali No. 23,
Nangli Vihar PH-II, New Delhi - 110043.

..... Applicant

Ld. Counsel for the Applicant: **Shri Manoj Kumar Awasthi,**
Advocate

Versus

1. Union of India, Through its Secretary, Ministry of Defence
South Block, New Delhi - 110001.
2. The Chief of the Air Staff, Air HQ (Vayu Bhawan) Rafi Marg,
New Delhi - 110001.
3. Air HQ, Dte of Air Veterans, Subroto Park, New Delhi -
110010.
4. Joint Controller Defence Account (Air Force) Subroto Park,
New Delhi - 110010.

..... Respondents

Ld. Counsel for the Respondents : **Shri RC Shukla,**
Central Govt Counsel.

ORDER (ORAL)

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

1. O.A. No 128 of 2021 has been received by this Tribunal by way of transfer from AFT (PB), New Delhi and re-numbered as T.A. No 01 of 2023. By means of the instant T.A., the petitioner had made the following prayers:-

“(a) Quash and set aside the impugned letters of reply dated 12.04.2019;

(b) Direct Respondents to grant disability Pension @ 50% after rounding off from 20% for life as recommended by RMB to the applicant with effect from the date of discharge from service i.e. 30.09.2017 with interest @ 12% p.a. till final payment is made.

(c) Any other relief which the Hon’ble Tribunal may deem fit and proper in the fact and circumstances of the case”.

2. Briefly stated, applicant was enrolled in the Indian Air Force on 02.07.1980 and was discharged on 30.09.2017 in Low Medical Category on completion of terms of engagement. At the time of discharge from service, the Release Medical Board (RMB) held on 27.01.2017 at HQ Central Air Command assessed his disability ‘**Diabetes Mellitus**’ @ 20% for life and disability qualifying for

disability element was assessed as Nil and opined the disability to be neither attributable to nor aggravated (NANA) by service. The applicant's claim for grant of disability element was rejected vide letter dated 28.02.2017. The applicant preferred First and second appeal which were also rejected vide letters dated 12.04.2019 and 05.02.2021. It is in this perspective that the applicant has preferred the present 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 of the applicant was contacted during the service, hence it is attributable to and aggravated by Air Force Service. He pleaded that various Benches of Armed Forces Tribunal have granted disability element in similar cases, as such the applicant be granted disability element as well as arrears thereof, as applicant is also entitled to disability element and its rounding off to 50%.

4. On the other hand, Ld. Counsel for the respondents contended that applicant was retired from service on completion of terms of engagement for which he has been granted service element. He further contended that composite disability for grant of

disability element has been assessed as NIL for life and has been regarded as NANA by the RMB hence, applicant is not entitled to disability element. He pleaded for dismissal of the instant 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 disability of the applicant is attributable to or aggravated by Air Force Service?
- (b) Whether the applicant is entitled for the benefit of rounding off the disability element?

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 is neither attributable to nor aggravated (NANA) by service on the ground of life style related disorder and onset of disability took place while posted in Peace location, therefore, applicant is not entitled to disability element. 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 to applicant 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 02.07.1980 and the disability has started after more than 34 years of Air Force service i.e. in the year 2015. 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 Air Force service.

8. The law on the point of rounding off of disability element 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 element 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 element @ 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 application.

11. In view of the above, the Transferred Application deserves to be partly allowed, hence **partly allowed**. The impugned orders passed by the respondents rejecting disability element are set aside. The disability suffered by the applicant is held as aggravated by Air Force Service. 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 application. The date of filing of Original Application at Principal Bench, New Delhi is 21.12.2020. 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.

(Vice Admiral Atul Kumar Jain) (Justice Ravindra Nath Kakkar)
Member (A) Member (J)

Dated: 20 February, 2023
UKT/-