Court No.1
Reserved Judgment

ARMED FORCES TRIBUNAL, REGIONAL BENCH,
LUCKNOW

Original Application No. 54 of 2014

Wednesday this the 16th day of September, 2015

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

Ex-Naik(TS)/Driver MT Amar Pal Singh
(Army No. 14513372-H), of Electrical Mechanical Engineers (EME), Secunderabad,
son of Late Kedar Singh, resident of House No. 4,
Sanjay Nagar, Link Road, Post Office – Shyamganj, District – Bareilly (U.P.) – 243005.

…….. Applicant

By Legal Practitioner Shri P.N. Chaturvedi, Advocate

Versus

1. Chief of the Army Staff,
   Integrated Headquarter of the
   Ministry of Defence (Army),
   South Block, New Delhi – 110011.

2. Officer-in-Charge,
   Electrical Mechanical Engineers (EME)
   Secunderabad.

3. Commanding Officer, 606 EME Battalion
   (850 Field Workshhop Company), C/o 56 APO.

4. Principal Controller Defence Accounts (Pension),
   Draupadi Ghat,
   Allahabad.

…… Respondents

By Legal Practitioner Shri Ishraq Farooqui, Learned Counsel for the Central Government

ORDER

"Hon'ble Lt Gen Gyan Bhushan, Member (A)"

1. The instant Original Application has been filed on behalf of the applicant under Section 14 of the Armed Forces Tribunal Act, 2007, and he has claimed the reliefs as under:-

> *"(a). Issue/pass an order or direction to the respondents to quash/set-aside the arbitrary and illegal CCDA (P) letter No. 14513372/D-8/Pen dated 20.12.1989 (Annexure No. A-1(ii)) rejecting the disability pension to him.*
>
> *(b) Issue/pass an order or direction of appropriate nature to the respondents to grant the disability pension to the applicant between 20% to 30% as required vide guide to Medical Officers (Military Pensions), 2002 and as decided by the Release Medical Board with effect from 01.08.1988 for life.*
>
> *(c) Issue/pass any other order or direction as this Hon'ble Tribunal may deem fit in the circumstances of the case.*
>
> *(d) Allow this application with costs."*

2. The admitted and undisputed facts of the case are that the applicant was enrolled in the Indian Army on 18.07.1973 and was discharged from service with effect from 31.07.1988 (Afternoon) on fulfilling his terms & conditions of enrolment. He was in medical category BEE (Permanent) due to NEUROSIS (REACTIVE DEPRESSION). The medical board before his discharge was held in February 1988, which assessed the disability @ 20% for two years and considered it neither

attributable to nor aggravated by military service being constitutional disease. His claim for disability pension was rejected. The applicant did not prefer any appeal against the rejection of his disability pension. Aggrieved by rejection of his disability pension, he has filed the instant O.A. There is a delay of approx 24 years in filing of the O.A., however, since the claim is recurring any nature, the delay in filing of the application was condoned vide this Tribunal order dated 19.02.2014.

3. Heard Shri P.N. Chaturvedi, Learned Counsel for the applicant, Shri Ishraq Farooqui, Learned Counsel for the respondents and perused the record.

4. Learned Counsel for the applicant has submitted that when the applicant joined the Army in 1973; he was medically fit and onset of the disease happened in January 1985. At the time of enrolment the applicant was found medically fit and there is no note of the disease at the time of acceptance in military service. Since the onset of the disease was during the service, as such the disease/disability has to be considered attributable to and aggravated by military service. Learned Counsel for the applicant further submitted that as per judgment of Hon'ble Apex Court in the case of **Sukhvinder Singh Vs. Union of India** reported in (2014) STPL (WEF) 468 SC even if the disability is assessed below 20%, the disability pension is to be granted and should be rounded off to 50%. Since there is no

note of such disease or disability in the service record at the time when he entered the service, it has to be considered that the disability was attributable to and aggravated by the service conditions. The applicant's Counsel placed reliance on the judgment of Hon'ble the Apex Court in the case of Dharamvir Singh reported in (2013) 7 SCC 316, and the subsequent judgment of the Hon'ble Apex Court in the case of **Sukhvinder Singh Vs. Union of India** reported in (2014) STPL (WEF) 468 SC. Lastly, the learned counsel for the applicant also made an oral submission, though not contained in the pleadings, that as per Government Order dated 31.01.2001 the disability pension be rounded off to 50%.

5. Per contra, the Learned Counsel for the respondents submitted that since the medical board had assessed the disability as neither attributable to nor aggravated by military service, as such the applicant was not fulfilling the primary condition for grant of disability pension as laid down in para 173 of Pension Regulations. His claim for disability pension was rejected with an advice to prefer an appeal to the Appellate Committee within six months, if he so desired but the applicant failed to prefer within the stipulated time. It was thereafter presumed that he is satisfied with the decision of the competent authority. He has now filed this O.A. after a lapse of 24 years.

6. Learned Counsel for the Respondents further submitted that applicant's claim for disability pension had been rejected

because it was considered neither attributable to nor aggravated by military service.

7. 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), Chapter IV of Entitlement Rules 1982 and the provisions of Rules 5, 9, 14(b) and 20 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) **Chapter IV – Entitlement Rules**

Entitlement Rules for Casualty Pensionary Awards, 1982

Rule 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.

(c) **Entitlement Rules for Casualty Pension Award, 1982**

"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.

a. The claimant shall not be called upon to prove the conditions of entitlement. He/she will be given more liberally to the claimants in field/afloat service cases.

Disease

14. In respect of diseases, the following rule will be observed:-

(a) cases…….

(b) a disease which has led to an individual's discharge or death will ordinarily be deemed to have arisen in service, if no note of it was made at the time of the individual's acceptance for military service. However, if medical opinion holds, for reasons to be stated, that the disease could not have been detected on medical examination prior to acceptance for service, the disease will not be deemed to have arisen during service.

x x x x x x x x

20. 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."

8. In the case of **Dharmvir Singh Vs. Union of India & others (supra)** the Hon'ble Apex Court has held as under:

"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 Pension), 2002 -"Entitlement : General Principles", including paragraphs 7,8 and 9 as referred to above (para 27)."

xxx xxx xxx

"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"*

xxx xxx xxx

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.

xxx xxx xxx

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."

9. In **Sukhvinder Singh Vs. Union of India (supra),** 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…….".

10. In the case of Veer Pal Singh vs. Ministry of Defence reported in (2013) 8 SCC 83 in paras 11,12,13,17,18 and 19 of the judgment, 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

bahaviour 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.

11. In **Union of India and Ors vs 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 invalided 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.*
>
> *Xxx xxx xxx*
>
> *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."*

12. The bunch of appeals culminated in being dismissed and the judgments of the High Court and Armed Forces Tribunal Benches were nodded in approval attended with direction that the dismissal of those appeals will be taken note of by the High Courts as well as by the Armed Forces Tribunal Benches in granting appropriate relief to the pensioners before them. 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 applicant, who was discharged/invalided out of service on account of his 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, would also be entitled to the benefit of rounding off.

13. Having given due considerations to the rival submissions made on behalf of the parties' Learned Counsel, we find that the applicant had been enrolled in the Indian Army in a fit medical condition and he suffered the disability during his service period, and therefore, in view of the judgment of the Hon'ble The Apex Court in the case of **Dharmvir Singh Vs. Union of India & others** (supra) and the subsequent judgment of the Hon'ble The Apex Court in the case of **Sukhvinder Singh Vs. Union of India** (supra), a presumption has to be drawn in favour of the applicant. Since the applicant suffered the disease due to service conditions and it is for the respondents to rebut the claim of the applicant. It is also made clear in the judgments

of Hon'ble The Apex Court (supra) that the applicant 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. Dwelling on disability less than 20%, Hon'ble The Apex Court in the case of **Sukhvinder Singh Vs. Union of India (supra)** in Para 9 of the judgment held that "whenever a member of the Armed forces is invalided out of service, it perforce has to be assumed that his disability was found to be above twenty per cent". All issues have now been settled, which are applicable or may be raised by the respondents in this case, by the judgments of the Hon'ble The Apex Court referred to above.

14. In this case, no reasoned opinion has been given by the medical board, on the basis of which the medical board concluded that the applicant's disease is neither attributable to nor aggravated by the service conditions. Mere conclusion without reasons is not a valid medical opinion. There is no note of such disease or disability in the service record of the applicant at the time of acceptance in service. In absence of any evidence on record to show that the applicant was suffering from disability or any ailment at the time of his acceptance in service, it will be presumed that he was in sound physical and mental condition at the time of entering service and deterioration of his health has taken place due to service and the disability has to be considered 20% and above. Therefore, the

medical opinion cannot be accepted and the applicant is entitled to the relief as per the above judgments of the Hon'ble The Apex Court.

15. In view of the facts, circumstances and case laws discussed above, we are of the considered view that the applicant is entitled to grant of disability pension @ 20% for two years. The O.A. No. 54 of 2014 is allowed. Impugned letter dated 20.12.1989 (Annexure No. A-1(iii) is set aside. The respondents are directed to grant disability pension to the applicant @ 20% for two years and pay arrears of disability pension with interest @ 9% per annum till the date of actual payment. In case the Applicant represents, the respondents shall also consider for rounding off of disability pension @ 50% as per policy and in the light of the order passed by Hon'ble The Apex Court in the case of Union of India vs. Ram Avtar (supra). Respondents are also directed to refer the case to Review Medical Board for reassessing the medical condition of the applicant for further entitlement of disability pension, if any. The respondents are directed to give effect to the order within three months from the date of receipt of a certified copy of this order.

16. No order as to costs.

(Lt Gen Gyan Bhushan)
Member (A)

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

SB