

RESERVED**ARMED FORCES TRIBUNAL, REGIONAL BENCH,
LUCKNOW****Original Application No. 491 of 2019**Wednesday, this the day 13th day of January, 2021**Hon'ble Mr. Justice Umesh Chandra Srivastava, Member (J)**
Hon'ble Vice Admiral Abhay Raghunath Karve, Member (A)Ex Nk Poonam Singh (No. 2492532X) S/O Sri Uday Singh c/o
Santosh Kumar, Village-Ram Pal Ganj, Post-Neem Teekar,
Thana-Bachharawan, Rae Bareilli.

..... Applicant

Ld. Counsel for the: **Col AK Srivastava (Retd)**, Advocate
Applicant

Versus

1. The Secretary, Govt of India (MoD), South Block, DHQ, P.O. New Delhi-110001.
2. The Chief of Army staff, Integrated HQ of MoD (Army) South Block, DHQ, P.O. New Delhi-110001.
3. AGPS-Integrated HQ of MoD (Army), South Block, DHQ, P.O. New Delhi-110001.
4. OC Records, The Punjab Regimental Centre, Ramgarh Cantt (Jharkhand).
5. Principal Controller of Defence Accounts, PCDA (P), Allahabad-211014.

..... Respondents

Ld. Counsel for the : **Shri Amit Jaiswal**
Respondents Central Govt Counsel.

ORDER

1. The instant Original Application has been filed on behalf of the petitioner under Section 14 of the Armed Forces Tribunal Act, 2007, whereby the petitioner has sought following reliefs:-

- (I) *Issue/pass an order, passed vide Records the Punjab Regiment letter No 2492532X Ex Nk (TS) dated 11.08.2016 (Annexure No A-1), denying/rejecting applicant's 40% disability pension due to AVULSION INJURY (RT) Heel (OPTD) for life on the pretext that said disability was neither attributable to nor aggravated by service as per RMB and thereby grant 50% disability due to AVULSION INJURY (RT) Heel (OPTD) for life.*
- (II) *Issue/pass an order or direction of appropriate nature to the respondents to set aside IHQ of MoD (Army) letter No. 40502/585/2016/AG/PS-4 (Imp-II) dated 11.07.2017 (Annexure No A-2), which rejected the applicant's 1st appeal for grant of 40% disability element of pension on the pretext that said disability was neither attributable to nor aggravated by service as per RMB and thereby grant 50% disability element of pension after rounding off his 40% disability due to AVILSION INJURY (RT) Heel (OPTD) for life.*
- (III) *Issue/pass an order or direction of appropriate nature as this Hon'ble Tribunal deems appropriate in favour of the accused.*
- (IV) *Allow this application with costs and interests.*

2. Brief facts of the case are that the applicant was enrolled in the Indian army on 10.07.1999 and was discharged from service w.e.f. 31.07.2016 (AN) under Army Rule 13 (3) (III) (i) on

completion of his terms of engagement. The applicant while on casual leave was riding a motor cycle which got collided with a truck resulting in severe injury. He was admitted to hospital and placed in low medical category. Prior to discharge, applicant was serving in low medical category and on account of disability 'Avulsion Injury (Rt) Heel (Optd)' his Release Medical Board (RMB) was held on 01.04.2016 which assessed his disability @ 40% for life attributable to military service. Disability pension claim was rejected and communicated to applicant vide letter dated 11.08.2016. Later, first appeal preferred by the applicant was rejected vide order dated 20.06.2017 on the ground of injury being not connected with military duty. It is in this perspective that this O.A. has been filed.

3. Learned counsel for the applicant drew our attention to Entitlement Rules for Casualty Pensionary Awards, 1982 which provides that 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 and in the event of his subsequently being discharged from service on medical grounds, any deterioration in his health which took place is entirely due to military service. Argument of learned counsel for the applicant is that since a person is deemed to be on duty during casual leave, therefore, injury sustained by him during the period of leave has to be treated to be attributable to military service and applicant deserves to be granted disability pension.

4. On the other hand, learned counsel for the respondents contended that though the applicant's disability is attributable to military service but injury has no causal connection with military duty. Therefore, First Appellate Authority (FAA) has rejected his claim for grant of disability pension. He pleaded for O.A. to be dismissed.

5. Thus, the moot question which arises for our consideration is, whether a person who is on leave, if he sustains injury, the injury sustained can be treated to be attributable to or aggravated by Army service?

6. Admittedly, in the instant case, the applicant sustained injury while driving motor cycle during continuance of his casual leave and had met with an accident. It was argued by learned counsel for the applicant that applicant was granted 14 days casual leave for the period from 30.06.2009 to 13.07.2009 to bring his family from Bearar (home town) to Kapurthala (duty station) and while proceeding he met with an accident on 10.07.2009 at about 1700hrs. The distance from home town to Ajmer railway station is said to be 40 kms, and as per Google search, train from Ajmer to Kapurthala leaves at around 1755hrs. Prior to boarding train, luggage was required to be booked which process takes approximately one hour and accident is said to have occurred at about 1700hrs which seems to be not a complete truth. The applicant has also not produced any document i.e. railway warrant/train ticket to show that he alongwith his family was to board train on 10.07.2009. The record reveals that family of

applicant was travelling by bus and he was riding a motor cycle which was hit by a passerby truck. He was rushed to Govt. Hospital, Ajmer by civil police from where he was transferred to Military Hospital, Nasirabad. No bus tickets etc have been brought on record to indicate that applicant's family was travelling by bus and also no road accident report i.e. NCR/General Diary is on record to show factum of accident. In court of inquiry nothing has been mentioned about police report after accident, which should have been brought on record to justify the case. Thus, there seems to be no nexus of accident with military duty. On this point a large number of judgements have been pronounced by various Courts vide which it has been made clear that for granting disability element the cause of injury suffered by the military personnel should bear a causal connection with military service. Whether injury was suffered during annual leave or casual leave or at the place of posting or during working hours is not relevant because attributability to military service is a factor which is required to be established in all such cases. In the instant case, the medical board and appellate authority has denied attributability on the ground of no nexus of injury/disability with military duty.

7. Hon'ble High Court in the case of ***Madan Singh Shekhawat***, AIR 1999 SC 3378 says that an Army personnel will be deemed to be on duty when he is on any type of authorized leave during travelling to or from home from place of posting. Since in the facts of that case, as stated earlier, the applicant was travelling for getting his return reservation to join duty, had met with an

accident, therefore, it was held that the injury sustained by the applicant was attributable to Army service, therefore, the *ratio decidendi* decided in the case of **Debasish Ghosh** (supra) is that there must be a reasonable nexus between the cause of injury sustained and Army duty.

8. In the case relied upon by the learned counsel for the respondents in **Union of India vs Ex Naik Vijay Kumar**, (2015) 10 SCC 460, Hon'ble Apex Court in para-19 has held, to quote:-

“19. In the light of above discussion, it is clear that the injury suffered by the respondent has no casual connection with the military service. The tribunal failed to appreciate that the accident resulting in injury to the respondent was not even remotely connected to his military duty and it falls in the domain of an entirely private act and therefore the impugned orders cannot be sustained.”

9. In the Full Bench decision of Hon'ble Delhi High Court in the case of **Ex Nk Dilbag Singh vs Union of India & Ors** delivered on 22.08.2008 in Writ Petition No. (C) 6959 of 2004 and connected matters, their Lordships observed in para-19, 23 and 24 as under:-

“19. For similar reasons we are unable to subscribe to the views in Ex. Sepoy Hayat Mohammed -vs- Union of India, 138(2007) DLT 539(DB) to the effect that the petitioner was eligible for the grant of Disability Pension owing to the fact that while on casual leave in his home he suffered several injuries owing to a steel girder and roof slabs falling on him. One of the reasons which appear to have persuaded the same Division Bench was that persons on annual leave are subject to the Army Act and can be recalled at any time as leave is at the discretion of the Authorities concerned. A rule of this nature is necessary to cover the eruption

of insurgencies or the breakout of a war. They neither envisage nor attempt to deal with liability to pay Disability Pension. It is impermissible to extrapolate a rule catering for a particular situation to altogether different circumstances.

23. We have also perused the detailed Judgment of the Division Bench of this Court in Shri Bhagwan wherein Jarnail Singh also came to be discussed. The Bench observed that - "An individual may be "on duty" for all practical purposes such as receipt of wages etc. but that does not mean that he is "on duty" for the purpose of claiming disability pension under the 1982 Entitlement Rules. A person to be on duty is required, under the 1982 Entitlement Rules, to be performing a task, the failure to do which would constitute an offence triable under the disciplinary code applicable to him. A person operating a wheat thresher while on casual leave cannot, by any stretch of imagination, be said to be performing an official duty or a task the failure to perform which would lead to disciplinary action". We respectfully affirm these views of the Division Bench.

24. To sum up our analysis, the foremost feature, consistently highlighted by the Hon'ble Supreme Court, is that it requires to be established that the injury or fatality suffered by the concerned military personnel bears a causal connection with military service. Secondly, if this obligation exists so far as discharge from the Armed Forces on the opinion of a Medical Board the obligation and responsibility a fortiori exists so far as injuries and fatalities suffered during casual leave are concerned. Thirdly, as a natural corollary it is irrelevant whether the concerned personnel was on casual or annual leave at the time or at the place when and where the incident transpired. This is so because it is the causal connection which alone is relevant. Fourthly, since travel to and fro the place of posting may not appear to everyone as an incident of military service, a specific provision has been incorporated in the Pension Regulations to bring such travel within the entitlement for Disability Pension if an injury is sustained in this duration. Fifthly, the Hon'ble Supreme Court has simply given effect to this Rule and has not

laid down in any decision that each and every injury sustained while availing of casual leave would entitle the victim to claim Disability Pension. Sixthly, provisions treating casual leave as on duty would be relevant for deciding questions pertaining to pay or to the right of the Authorities to curtail or cancel the leave. Such like provisions have been adverted to by the Supreme Court only to buttress their conclusion that travel to and fro the place of posting is an incident of military service. Lastly, injury or death resulting from an activity not connected with military service would not justify and sustain a claim for Disability Pension. This is so regardless of whether the injury or death has occurred at the place of posting or during working hours. This is because attributability to military service is a factor which is required to be established.”

10. The aforesaid view expressed by Full Bench of Hon’ble Delhi High Court was considered by Hon’ble Supreme Court in the case of ***Union of India & ors vs. Jujhar Singh***, reported in (2011) 7 SCC 735. Hon’ble Supreme Court has also considered the case of ***Regional Director, E.S.I. Corporation & anr vs. Francis De Costa and another***, (1996) 6 SCC 1. Though the case of ***Francis De Costa*** (supra) was not a case relating to Army, but the question involved in that case was whether injury the injury sustained by respondent in the said case amounted to “employment injury” within the meaning of Employees’ State Insurance Act, 1948 and he is entitled to claim disablement benefit. This question was replied by Hon’ble Apex Court in negative. Hon’ble Apex Court observed as under:-

“A road accident may happen anywhere at any time. But such accident cannot be said to have arisen out of employment, unless it can be shown that the employee was doing something incidental to his employment.”

11. In the case of **Jujhar Singh** (supra) Hon'ble Apex Court has concluded in Para 23 as under:-

“23. As rightly pointed by the counsel for the Union of India, the High Court failed to appreciate that even though the respondent sustained injuries while he was on annual leave in 1987, he was kept in service till superannuation and he was superannuated from service w.e.f. 01.07.1998. It is relevant to point out that he was also granted full normal pension as admissible under the Regulations. In the case on hand, inasmuch as the injury which had no connection with the military service even though suffered during annual leave cannot be termed as attributable to or aggravated by military service. The member of the Armed Forces who is claiming disability pension must be able to show a normal nexus between the act, omission or commission resulting in an injury to the person and the normal expected standard of duties and way of life expected from member of such forces. Inasmuch as the respondent sustained disability when he was on annual leave that too at his home town in a road accident, the conclusion of the learned Single Judge that he is entitled to disability pension under Regulation 179 is not based on any material whatsoever. Unfortunately, the Division Bench, without assigning any reason, by way of a cryptic order, confirmed the order of the learned Single Judge.”

12. The view expressed by the Full Bench of Hon'ble Delhi High Court, approved by Hon'ble Apex Court, clearly establishes that the requirement of law is that it has to be established that the cause of injury suffered by the military personnel bears a causal connection with military service. Whether injury was suffered during annual leave or casual leave or at the place of posting or during working hours is not relevant because attributability to military service is a factor which is required to be established in all such cases. A careful study of observations made in the case of

Ex Nk Dilbagh Singh vs Union of India, 2008 (106) Delhi Reported Judgments 865 shows that it considered the word “duty” as given in Appendix II of Regulation 423 of Medical Services of Armed Forces Regulations, 1983 defining the attributability to service.

13. Hon’ble Apex Court in ***Union of India & ors vs. Baljit Singh***, reported in (1996) 11 SCC 315, has observed that in each case where a disability pension is sought for and made a claim, it must be affirmatively established as a fact as to whether the injury sustained was due to military service or was aggravated by military service.

14. The consequence of the principle of law laid down by Hon’ble Full Bench in the case of ***Ex Nk Dilbag Singh*** (supra) is that there should be a causal connection between the commission or omission of the act of the Army personnel with discharge of his military duty which is sine qua non for the claim of disability pension. This principle of law laid down in the case of ***Ex Nk Dilbag Singh*** (Supra) was nodded with approval by the Hon’ble Apex Court in the case of ***Jujhar Singh*** (Supra).

15. It may be noticed that in the case of ***Union of India and another vs Talwinder Singh***, (2012) 5 SCC 480, Hon’ble the Apex Court has also considered the same point of grant of disability pension for injury sustained while on annual leave. The Apex Court in Paras 11, 12 and 14 of the judgment has held as follows:-

“11. This Court recently decided an identical case in Union of India & Ors. v. Jujhar Singh, AIR 2011 SC 2598, and after reconsidering a large number of earlier judgments including Secretary, Ministry of Defence & Ors. v. A.V. Damodaran (dead) through L.Rs. & Ors., (2009) 9 SCC 140; Baljit Singh’s (supra); Regional Director, ESI Corporation & Anr. v. Francis De Costa & Anr., AIR 1997 SC 432, came to the conclusion that in view of Regulation 179, a discharged person can be granted disability pension only if the disability is attributable to or aggravated by military service and such a finding has been recorded by Service Medical Authorities. In case the Medical Authorities records the specific finding to the effect that disability was neither attributable to nor aggravated by the military service, the court should not ignore such a finding for the reason that Medical Board is specialised authority composed of expert medical doctors and it is a final authority to give opinion regarding attributability and aggravation of the disability due to the military service and the conditions of service resulting in the disablement of the individual.

“12. A person claiming disability pension must be able to show a reasonable nexus between the act, omission or commission resulting in an injury to the person and the normal expected standard of duties and way of life expected from such person. As the military personnel sustained disability when he was on an annual leave that too at his home town in a road accident, it could not be held that the injuries could be attributable to or aggravated by military service. Such a person would not be entitled to disability pension. This view stands fully fortified by the earlier judgment of this Court in Ministry of Defence v. Ajit Singh.”

14. We are of the view that the opinion of the Medical Board which is an expert body must be given due weight, value and credence. Person claiming disability pension must establish that the injury suffered by him bears a causal connection with military service. In the instant case, as the injury suffered by the respondent could not be attributable to or aggravated by the military service he is not entitled for disability pension.”

16. Hon'ble Apex Court in the case of **Sukhwant Singh vs Union of India & Ors**, (2012) 12 SCC 228 has again considered this point and held in para 6 as under:-

“6. In our view, the Tribunal has rightly summed up the legal position on the issue of entitlement of disability pension resulting from any injuries, etc. and it has correctly held that in both cases there was no casual connection between the injuries suffered by the appellants and their service in the military and their cases were, therefore, clearly not covered by Regulation 173 of the Regulations. The view taken by the Tribunal is also supported by a recent decision of this Court in Union of India vs Jujhar Singh.”

17. Thus, Hon'ble Apex Court has confirmed the view taken by the Armed Forces Tribunal. By the said judgment, Hon'ble Apex Court has decided two Appeals by a common judgment. First Appeal was of **Sukhwant Singh vs. Union of India**, (Civil Appeal No. 1987/2011 and the other was **Jagtar Singh vs. Union of India** (Civil Appeal No. 1988 of 2011).

18. Facts of Civil Appeal No. 1987 of 2011, as they appear from the judgment of Hon'ble Apex Court, were as under:-

“Appellant Sukhwant Singh, enrolled in the Army, while he was on nine days' casual leave, sustained an injury in a scooter accident that rendered him unsuitable for any further military service. Therefore, he was discharged from service and his claim for the disability pension was rejected by the authorities concerned on the ground that the injury sustained by the appellant was not attributable to military service as stipulated in Regulation 173 of the Army Pension Regulations, 1961.”

19. Facts of Civil Appeal No. 1988 of 2011, as noticed by Hon'ble Apex Court in aforesaid Civil Appeal, were as under:-

“Appellant Jagtar Singh was on two months’ annual leave. He met with an accident in which his brother died and he himself received serious injuries that led to the amputation of his left leg above the knee. In his petition appellant did not disclose the circumstances in which the accident took place.”

20. In the above mentioned factual background the Tribunal rejected the claim of the Army personnel for grant of disability pension for the reasons mentioned in detail in its judgment. The reasons given by the Tribunal were considered by Hon'ble Apex Court in its judgment and the same were confirmed. We feel it pertinent to mention that facts of above mentioned both the cases were absolutely similar to the present case before us.

21. To consider as to what acts are covered by the term ‘duty’ we may like to make reference to Entitlement Rules, Appendix II of Clause 12 which defines the word duty, which for convenience sake may be reproduced as under:

“DUTY: 12. A person subject to the disciplinary code of the Armed Forces is on “duty”:- (a) When performing an official task or a task, failure to do which would constitute an offence triable under the disciplinary code applicable to him.

(b) When moving from one place of duty to another place of duty irrespective of the mode of movement.

(c) During the period of participation in recreation and other unit activities organised or permitted by Service Authorities and during the period of travelling in a body or singly by a prescribed or organised route.

Note:1

(a) *Personnel of the Armed Forces participating in*

(i) *Local/national / international sports tournaments as member of service teams, or,*

(ii) *Mountaineering expeditions / gliding organised by service authorities, with the approval of Service Hqrs. will be deemed to be “on duty” for purposes of these rules.*

(b) Personnel of the Armed Forces participating in the above named sports tournaments or in privately organised mountaineering expeditions or indulging in gliding as a hobby in their individual capacity, will not be deemed to be „on duty” for purposes of these rules, even though prior permission of the competent service authorities may have been obtained by them.

(c) Injuries sustained by the personnel of the Armed Forces in impromptu games and sports outside parade hours, which are organised by, or disability arising from such injuries, will continue to be regarded as having occurred while „on duty” for purposes of these rules.

Note: 2

The personnel of the Armed Forces deputed for training at courses conducted by the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, Darjeeling shall be treated on par with personnel attending other authorised professional courses or exercises for the Defence Services for the purpose of the grant of disability family pension on account of disability/death sustained during the courses.

(d) When proceeding from his leave station or returning to duty from his leave station, provided entitled to travel at public expenses i.e. on railway warrants, on concessional voucher, on cash TA (irrespective of whether railway warrant/cash TA is admitted for the whole journey or for a portion only), in government transport or when road mileage is paid/payable for the journey.

(e) When journeying by a reasonable route from one’s quarter to and back from the appointed place of duty, under organised

arrangements or by a private conveyance when a person is entitled to use service transport but that transport is not available.

(f) An accident which occurs when a man is not strictly on duty, as defined may also be attributable to service, provided that it involved risk which was definitely enhanced in kind or degree by the nature, conditions, obligations or incidents of his service and that the same was not a risk common to human existence in modern conditions in India. Thus for instance, where a person is killed or injured by another party by reason of belonging to the Armed Forces, he shall be deemed „on duty“ at the relevant time. This benefit will be given more liberally to the claimant in cases occurring on active service as defined in the Army/Navy/Air Force Act.”

22. The co-ordinate Bench of the Armed Forces Tribunal, Regional Bench, Chandigarh in the case of ***Baldev Singh vs Union of India O.A. No. 3690 of 2013 decided on 02.03.2016*** has considered this question in great detail. It would be fruitful to reproduce para-21 as follows:-

“21. Recently, the Apex Court in Civil Appeal No.6583 of 2015 Union of India & others Versus Ex Naik Vijay Kumar, vide its judgment dated 26th August, 2015 has held that if the injury suffered or death caused to an individual, has no causal connection with the military service, it cannot be said that the said disability or death is attributable to military service. In the said judgment, the apex court has considered para 12 of the judgment given in another case Union of India and Another Vs. Talwinder Singh (2012) 5 SCC 480 which is reproduced as below :

“12. A person claiming disability pension must be able to show a reasonable nexus between the act, omission or commission resulting in an injury to the person and the normal expected standard of duties and way of life expected from such

person. As the military personnel sustained disability when he was on annual leave that too at his home town in a road accident, it could not be held that the injuries could be attributable to or aggravated by military service. Such a person would not be entitled to disability pension. This view stands fully fortified by the earlier judgment of this court in Ministry of Defence V. Ajit Singh, (2009) 7 SCC 328.

23. We are in full agreement with the views expressed by the co-ordinate Bench of Armed Forces Tribunal, Chandigarh in the case of **Baldev Singh** (supra), which finds full support from several pronouncements of Hon'ble Apex Court, and keeping in view the principle of law laid down in that case, we find that learned counsel for the applicant has not been able to make out a case in the present O.A. that the applicant's injury due to accident during casual leave has any causal connection with army duty.

24. O.A. has no merits, deserves to be dismissed and is accordingly **dismissed**.

No order as to costs.

(Vide Admiral Abhay Raghunath Karve) (Justice Umesh Chandra Srivastava)
Member (A) Member (J)

Dated : 13th January, 2021

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