

Court No. 1

ARMED FORCES TRIBUNAL, REGIONAL BENCH, LUCKNOW

ORIGINAL APPLICATION No. 314 of 2024

Thursday, this the 02nd day of January, 2025

**“Hon’ble Mr. Justice Anil Kumar, Member (J)
Hon’ble Vice Admiral Atul Kumar Jain, Member (A)”**

JC 670211X Ex. Subedar Lal Bahadur S/o Late Ram Suchit,
House No. 53/T/1B/A, Bhola Ka Purwa, Neewa, Prayagraj.

..... Applicant

Ld. Counsel for the Applicant : **Col. Ashok Kumar (Retd.)**, Advocate
Shri Rohit Kumar, Advocate

Versus

1. Union of India, through Secretary, Ministry of Defence, New Delhi.
2. Commandant cum Chief Records Officer, Bangalore.
3. Chairperson, 1st Appellate Committee on Pensions, Additional Director General Personnel Services (PS-4), Adjutant General’s Branch, Room No. 416, 4th Floor, Integrated Headquarters of Ministry of Defence (Army), Army Headquarters, DHQ PO, New Delhi -110011.

.....Respondents

Ld. Counsel for the Respondents. : **Shri Bipin Kumar Singh**, Advocate
Central Govt. Standing Counsel

ORDER**“Per Hon’ble Mr. Justice Anil Kumar, 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) *Quash the rejection order of the ASC Records bearing No. No. JC670211X/NS/DP dated 30 Mar 2022 (Annexure A-1 refers) with all the consequential benefits to the applicant.*
- (b) *Direct the respondents to pay the disability pension to the applicant @20% with effect from 18 Feb 2022 (date of discharge of the applicant).*
- (c) *To direct the respondents to grant the benefits of rounding to the applicant as catered in the paragraph 7.2 of the Government of India, Ministry of Defence, New Delhi policy letter No. 1(2) /97/I/D(Pen-C) dated 31 Jan 2001, effective from 01 Jan 1996.*
- (d) *Direct the respondents to decide the statutory first appeal of the applicant bearing No. CAK/D/SP/AAFN/D/19720 dated 31 May 2023 (Annexure A-2 refers) within a timeframe to be fixed by this Hon’ble Tribunal preferably one month as over one year one month have already elapsed.*
- (e) *To issue any other order or direction considered expedient and in the interest of Justice and equity.*
- (f) *Award cost of the petition.*

2. Briefly stated, applicant was enrolled in the Indian Army on 15.02.1992 and discharged on 28.02.2022 (AN) in Low Medical Category on fulfilling the conditions of his enrolment under Rule 13

(3) Item I (i) (a) of the Army Rules, 1954. The applicant is in receipt of Service Pension. At the time of discharge from service, the Release Medical Board (RMB) held at 181 Military Hospital on 15.01.2022 assessed his disability '**PATHOLOGICAL MYOPIA RIGHT EYE (ICD CODE H 52.1)**' @20% for life and opined the disability to be neither attributable to nor aggravated (NANA) by service. The applicant's claim for grant of disability pension was rejected vide letter dated 30.03.2022. The applicant preferred First Appeal dated 31.05.2023 but of no avail. 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 disease of the applicant was contracted during the service, hence it is 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 element of disability pension and its rounding off to 50%.

4. On the other hand, Ld. Counsel for the respondents contended that disability of the applicant @20% for life has been regarded as NANA by the RMB, hence as per Regulation 53(a) of the Pension Regulations for the Army, 2008 (Part-I) which provides

that “An individual released/retired/ discharged on completion of terms of engagement or on completion of service limits or on attaining the prescribed age (irrespective of his period of engagement), if found suffering from a disability attributable to or aggravated by military service and so recorded by Release Medical Board, may be granted disability element in addition to service pension or service gratuity from the date of retirement/discharge, if the accepted degree of disability is assessed at 20% or more” the applicant is not entitled to disability element of disability pension. He further contended that while posted with 27 Coy ASC (Sup) the applicant was diagnosed with the aforesaid disability for which he was placed in low medical category E2 (T-24) with effect from 24.02.2016 and was considered as aggravated by service since, onset of disease in Field/HAA/CI OPS due to prolonged clerical duties under poor lighting condition. In subsequent review carried out at Military Hospital, Ambala the applicant was further downgraded to low medical category E2 (P) for his disability with effect from 10.08.2016 and continued in the same medical category till his discharge from service. Although the applicant was in low medical category but he was retained in service under shelter appointment till completion of his terms of engagement. The RMB opined the applicant’s disability as “Not Attributable” on the ground that there is no history of service related trauma/infection and disability incidentally detected during PME. Further, since the onset of disability was in Ambala (Peace), hence, RMB opined the

applicant's disability as "Not Aggravated" on the ground that since etiopathogenesis of disability is not related to military service. Ld. Counsel for the respondents further submitted that the applicant's belated statutory First Appeal dated 31.05.2023 was replied vide ASC Records (South) letter dated 25.07.2023 with an advice to submit ink signed copy of 1st Appeal against rejection of initial claim for disability pension along with delay report and undertaking certificate for further processing of his appeal with Appellate Committee on First Appeal. Instead of submitting the requisite documents, the applicant against submitted the same Appeal through a Legal Notice dated 31.05.2023 by his Counsel for consideration of his appeal to First Appellate Committee on Pension, AG Branch, IHQ of MoD (Army) which too was replied vide ASC Records (South) letter dated 10.08.2023. He further submitted that since the applicant is not entitled for the grant of disability pension, the question of rounding off of disability pension does not arise. 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 two folds:-

- (a) Whether the disability of the applicant is attributable to or aggravated by Military 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 only by endorsing that the disability '**PATHOLOGICAL MYOPIA RIGHT EYE (ICD CODE H 52.1)**' is neither attributable to nor aggravated (NANA) by service on the ground of onset of disability in February, 2016 while posted in Peace location (Ambala Cantt.) and etiopathogenesis of disability is not related to military service, 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 disability pension to applicant is cryptic, 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 15.02.1992 and the disability has started after more than 23 years of Army service i.e. in February, 2016. 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 military service.

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 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."*

9. Additionally, consequent upon the issue of Government of India, Ministry of Defence letter No. 17(01)/2017/D(Pen/Policy) dated 23.01.2018, Principal Controller of Defence Accounts (Pensions), Prayagraj has issued Circular No. 596 dated 09.02.2018 wherein it is provided that the cases where Armed Forces Pensioners who were retired/discharged voluntary or otherwise with disability and they were in receipt of Disability/War Injury Element as on 31.12.2015, their extent of disability/War Injury Element shall be re-computed in the manner given in the said Circular which is applicable with effect from 01.01.2016.

10. As such, in view of the decision of Hon'ble Supreme Court in the cases of ***Union of India and Ors vs Ram Avtar & ors (supra)***

as well as Government of India, Ministry of Defence letter No. 7(01)/2017/D(Pen/Policy) dated 23.01.2018, we are of the considered view that benefit of rounding off of disability element of disability pension @20% for life to be rounded off to 50% for life may be extended to the applicant from the next date of his discharge.

11. In view of the above, the **Original Application No. 314 of 2024** deserves to be allowed, hence **allowed**. The impugned orders, rejecting the applicant's claim for grant of disability element of disability pension, are set aside. The disability 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% for life from the next 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 next date of his 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.

12. No order as to costs.

(Vice Admiral Atul Kumar Jain)
Member (A)

(Justice Anil Kumar)
Member (J)

Dated : 02 January, 2025

Ashok/AKD/-