

Court No. 1**ARMED FORCES TRIBUNAL, REGIONAL BENCH, LUCKNOW****ORIGINAL APPLICATION No. 741 of 2023**Tuesday, this the 07th day of November, 2023**“Hon’ble Mr. Justice Ravindra Nath Kakkar, Member (J)”****“Hon’ble Vice Admiral Atul Kumar Jain, Member (A)”**

No. 15467867-K, Ex. DFR Yogender Singh Solanki, resident of Narayanganj, Gali No. 2 Pankha Road Ujhani, District – Badaun, State – Uttar Pradesh, Pin code – 243639.

..... Applicant

Ld. Counsel for the Applicant : **Shri Raj Kumar Mishra**, Advocate.
Shri A.K. Chaudhary, Advocate
Ms. Upasna Mishra, Advocate

Versus

1. Union of India, through the Secretary, Ministry of Defence, Room No. 101A, South Block, DHQ PO, New Delhi, Pin-110011.
2. Chief of the Army Staff, Adjutant General Branch, IHQ of MoD (Army), New Delhi -110011.
3. Armoured Corps Record, PIN – 900476, C/o 56 APO.
4. The PCDA (Pension), Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, Pin-211012.

.....Respondents

Ld. Counsel for the Respondents. : **Ms. Amrita Chakraborty**, Advocate
Central Govt. Standing Counsel
Assisted by **Maj. Uma Yadav**,
Departmental Representative

ORDER

“Per Hon’ble Mr. Justice Ravindra Nath Kakkar, 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 and set aside the impugned order dated 30.11.2019 to the extent this order deny the grant of Disability Pension to the applicant.*
- (b) *Direct the Respondents to treat the disabilities of the Applicant namely, namely, “ID (i) Primary Hypertension, ID (ii) Obesity, ID (iii) Stroke Ischemic (L/T) MCA Territory and ID (iv) Dyslipidemia” as Attributable to/ Aggravated by stress and strain of military services.*
- (c) *Direct the Respondents to grant disability element of pension to the Applicant @50% for life w.e.f. 01.07.2018 as degree of his disablement for because of the said disability has been assessed @50% for life by the RMB.*
- (d) *Direct the Respondent to pay disability element of pension to the Applicant at an enhanced rate @75% for life w.e.f. 01.07.2018 by rounding off / broad –banding Applicant’s disability from 50% to 75% as per Govt. Policy dated 31.01.2001.*
- (e) *Direct the Respondents to pay to the Applicant an interest @10% per annum on the arrears of enhanced disability pension w.e.f. 01.07.2018 and/or.*
- (f) *To pass such further order or orders/Directions as this Hon’ble Tribunal may deem fit and proper in accordance with law.*

2. Briefly stated, applicant was enrolled in the Armoured Corps of Indian Army on 03.03.1995 and discharged on 30.06.2018 in Low Medical Category under Rule 13 (3) Item III (iii)(a)(i) of the Army Rules, 1954 as no shelter appointment was available in the Unit. At the time of discharge from service, the Release Medical Board (RMB) held at 167 Military Hospital Mamun on 14.03.2018 assessed his disabilities (i) **'PRIMARY HYPERTENSION (I10)'** @ 30% for life (ii) **'OBESITY (E66)'** @1-5% for life, (iii) **'STROKE ISCHEMIC (LT) MCA TERRITORY (I63.51)'** @ 20 % for life and (iv) **'DYSLIPIDEMIA (E78)'** @ 6-10% for life, **composite disabilities @50% 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 15.10.2018. The applicant preferred First Appeal which too was rejected vide letter dated 13.11.2019 which was communicated to the applicant vide letter dated 30.11.2019. 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 diseases of the applicant were contracted during the service, hence they are 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 pension and its rounding off to 75%.

4. On the other hand, Ld. Counsel for the respondents contended that composite disabilities of the applicant @ 50% for life have been regarded as NANA by the RMB, hence as per Regulations 81 and 95 of Pension Regulations for the Army, 2008 (Part-I) the applicant is not entitled to disability element of disability pension. She 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 Military Service?
- (b) Whether the applicant is entitled for the benefit of rounding off the disability element 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 first and third disabilities '**PRIMARY HYPERTENSION (I10)**' and '**STROKE ISCHEMIC (LT) MCA TERRITORY (I63.51)**' are neither attributable to nor aggravated (NANA) by service on the ground of onset of disabilities on 02.02.2015 and 06.07.2016 while posted in Peace location (Mhow and Pathankot), 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 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 03.03.1995 and the first and third disabilities have started after more than 19 and 20 years of Army service i.e. on 02.02.2015 and 06.07.2016. 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 first and third disabilities of the applicant i.e. '**PRIMARY HYPERTENSION (I10)**' and '**STROKE ISCHEMIC (LT)**

MCA TERRITORY (I63.51) should be considered as aggravated by military service.

8. However, with regard to second and fourth disabilities i.e. **'OBESITY (E66)'** and **'DYSLIPIDEMIA (E78)'** we are agree with the opinion of the RMB as NANA as they are life style disorder.

9. In para 17 A (a) of Chapter VII of the Guide to Medical Officer (Military Pensions), 2002 the provision for composite assessment has been mentioned which reads as under :-

"17A. Composite Assessment

(a) Where there are two or more disabilities due to service, compensation will be based on the composite assessment of the degree of disablement. Generally speaking, when separate disabilities have entirely different functional effects, the composite assessment will be the arithmetical sum of their separate assessment. But where the functional effects of the disabilities overlap, the composite assessment will be reduced in proportion to the degree of overlapping. There is a tendency for some Medical Boards to reduce the composite assessment in the former group of cases. This is not correct."

10. In the instant case there are functional effects of the first and third disabilities overlapping, as such composite assessment is to be reduced in proportion to the degree of overlapping. The degree of first disability is @30% and third disability is @20% for which we are of the view that there is some overlapping. Accordingly, we hold that composite assessment of first and third disabilities is less than @50% for life.

11. 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 January 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 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."*

12. Additionally, consequent upon the issue of Government of India, Ministry of Defence letter No. 17(01)/2017(01)/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.

13. 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."

14. As such, in view of the decision of Hon'ble Supreme Court in the case of ***Shiv Dass (supra)*** as well as Government of India, Ministry of Defence letter No. 17(01)/2017(01)/D(Pen/Policy) dated 23.01.2018, we are of the considered view that benefit of rounding off of disability element of disability pension less than @50% 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 Original Application.

15. In view of the above, the **Original Application No. 741 of 2023** deserves to be partly allowed, hence **partly allowed**. The impugned orders, rejecting the applicant's claim for grant of disability element of disability pension, are set aside. The first and third disabilities i.e. **'PRIMARY HYPERTENSION (I10)** and **'STROKE ISCHEMIC (LT) MCA TERRITORY (I63.51)'** of the applicant are held as aggravated by Army Service. The applicant is entitled to get disability element less than @50% for life which would be rounded off to 50% for life w.e.f. three years preceding the date of filing of Original Application. The respondents are directed to grant disability element to the applicant less than @50% for life which would stand rounded off to 50% for life w.e.f. three years preceding the date of filing of Original Application. The date of filing of Original Application is 28.06.2023. 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.

16. No order as to costs.

17. Major Uma Yadav, Departmental Representative for the respondents orally submitted to grant Leave to Appeal against the above order which we have considered and no point of law of general public importance being involved in the case the plea is rejected.

(Vice Admiral Atul Kumar Jain)
Member (A)

(Justice Ravindra Nath Kakkar)
Member (J)

Dated : 07 November, 2023

Ashok/AKD/-