

Court No. 1
Reserved

ARMED FORCES TRIBUNAL, REGIONAL BENCH, LUCKNOW

ORIGINAL APPLICATION No. 456 of 2023

Monday, this the 11th day of December, 2023

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

No. 128854A, Nitender Singh, Ex. MCMECH (P)-II, S/o Sri Ummed Singh, presently residing at C/o Pradeep Chaudhary, Mohalla Steemar Ghat, Head Post Office – Ghazipur, District – Ghazipur, Uttar Pradesh-233001.

..... **Applicant**

Counsel for the : **Shri Manish Kumar Rai**, Advocate
Applicant

Versus

1. Union of India through Secretary, Ministry of Defence, New Delhi-110011.
2. Chief of the Naval Staff, Ministry of Defence (Navy), Integrated Headquarters, Sena Bhawan, New Delhi-11011.
3. Logistic Officer In-charge, Naval Pension Office (NAVPEN), INS Tana Ji, Sion-Trombay Road, Mankhurd, Mumbai-400088.
4. Principal Controller of Defence Accounts (Navy), No. 1 Cooperage Road, Mumbai-400001.

.....**Respondents**

Counsel for the : **Ms. Prerna Singh**, Advocate
Respondents. Central Govt. 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) To issue/pass an order or directions to opposite parties for grant of disability element of disability pension to the applicant @100% for life long for disability “C-3-6 Cord contusion with Post Traumatic, Quadriplegia (OPTD), ASIA ‘C’ Neurology (ICD No. 14.6)” from the next date of his discharge i.e. from 01.02.2021 by holding disability as attributable to and aggravated by military service.

(b) To issue/pass an order or directions to opposite parties to pay arrear of disability element of pension to applicant along with 12% interest from the next date of his discharge i.e. from 01.02.2021 till it is actually paid.

(c) Any other relief which the Tribunal may deem fit and proper in the facts and circumstances of the case in favour of the applicant.

2. Facts giving rise to Original Application in brief are that applicant was enrolled in the Indian Navy on 30.01.2001 and was invalided out from service on 31.01.2021 in low medical category after rendering 20 years and 01 day of service. The applicant was granted 30 days Casual Leave with effect from 04.11.2019. According to the applicant, during the aforesaid Casual Leave, on 12.11.2019 applicant while travelling to his leave station New Delhi from his duty station

Visakhapatnam by a hired car on his own expenses met with a Road traffic accident enroute near Araku Valley where the Car in which he was travelling collided with a tempo and sustained severe injury, which after investigation was found to be a case of **“C3-6 CORD CONTUSION WITH POST TRAUMATIC QUADRIPARESIS (OPTD) : ASIA ‘C’ NEUROLOGY ICD NO. S14.6, V43”**. Before being discharged from service, Invaliding Medical Board (IMB) was held at INHS Kalyani on 31.10.2020 in which applicant was found suffering with 100% disability for life. Despite being invalided out from service in low medical category, disability element of disability pension was denied to applicant on the reason that his disability was neither attributable to nor aggravated (NANA) by Naval Service vide letter dated 14.09.2023. The applicant preferred First Appeal dated 10.05.2022 but of no avail. It is in this perspective that the applicant has preferred the present Original Application.

3. Learned counsel for the applicant submitted that applicant was on Casual Leave which is to be treated on duty when he sustained injury, which ultimately resulted into 100% disability for life, because of **“C3-6 CORD CONTUSION WITH POST TRAUMATIC QUADRIPARESIS (OPTD) : ASIA ‘C’ NEUROLOGY ICD NO. S14.6, V43”**. He relied upon the order dated 05.01.2023 passed by the Armed Forces Tribunal, Regional Bench, Chandigarh in Original Application No. 1049 of 2020, ***Satya Pal Versus Union of India & POthers*** and order dated 20.03.2023 passed by this Tribunal in Original Application

No. 965 of 2022, **Ex. Nk. (MACP-I) Kaushlendra Mishra Versus Union of India & Others.** In addition to the above, he further submitted that various Benches of AFT, Hon'ble High Courts and the Hon'ble Apex Court, in the matter of disability, has held that if an armed forces personnel suffers with disability during the course of service, which was never reported earlier when he/she was enrolled/recruited in the Navy, the said disability would be treated to be attributable to or aggravated by Naval service and he/she shall be entitled to the disability pension for the same. Thus, he submitted that applicant's case being fully covered with above, as he also suffered injury while on duty and same being not reported earlier at the time of his enrolment, he is entitled to disability element of disability pension.

4. Per contra, learned counsel for the respondents submitted that the applicant was granted 30 days Casual Leave with effect from 04.11.2019. The applicant during aforesaid Casual Leave, on 12.11.2019 sustained severe injury while going to Araku Valley in a hired taxi which collided with a tempo. As held in the report dated 31.10.2020 of the Invaliding Medical Board Proceedings and Injury Report dated 10.10.2019, applicant was on Leave. For grant of the disability element of disability pension it is not only required that armed forces personnel should be on duty, but there must be some causal connection also between the injury and Naval service. She further submitted that unless injury sustained has causal connection with Naval service, armed forces personnel cannot be allowed disability

element of disability pension merely on the reason of being on duty or disability was not reported/detected while being enrolled or commissioned. She further submitted that in the given facts, applicant being injured while going to Araku Valley in a hired taxi during the Casual Leave, there was no causal connection between the injury sustained and Naval service and, therefore, applicant is not entitled to disability element of disability pension, as he is claiming. In support, Ld. Counsel for the respondents has placed reliance on the following case laws of the Hon'ble Apex Court:-

(a) ***Renu Devi v Union of India and others***, Decided on July 03. 2019 in Special Appeal arising out of Diary No. C-37356 of 2017.

(b) ***Vijay Kumar v. Union of India***, 2016 SCC 460.

(c) The ***Secretary Govt of India & Others v. Dharamvir Singh*** Decided on 20, September 2019 in Civil Appeal No 4981 of 2012.

5. We have heard Shri Manish Kumar Rai, Ld. Counsel for the applicant and Ms. Prerna Singh, Ld. Counsel for the respondents and have also perused the record.

6. After having heard the submissions of Ld. Counsel of both the sides we found that there are certain facts admitted to both the parties, i.e., applicant was enrolled in the Indian Navy on 30.01.2001 and invalided out from service on 31.01.2021, he sustained injury while on Casual leave while going to Araku Valley in a hired taxi, the taxi

collided with a tempo and placed in low medical category for the disability “**C3-6 CORD CONTUSION WITH POST TRAUMATIC QUADRIPARESIS (OPTD) : ASIA ‘C’ NEUROLOGY ICD NO. S14.6, V43**” vide Invaliding Medical Board report dated 31.10.2020 and his disability was assessed at 100% for life, the disability claim of the applicant was rejected.

7. The respondents have denied disability element of disability pension to the applicant on the reason that for getting disability element of disability pension, in respect of injury sustained during the course of employment, there must be some causal connection between the disability and Naval service, and this being lacking in applicant’s case, as there was no causal connection between the disability and Naval service, he is not entitled for the same.

8. This question has been considered time and again not only by the various Benches of AFT but by Hon’ble High Courts and the Hon’ble Apex Court. In a more or less similar matter, **Secretary, Govt of India & Others Vs. Dharamveer Singh**, decided on 20 September 2019, in Civil Appeal No 4981 of 2012, the facts of the case were that respondent of that case met with an accident during the leave period, while riding a scooter and suffered head injury with ‘**Faciomaxillary and Compound Fracture 1/3 Femur (LT)**’. A Court of enquiry was conducted in that matter to investigate into the circumstances under which the respondent sustained injuries. The Brigade Commander gave Report, dated August 18, 1999 to the effect that

injuries, occurred in peace area, were attributable to military service. One of the findings of the report recorded under Column 3 (c) was that “No one was to be blamed for the accident. In fact respondent lost control of his own scooter”. In this case the respondent was discharged from service after rendering pensionable service of 17 years and 225 days. In pursuance to report of the Medical Board dated November 29, 1999, which held his disability to be 30%, the claim for disability pension was rejected by the Medical Board on the ground that the disability was neither attributable to nor aggravated by military service. An appeal filed by the respondent against the rejection of his claim for the disability pension was rejected by the Additional Directorate General, Personnel Services. Respondent then filed an O.A. in Armed Forces Tribunal against the order of denial of disability pension which after relying upon the judgment of Hon’ble Apex Court in the case of **Madan Singh Shekhawat v. Union of India & Ors**, (1999) 6 SSC 459 was allowed by the Tribunal holding that respondent was entitled to disability pension. Aggrieved by the same, this Civil Appeal was filed in which the Hon’ble Apex Court framed following 3 points for consideration:-

- (a) Whether, when Armed Forces Personnel proceeds on casual leave or annual leave or leave of any kind, he is to be treated on duty?.
- (b) Whether the injury or death caused if any, the armed forces personnel is on duty, has to have some causal connection with military service so as to hold that such injury

or death is either attributable to or aggravated by military service?.

(c) What is the effect and purpose of Court of Inquiry into an injury suffered by armed forces personnel?.

9. The Hon'ble Apex Court decided the question number 1 in affirmative holding that when armed forces personnel is availing casual leave or annual leave, is to be treated on duty.

10. While deciding the second question the Hon'ble Apex Court in para 20 of the judgment held as under:-

“ In view of Regulations 423 clauses (a) , (b), there has to be causal connection between the injury or death caused by the military service. The determining factor is a causal connection between the accident and the military duties. The injury be connected with military service howsoever remote it may be. The injury or death must be connected with military service. The injury or death must be intervention of armed forces service and not an accident which could be attributed to risk common to human being. When a person is going on a scooter to purchase house hold articles, such activity, even remotely, has no causal connection with the military service”.

11. Regarding question number 3, the Hon'ble Apex Court held that if a causal connection has not been found between the disabilities and military service, applicant **would not** be entitled to the disability pension. While deciding this issue, the Hon'ble Apex Court has discussed several cases decided by itself as well as the various Benches of the Armed Forces Tribunal and the High Courts and has held that when armed forces personnel suffers injury while returning from or going to leave, it shall be treated to have causal connection with military service and, for such injury, resulting in disability, the injury would be considered attributable to or aggravated by military service.

12. The Hon'ble Apex Court while summing up took note of following guiding factors by the Armed Forces Tribunal, Regional Bench, Chandigarh, in the case of **Jagtar Singh v. Union of India & Ors**, Decided on November 02, 2020 in TA No 61 of 2010 approved in the case of **Sukhwant Singh** and **Vijay Kumar** case, and held that they do not warrant any modification and the claim of disability pension is required to be dealt with accordingly. Those guiding factors are reproduced below for reference:-

“(a) The mere fact of a person being on 'duty' or otherwise, at the place of posting or on leave, is not the sole criteria for deciding attributability of disability/death. There has to be a relevant and reasonable causal connection, howsoever remote, between the incident resulting in such disability/death and military service for it to be attributable. This conditionality applies even when a person is posted and present in his unit. It should similarly apply when he is on leave; notwithstanding both being considered as 'duty'.

(b) If the injury suffered by the member of the Armed Force is the result of an act alien to the sphere of military service or in no way be connected to his being on duty as understood in the sense contemplated by Rule 12 of the Entitlement Rules 1982, it would not be legislative intention or nor to our mind would be permissible approach to generalise the statement that every injury suffered during such period of leave would necessarily be attributable.

(c) The act, omission or commission which results in injury to the member of the force and consequent disability or fatality must relate to military service in some manner or the other, in other words, the act must flow as a matter of necessity from military service.

(d) A person doing some act at home, which even remotely does not fall within the scope of his duties and functions as a Member of Force, nor is remotely connected with the functions of military service, cannot be termed as injury or disability attributable to military service. An accident or injury suffered by a member of the Armed Force must have some casual connection with military service and at least should arise from such activity of the member of the force as he is expected to maintain or do in his day-to-day life as a member of the force.

(e) The hazards of Army service cannot be stretched to the extent of unlawful and entirely un-connected acts or omissions on the part of the member of the force even when he is on leave. A fine line of distinction has to be drawn between the matters connected, aggravated or attributable to military service, and the matter entirely alien to such service. What falls ex-facie in the domain of an entirely private act cannot be treated as legitimate basis for claiming the relief under these provisions. At best, the member of the force can claim disability pension if he suffers disability from an injury while on casual leave even if it arises from some negligence or misconduct on the part of the member of the force, so far it has some connection and nexus to the nature of the force. At least remote attributability to service would be the condition precedent to claim under Rules 173. The act of omission and commission on the part of the member of the force must satisfy the test of prudence, reasonableness and expected standards of behavior”.

(f) The disability should not be the result of an accident which could be attributed to risk common to human existence in modern conditions in India, unless such risk is enhanced in kind or degree by nature, conditions, obligations or incidents of military service.”

13. We have considered the applicant's case in view of above guiding factors and we find that applicant was on Casual Leave and while going to Araku Valley in a hired taxi, the taxi collided with a tempo and sustained injury resulting into disability to the extent of 100% for life, on account of **"C3-6 CORD CONTUSION WITH POST TRAUMATIC QUADRI-PARESIS (OPTD) : ASIA 'C' NEUROLOGY ICD NO. S14.6, V43"**. Although the applicant has stated that on 12.11.2019 during casual leave applicant was travelling to his leave station New Delhi from his duty station Visakhapatnam by a hired Car on his own expenses and met with a Road traffic accident in route near Araku Valley where the Car was collided with a tempo and applicant sustained injury, but we find that in the Injury Report dated 10.10.2019 the applicant himself stated that **"I 128854A MCMECH (P)-II, Nitender Singh INS KAMORTA hereby declare that the injury sustained by me on 12 Nov 2019 did not occur while I was in the performance of military duty"** and in para 3 of the Injury Report the applicant also stated that **"I was going to Araku Valley in a Hired taxi, then the taxi collided with a Tempo and I got injured on 12 Nov 19 at 1130 Hrs"** as such we are of the considered opinion that the activity in which applicant sustained injury being not connected with his Naval duties in any manner, he is not entitled to the disability element of disability pension for the same.

14. The order dated 05.01.2023 passed by the Armed Forces Tribunal, Regional Bench, Chandigarh in the case of **Satya Pal**

Versus Union of India & Other (Supra) is not applicable in the instant case as in that case the applicant's husband sustained injury while on Casual Leave and away to Railway Station for reservation of seat in the train to perform return journey after availing 20 days of Casual Leave and met with an accident on way back while performing tasks related to military duties and in the present case there is no causal connection between the activity in which applicant sustained injury and Naval service.

15. Further, order dated 20.03.2023 passed by this Tribunal in the case of ***Kaushlendra Mishra Versus Union of India & Other*** (Supra) is not applicable in the instant case as in that case the applicant was on bonafide military duty when he sustained injury and the activity in which he sustained injury being connected with his military duty he was held entitled to disability pension and in the present case there is no causal connection between the activity in which applicant sustained injury and Naval service.

16. In the result, we hold that the claim of applicant's disability pension has rightly been rejected by the respondents which needs no interference. Resultantly, Original Application is **dismissed**.

17. No order as to cost.

(Vice Admiral Atul Kumar Jain)
Member (A)

(Justice Anil Kumar)
Member (J)

Dated: 11 December, 2023

AKD/-