

Court No. 1

ARMED FORCES TRIBUNAL, REGIONAL BENCH, LUCKNOW

ORIGINAL APPLICATION No. 1477 of 2023.

Thursday, this the 28th day of November, 2024

**“Hon’ble Mr. Justice Anil Kumar, Member (J)
Hon’ble Lt. Gen. Anil Puri, Member (A)”**

No. 628811-A, WO Ashok Kumar Tripathi (Retd.), Son of Late Ram Yagya Tripathi, R/o 6-A, Gopal Nagar, Yashoda Nagar (Near Kela Devi Mandir), Post – Kidwai Nagar, District – Kanpur Nagar (U.P), Pin-208011.

..... Applicant

Ld. Counsel for the : **Shri R. Chandra**, Advocate
Applicant

Versus

1. Union of India, through, the Secretary, Ministry of Defence, Govt. of India, New Delhi -110011.
2. The Chief of the Air Staff, Air Headquarters, New Delhi - 110011.
3. Directorate of Air Veterans, Air Headquarters, SMC Building, 1st Floor, Subroto Park, New Delhi -110010.
4. The Chief Controller of Defence Accounts (Pension), Draupadi Ghat, Allahabad -14 (U.P).

.....Respondents

Ld. Counsel for the : **Shri Ram Saran Awasthi**, Advocate
Respondents. 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 :-

- (I) *The Hon’ble Tribunal may be pleased to direct the respondents to grant Disability Element with effect from 01/05/2023 (Next date of discharge) along with its arrears and interest thereon at the rate of 18% per annum.*
- (II) *Hon’ble Tribunal may be pleased further to grant benefit of rounding of disability pension @75% in terms of Ram Avtar’s case.*
- (III) *Any other appropriate order or direction which the Hon’ble Tribunal may deem just and proper in the nature and circumstances of the case.*

2. Briefly stated, applicant was enrolled in the Indian Air Force on 17.12.1983 and discharged on 30.04.2023 in Low Medical Category on attaining the age of superannuation after rendering 39 years 04 months and 13 days of regular service. The applicant is in receipt of Service Pension. Before discharge from service, the Release Medical Board (RMB) held at SMC, 8 Wing Air Force on 16.01.2023 assessed his disabilities (i) **‘PRIMARY HYPERTENSION (I10, Z09.0)’ @30%** (ii) **‘DIABETES MELLITUS TYPE-2 (E11, Z09.0)’ @ 20%** (iii) **‘B/L SENSORINEURAL HEARING LOSS (H90.3, Z09.0)’ @ 20 %** and (iv) **‘OTHER ANXIETY DISORDER (E41, Z09.0)’@ 40%**for, **composite disabilities @71.44% for life** and opined the third disability to be

aggravated by service and first, second and fourth 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 10.04.2024. The applicant preferred Appeal/Representation dated 08.06.2023 but of no avail. The applicant served Legal Notice through his Counsel 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 although the third disability of the applicant has been regarded as aggravated by military service but its degree of disablement has wrongly been assessed @15%. He further submitted that at the time of enrolment, the applicant was found mentally and physically fit for service in the Air Force and there is no note in the service documents that he was suffering from any disease at the time of enrolment in Air Force. The first, second and fourth diseases of the applicant were contracted during the service, hence they are also attributable to and aggravated by Air Force 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 although the third disability of the applicant has been regarded as aggravated by military service by the RMB but

it's degree of disablement has been assessed @15% which is less than 20% and the first, second and fourth disabilities of the applicant @30%, @20% and @40% respectively for life have been regarded as NANA by the RMB, hence as per Regulation 153 of the Pension Regulations for the Indian Air Force, 1961 (Part-I) which provides that *“Unless otherwise specifically provided, disability pension may be granted to an individual who is invalided from service on account of a disability which is attributable to or aggravated by Air Force service and is assessed at 20% or over”* the applicant is not entitled to disability element of disability pension. He further submitted that the applicant had a family history of Primary Hypertension and personal history of smoking vide Medical Case Sheet dated 18.08.2022. It is documented fact that individuals with genetic loading for Primary Hypertension have a tendency to develop the same disease. Further, order age and smoking are independent risk factor for contracting Primary Hypertension, Diabetes Mellitus Type-II and Other Anxiety Disorder. The applicant was detected the disabilities at the age of 53 and 56 years respectively. Smoking is under voluntary control of the applicant and cannot be said to be due to the conditions of service. The root cause of the ailment that the applicant suffered from is older and smoking. Therefore, the applicant's disabilities cannot be considered as either aggravated or attributable to the service conditions of the Indian Air Force. 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 of two folds:-

(a) Whether the first, second and fourth disabilities of the applicant are attributable to or aggravated by Air Force Service?

(c) 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 first, second and fourth disabilities i.e. **‘PRIMARY HYPERTENSION (I10, Z09.0)’, ‘DIABETES MELLITUS TYPE-2 (E11, Z09.0)’** and **‘OTHER ANXIETY**

DISORDER (E41, Z09.0)' are neither attributable to nor aggravated (NANA) by service, on the ground of onset of these disabilities in December 2019, and March 2022 while posted in Peace location (Kanpur & Adampur) and life style diseases, therefore, applicant is not entitled to disability element of disability pension for these disabilities. 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 are cryptic, not convincing and doesn't reflect the complete truth on the matter. Peace Stations have their own pressure of rigorous Air Force training and associated stress and strain of Air Force service. The applicant was enrolled in Indian Air Force on 17.12.1983 and the first, second and fourth disabilities have started after more than 35 and 38 years of Air Force service i.e. in December 2019 and March 2022. 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, second and fourth disabilities of the applicant should be considered as aggravated by Air Force 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 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.”

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 case of ***Union of India and Ors vs Ram Avtar (supra)*** as well as Government of India, Ministry of Defence letter No.17(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 @71.44% for life to be rounded off to 75% 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. 1477 of 2023** deserves to be allowed, hence **allowed**. The impugned order, rejecting the applicant's claim for grant of disability element of disability pension, is set aside. Be it mentioned that the third disability has already been regarded as aggravated by military service by the RMB. The first, second and fourth disabilities of the

applicant are also held as aggravated by Air Force Service. The applicant is entitled to get disability element @71.44% for life which would be rounded off to 75% for life from the next date of his discharge. The respondents are directed to grant disability element to the applicant @71.44% for life which would stand rounded off to 75% 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.

(Lt. Gen. Anil Puri)
Member (A)

(Justice Anil Kumar)
Member (J)

Dated : 28 September, 2024

Ashok/AKD/-