

Court No. 1

ARMED FORCES TRIBUNAL, REGIONAL BENCH, LUCKNOW

ORIGINAL APPLICATION No. 481 of 2024

Tuesday, this the 10th day of December, 2024

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

JC-700070L Ex. Sub. S. Sethuraj S/o Seenivasan, Village – E
Kumaralingapuram, Post – Naduvappti, Tehsil – Sattur, District
Virudhunagar, Pin-626203 (Tamil Nadu).

..... Applicant

Ld. Counsel for the : **Shri K.P. Datta**, Advocate
Applicant

Versus

1. Union of India, through its Secretary, Integrated HQs of MoD (Army), New Delhi-110011.
2. The Additional Directorate Gen of Personnel Services PS-8, AG’s Branch, Integrated HQ of MoD (Army), Room No. 527, 5th Floor, ‘A’ Block, Defence Office Complex, KG Marg, New Delhi-110001.
3. The Officer in Charge, Records AMC, Lucknow, Pin-226002 (UP).
4. The PCDA (P), Draupadi Ghat, Allahabad, Pin-211014 (UP).

.....Respondents

Ld. Counsel for the : **Shri R.K.S. Chauhan**, 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 :-

- A. *To issue/pass an order to set-aside/quash IHQ of MoD (Army), rejection order letter No.B/40502/1836/2023/AG/PS-8 dated 08 Mar 2024, received vide AMC Records letter No. JC-7000070L/Pen/DP/1st Appeal dated 01 Apr 2024.*
- B. *To issue/pass an order to grant composite disability element @76% assessed by Release Medical Board with benefit of Rounding off to 100% in light of judgment Hon’ble Apex Court, Order of Hon’ble AFT in similar cases from next date of discharge wef 01.09.2023.*
- C. *To issue/pass an order to grant arrears of disability element along with interest @18% p.a. on arrears from next date of discharge wef 01.09.2023.*
- D. *to any other order as this Hon’ble Tribunal may deem just, fit and proper under the circumstances of the case in favour of the applicant.*

2. Briefly stated, applicant was enrolled in the Indian Army on 26.08.1993 and discharged on 31.08.2023 in Low Medical Category on fulfilling the conditions of his enrolment under Rule 13 (3) Item III(i)(a) of the Army Rules, 1954. The applicant is in receipt of Service Pension. Before discharge from service, the Release Medical Board (RMB) held at Command Hospital

(Southern Command), Pune on 08.05.2023 assessed his disabilities (i) **'ESSENTIAL (PRIMARY) HYPERTENSION (I10)' @40%**, (ii) **'NON INSULIN DEPENDENT DIABETES MELLITUS TYPE II (E11)' @40%**, (iii) **'MIXED HYPERLIPEDAEMIA (E78.2)' @5%** and (iv) **'ATHEROSCLEROTIC HEART DISEASE ACUTE MYOCARDIAL INFARCTION I25.1, I21.0' @30%**, **composite disabilities @76% for life** and opined the disabilities to be neither attributable to nor aggravated (NANA) by service. The applicant's claim for grant of disability element of disability pension was rejected vide letter dated 02.09.2023. The applicant preferred First Appeal dated 17.10.2023 which too was rejected vide letter dated 08.03.2024 which was communicated to the applicant vide letter dated 01.04.2024. 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 element of disability pension and its rounding off to 100%.

4. On the other hand, Ld. Counsel for the respondents contended that composite disabilities of the applicant @76% for life have 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 submitted that Para 43 of Chapter VI of Guide to Medical Officers (Military Pension), 2008 provides that *“Primary Hypertension will be considered aggravated if it occurs while serving in Filed Areas, HAA, CI Ops areas or prolonged afloat service”*. Further, Para 26 of Chapter VI of Guide to Medical Officers (Military Pension), 2008 provides that *“Diabetes Mellitus will be conceded aggravated if onset occurs while serving in Field, CI Ops, HAA and prolonged afloat service”*. Para 9 of Chapter I of guide to Medical Officers (Military Pension), 2002 provides that *“Dyslipidemia is due to hereditary mutations or due to dietary and lifestyle habits. Service factors have no role in either its onset or course of the disease.”* Para 47 of Chapter 47 of Guide to

Medical Officers (Military Pension), 2008 provides that "*Ischaemic Heart Disease Acute (Myocardial Infarction (I25.1, I21.0) will be considered attributable or aggravated if it occurs while serving in Fied Areas, HAA, CI Ops areas or due to stress and strain of Military Service*". 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 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 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 '**ESSENTIAL (PRIMARY) HYPERTENSION (I10)**', '**NON INSULIN DEPENDENT DIABETES MELLITUS TYPE II (E11)**' and '**ATHEROSCLEROTIC HEART DISEASE ACUTE MYOCARDIAL INFARCTION (I25.1, I21.0)**' are neither attributable to nor aggravated (NANA) by service on the ground of onset of these disabilities in June, 2021 and March, 2023 while posted in Peace location, 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 for these disabilities are 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 26.08.1993 and the first, second and fourth disabilities have started after more than 27 and 29 years of Army service i.e. in June, 2021 and March, 2023. 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 military service.

8. However, with regard to third disability i.e. '**MIXED HYPERLIPEDAEMIA (E78.2)**' we are agree with the opinion of RMB as NANA as it is a lifestyle disease due to excessive intake of calories and the same does not have any causal connection with military service.

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, second and fourth disabilities overlapping, as such composite assessment is to be reduced in proportion to the degree of overlapping. The degree of first disability is 40%, the degree of second disability is @40% and fourth disability is @30% for which we are of the view that there is some overlapping. The degree of third disability is @5% and composite assessment for all the disabilities is @76%. Accordingly, we hold that composite

assessment of first, second and fourth disabilities is less than @75% 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 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 invalided 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/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. As such, in view of the decision of Hon'ble Supreme Court in the case of ***Union of India and Ors vs Ram Avtar & ors (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 less than @75% for life to be rounded off to 75%

for life may be extended to the applicant from the next date of his discharge.

14. In view of the above, the **Original Application No. 481 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, second and fourth disabilities of the applicant are held as aggravated by Army Service. The third disability of the applicant is held as NANA as has been opined by the RMB. The applicant is entitled to get disability element less than @75% 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 less than @75% 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.

15. No order as to costs.

(Vice Admiral Atul Kumar Jain)
Member (A)

(Justice Anil Kumar)
Member (J)

Dated : 10 December, 2024

AKD/-