

Court No. 1

ARMED FORCES TRIBUNAL, REGIONAL BENCH, LUCKNOW

ORIGINAL APPLICATION No. 731 of 2023

Tuesday, this the 27th day of February, 2024

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

14510921-M, Ex. Hav/Hony. Nb. Sub. Om Prakash Pun S/o Late Gam Bahadur Pun, R/o C/o Akhilesh Kumar, 1348 Kidwai Nagar, Allahpur, Prayagraj -211006 (U.P).

..... Applicant

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

Versus

1. Union of India, through the Secretary, Ministry of Defence, Govt. of India, New Delhi -110011.
2. The Chief of the Army Staff, Integrated Headquarters, New Delhi – 110011.
3. Officer-in-charge, EME Records, PIN-900453, C/o 56 APO.
4. The Chief Controller of Defence Accounts, Draupadi Ghat, Allahabad -14 (U.P).

.....Respondents

Ld. Counsel for the Respondents. : **Shri Manu Kumar Srivastava**, Advocate
Central Govt. Standing Counsel
Assisted by Major Danish Farooqui,
Departmental Representative

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 set aside the rejection order dated 10.05.2023 (Annexure No.A-1).*
- (II) *The Hon’ble Tribunal may be pleased to direct the respondents to grant Disability Element with effect from 28.02.1996 (next date of discharge) along with its arrears and interest thereon at the rate of 18% per annum.*
- (III) *Hon’ble Tribunal may be pleased further to grant benefit of rounding of disability pension @50% in terms of Ram Avtar’s case.*
- (IV) *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 initially enrolled in the Corps of EME of Indian Army 18.10.1972 and discharged on 28.02.1995 (AN) on completion of terms of engagement in Low Medical Category under Rule 13 (3) Item III (i) of the Army Rules, 1954. At the time of discharge from service, the Release Medical Board (RMB) held on 01.12.1994 assessed his disability ‘**PRIMARY HYPERTENSION 401**’ @20% for two years and opined the disability to be **Aggravated by** military service. The disability claim of the applicant was however rejected by the Chief Controller of Defence Account (Pensions), Allahabad vide letter dated 18.12.1995 the ground that the disability of the applicant was

neither attributable to nor aggravated by military service which was communicated to the applicant vide letter dated 04.01.1996. The applicant preferred representation/appeal dated 03.05.2023 which too was rejected vide letter dated 10.05.2023. It is in this perspective that the applicant has preferred the present Original Application.

3. Ld. Counsel for the applicant submitted that the applicant's disability was found to be aggravated by military service vide RMB which had also assessed the disability @20% for two years. He further 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. The Chief Controller of Defence Accounts (Pension), Allahabad has no authority to overrule the opinion of the RMB. 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. Ld. Counsel for the respondents conceded that disability of the applicant @20% for two years has been regarded as **aggravated by** the RMB, but pension sanctioning authority i.e. Chief Controller of Defence Accounts (Pensions), Allahabad has rejected the claim of the applicant on the ground that the disability of the applicant is neither attributable to nor aggravated by military

service, hence the applicant is not entitled to disability element of disability pension. 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 records and we find that the questions which need to be answered are of two folds:-

- (a) Whether the Chief Controller of Defence Accounts (Pensions), Allahabad has authority to overrule the opinion of RMB?
- (b) Whether the applicant is entitled for the benefit of rounding off the disability element of disability pension?

6. This is a case where the disability of the applicant has been held as aggravated by military service by the RMB. The RMB assessed the disability @20% for two years. However, the opinion of the RMB has been overruled by Chief Controller of Defence Accounts (Pensions), Allahabad and the disability has been regarded as neither attributable to or aggravated by military service.

7. The issue of sanctity of the opinion of a Release Medical Board and its overruling by a higher formation is no more Res Integra. The Hon'ble Supreme Court in the case of ***Ex. Sapper Mohinder Singh vs. Union of India & Others***, in Civil Appeal

No.164 of 1993, decided on 14.01.1993, has made it clear that without physical medical examination of a patient, a higher formation cannot overrule the opinion of a Medical Board. Thus, in light of the observations made by the Hon'ble Apex Court in the case of **Ex Sapper Mohinder Singh vs. Union of India & Others**, we are of the considered opinion that the decision of competent authority i.e. Principal Controller of Defence Accounts (Pensions), Allahabad over ruling the opinion of RMB held on 01.12.1994 is void in law. The relevant part of the aforesaid judgment is quoted below:-

“From the above narrated facts and the stand taken by the parties before us, the controversy that falls for determination by us is in a very narrow compass viz. whether the Chief Controller of Defence Accounts (Pension) has any jurisdiction to sit over the opinion of the experts (Medical Board) while dealing with the case of grant of disability pension, in regard to the percentage of the disability pension, or not. In the present case, it is nowhere stated that the Applicant was subjected to any higher medical Board before the Chief Controller of Defence Accounts (Pension) decided to decline the disability pension to the Applicant. We are unable to see as to how the accounts branch dealing with the pension can sit over the judgment of the experts in the medical line without making any reference to a detailed or higher Medical Board which can be constituted under the relevant instructions and rules by the Director General of Army Medical Core.”

8. Thus in light of the aforesaid judgment (supra) as well as IHQ of MoD (Army) letter dated 25.04.2011 it is clear that the disability assessed by RMB cannot be reduced/overruled by Principal Controller of Defence Accounts (Pension), Allahabad, hence the

decision of Chief Controller of Defence Accounts (Pensions), Allahabad is void. Hence, we are of the opinion that the disability of the applicant should be considered as aggravated by military service as has been opined by the RMB.

9. 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."*

10. 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.

11. 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(01)/D(Pen/Policy) dated 23.01.2018, we are of the considered view that the applicant is entitled for the grant of disability element of disability pension @20% for two years from the next date of his discharge i.e. 01.03.1995 which would be

rounded off to 50% from 01.01.1996 (the date when the policy is made applicable) for remaining period.

12. Although the applicant's RMB was valid for the period of two from the next date of discharge but we are of the considered opinion that after a lapse of more than 28 years from the date of discharge it will not be appropriate to direct the respondents to conduct Re-Survey Medical Board (RSMB) to assess his disability. Even otherwise, the question of entitlement of applicant to disability element of disability pension cannot be determined on the basis of medical examination conducted 28 years after his discharge.

13. In view of the above, the **Original Application No. 731 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 disability of the applicant is held as aggravated by Military Service as has been opined by RMB. The applicant is entitled to get disability element @20% for two years from the next date of his discharge which would be rounded off to 50% from 01.01.1996. The respondents are directed to grant disability element to the applicant @20% for two years from the next date of discharge which would stand rounded off to 50% from 01.01.1996. The respondents are 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 actual payment.

14. No order as to costs.

15. Major Danish Farooqui, Departmental Representative 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 Anil Kumar)
Member (J)

Dated : 27 February, 2024

AKD/-