

Court No. 1**ARMED FORCES TRIBUNAL, REGIONAL BENCH, LUCKNOW****ORIGINAL APPLICATION No. 580 of 2024**Thursday, this the 20th day of February, 2025**“Hon’ble Mr. Justice Anil Kumar, Member (J)**
Hon’ble Vice Admiral Atul Kumar Jain, Member (A)”

Service No. 15463187-M Ex. LD Arun Prakash Trivedi, presently residing at C/o Om Nariyan Trivedi, Nai Basti Shiva Bihar (Kothi), Mandhana, District – Kanpur Nagar, Uttar Pradesh, PIN-209217.

..... Applicant

Ld. Counsel for : **Shri Keshav Sharma**, Advocate.
the applicant

Versus

1. Union of India through the Secretary, Ministry of Defence, South Block, New Delhi-110011.
2. Chief of the Army Staff, Integrated Headquarters of MoD (Army), DHQ, New Delhi-11.
3. The Officer-In-Charge, Armed Corps Records, PIN-900476, C/o 56 APO.
4. The PCDA (Pension), Draupadi Ghat, Allahabad, UP-14.

.....Respondents

Ld. Counsel for the: **Shri Alok Kumar Mishra**, Advocate
Respondents. Central Govt. Standing Counsel

ORDER

“Per Hon’ble Mr. Justice Anil Kumar, Member (J)”

1. The present Original Application has been filed under Section 14 of the Armed Forces Tribunal Act, 2007. The applicant has sought the following reliefs:-

- (a) *The Hon’ble Tribunal may be pleased to set aside the rejection letter 15463187M/DP/Pen dated 04 Aug 2012 and rejection letter 15463187M/DP/Pen dated 12 Feb 2013.*
- (b) *The Hon’ble Tribunal may be pleased to direct the respondents to grant disability element with effect from 01 Jul 2012 along with its arrears and interest thereon at the rate of 18% per annum.*
- (c) *The Hon’ble Tribunal may be pleased further to grant benefit of rounding off disability pension as per law in terms of Ram Avtar’s Case.*
- (d) *To issue/pass any other orders/direction as this Hon’ble Tribunal may deem fit and proper under the circumstances of the case in favour of the applicant and render justice.*

2. The brief facts of the case are that the applicant was enrolled in the Armoured Corps of Indian Army on 31.12.1993 and discharged from service on 30.06.2012 in Low Medical Category (on medical grounds) before completion of terms of engagement under Rule 13 (3) Item III (iii) (a) of the Army Rules, 1954 after rendering 18 years and 06 months of service as no shelter appointment commensurate to his disability was available. The applicant is in receipt of Service Pension. Before discharge, Release Medical Board (RMB) held at Military Hospital, Amritsar on 01.05.2012 assessed his disability '**UNSPECIFIED PSYCHOSIS (F-29)**' @6-10% for life and opined the disability to

be neither attributable to nor aggravated by service (NANA). Applicant's claim for grant of disability element of disability pension was rejected vide letter dated 04.08.2012. The applicant preferred Petition/First Appeal dated 31.12.2012 which too was rejected vide letter dated 12.02.2013. It is in this perspective that the applicant has preferred the present Original Application.

3. Ld. 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 disease of the applicant was contracted during the service, hence it is attributable to and aggravated by Military Service. Ld. Counsel for the applicant has relied upon the Hon'ble Apex Court judgment in the case of **Sukhwinder Singh vs Union of India & Ors**, reported in (2014) STPL (WEB) 468 SC and contended that since applicant's services were cut short and he was discharged from service prior to completion of terms of engagement in the rank of LD, therefore his discharge from service should be a deemed invalidation as held in the case of **Sukhwinder Singh** (supra) and applicant deserves to be granted disability element of disability pension with its rounding off to 50%.

4. On the other hand, Ld. Counsel for the respondents submitted that as the disability of applicant has been assessed @6-10% for life i.e. below 20% as NANA, he is not entitled to disability element of pension in terms of Regulation 95 of Pension Regulations for the Army, 2008 (Part-I) which provides that *"Individual who is placed in a low medical category (other than 'E') permanently and who is discharged because no alternative employment in his own trade/category suitable to his low medical category could be provided or who is unwilling to accept the alternative employment or who having been retained in alternative appointment is discharged before completion of the engagement, shall be deemed to have been invalided out of service under the Entitlement Rules for Casualty Pensionary Awards, 1982 as laid down in APPENDIX-IV to these Regulations. This provision shall also apply to individual who is placed in a low medical category while on extended service and is discharged on that account before completion of the period of his extension"* and his claim was rightly denied by the respondents being disability below 20% as NANA. He further submitted that the Medical Board is an expert body and its opinion is entitled to be given due weight, value and credence. He pleaded for dismissal of the Original Application.

5. We have heard learned counsel for the parties and perused the material placed on record.

6. For adjudication of the controversy involved in the instant case, we need to address only two issues; firstly, is the discharge of applicant a case of normal discharge or invalidation? and secondly is applicant is entitled to disability element of pension being disability below 20% attributable to or aggravated by military service.

7. For the purpose of first question as to whether the discharge of the applicant by Release Medical Board is a case of discharge or invalidation. In this context, it is clear that the applicant was discharged from service before completion of his terms of engagement in the rank of LD on medical grounds in low medical category. In this regard, Rule 4 of the Entitlement Rules for Casualty Pensionary Awards, 1982 defines invalidation as follows:

"Invaliding from service is a necessary condition for grant of a disability pension. An individual, who, at the time of his release under the Release Regulations, is in a lower medical category than that in which he was recruited will be treated as invalided from service. JCOs/ORs and equivalent in other services who are placed permanently in a medical category other than 'A' and are discharged because no alternative employment suitable to their low medical category can be provided, as well as those who having been retained in alternative employment but are discharged before the completion of their engagement will be deemed to have been invalided out of service."

8. Thus, in light of above definition, it is clear that the applicant was in low medical category as compared the one when he was enrolled and hence his discharge is to be deemed as invalidation out of service.

9. The law on this point is very clear as reported in (2014) STPL (WEB) 468, ***Sukhwinder Singh vs Union of India & Ors.***

Para 9 of the aforesaid judgment being relevant is reproduced as under:-

"9. We are of the persuasion, therefore, that firstly, any disability not recorded at the time of recruitment must be presumed to have been caused subsequently and unless proved to the contrary to be a consequence of military service. The benefit of doubt is rightly extended in favour of the member of the Armed Forces; any other conclusion would be tantamount to granting a premium to the Recruitment Medical Board for their own negligence. Secondly, the morale of the Armed Forces requires absolute and undiluted protection and if an injury leads to loss of service without any recompense, this morale would be severely undermined. Thirdly, there appears to be no provisions authorising the discharge or invaliding out of service where the disability is below twenty percent and seems to us to be logically so. Fourthly, whenever a member of the Armed Forces is invalided out of service, it perforce has to be assumed that his disability was found to be above twenty per cent. Fifthly, as per the extant Rules/Regulations, a disability leading to invaliding out of service would attract the grant of fifty per cent disability pension."

10. From the above mentioned Rule on disability pension and ratio of law emerging out of above Hon'ble Apex Court's judgment, it is clear that once a person has been recruited in a fit medical category, the benefit of doubt will lean in his favour unless cogent reasons are given by the Medical Board as to why the disease could not be detected at the time of enrolment. Although the applicant's disability is a mental disorder, but considering that the applicant was enrolled in Indian Army on 31.12.1993 and the disability has started after more than ten years of Army service i.e. on 11.08.2004, we are of the considered opinion that the benefit of doubt in these

circumstances should be given to the applicant, and the disability of the applicant should be considered as aggravated by military service. The aforesaid law also makes clear that in case of invalidation the disability percentage is presumed to above 20% irrespective of the disability percentage assessed by RMB.

11. In view of the above, we are of the considered opinion that applicant's discharge vide Release Medical Board held on 01.05.2012 is to be treated as invalidation in terms of Rule 4 of the Entitlement Rules (supra).

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. 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 cases of ***Sukhwinder Singh vs Union of India & Ors.*** (supra) and ***Shiv Dass*** (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 @20% 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. 580 of 2024** 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 above @20% for life as

aggravated by service. The applicant is entitled to get disability element @20% 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 @20% 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 28.05.2024. 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.

(Vice Admiral Atul Kumar Jain)
Member (A)

(Justice Anil Kumar)
Member (J)

Dated: 20 February, 2025

AKD/-