

Court No. 1

**ARMED FORCES TRIBUNAL, REGIONAL BENCH,
LUCKNOW**

ORIGINAL APPLICATION No. 109 of 2022

Thursday, this the 07th day of July, 2022

**“Hon’ble Mr. Justice Umesh Chandra Srivastava, Member (J)
Hon’ble Vice Admiral Abhay Raghunath Karve, Member (A)”**

No. JC-702090X, Ex Nb Subedar Naresh Ram Dulari Bhagan
S/o Late Ramdulari Bhagan, Residence of Vill-Bangla (Sunga),
Po-Parseadepur, Dist-Rae Bareli, Pin -229129 (U.P)

..... Applicant

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

Versus

1. The Union of India, through its Secretary, Integrated HQs of MoD (Army), New Delhi-110011.
2. The Chief of Army Staff, Integrated HQ of MoD (Army), South Block, New Delhi-110001.
3. The Officer in Charge, Army Medical Corps Records, Lucknow, Pin -226002 (U.P)
4. The PCDA (P) Draupadi Ghatt Allahabad, Pin-211014 (U.P).

.....**Respondents**

Ld. Counsel for the : **Shri Rajeev Narayan Pandey,**
Respondents. **Central Govt. Counsel**

ORDER

“Per Hon’ble Mr. Justice Umesh Chandra Srivastava, 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/pas an order or directions to set-aside /quash the Records AMC Lucknow rejection letter No. JC-702090X/REJ/DPI dated 17September 2021.*
- B. *To issue / pass an order or directions to the respondents to grant composite disability element of disability pension @50% to the applicant and benefits of Rounding off / Broad banding @50% to 75% with interest @ 18% p.a. on arrears from date of discharge wef 30.06.2021 in light of judgement of Hon’ble Apex Court Orders passed by Armed Forces Tribunal in similar cases and Govt. of India Policy letters.*
- C. *To issue / pass an order or directions to the respondents to decide his appeal submitted on 17.11.2021.*
- D. *To issue / pass any other or directions 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 30.06.1994 and was discharged on 30.06.2021(A/N) in Low Medical Category on fulfilling the conditions of his enrolment under Rule 13 (3) (ii)(a) of the Army Rules, 1954. At the time of discharge, Release Medical Board (RMB) held at CH (EC) Kolkatta on 02.06.2021 assessed his disabilities (i) '**PRIMARY HYPERTENSION (I.10)**' @30% (ii) '**SIMPLE OBESITY (E-66.9)**' @ 5% (iii) '**IMPAIRED GLUCOSE TOLERANCE (R-73.01)**'@15% and (iv) '**MENINGEAL CYST 05-07 (G96.19)**' @20% for life **Composite disabilities** of all disease was assessed @ 50% for life and opined the 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 17.09.2021. The applicant preferred First Appeal which was not replied by the respondents. 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 diseases 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 pension as well as arrears thereof, as applicant is also entitled to disability pension @ 50% and its rounding off to 75%.

4. On the other hand, Ld. Counsel for the respondents contended that on retirement applicant was granted service pension vide PPO dated 24.06.2021. Disabilities of the applicant were declared as neither attributable to nor aggravated by military service. RMB cited that there is no evidence of any exceptional stress and strain due to service conditions like posting to Field Area, High Altitude Area, Counter Insurgency Operations Area or prolonged afloat service causing disability PRIMARY HYPERTENSION, IMPAIRED GLUCOSE TOLERANCE and MENINGEAL CYST. As far as disability SIMPLE OBESITY is concerned, it is a lifestyle disease due to poor dietary habit and sedentary lifestyle. Composite disabilities of the applicant have been assessed by the RMB @ 50% with net assessment qualifying for disability pension as **NIL** and regarded as NANA, hence applicant is not entitled to disability pension in terms of Rule 173 of Pension Regulations for the

Army 1961 (Part-1). 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 three folds:-

- (a) Whether the disabilities of the applicant are attributable to or aggravated by Military Service?
- (b) What percentage of disability applicant is entitled?
- (c) Whether the applicant is entitled for the benefit of rounding off the 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 disabilities are related to lifestyle disorder, therefore, applicant is not entitled to disability pension. However, considering the facts and circumstances of the case, we are of the opinion that this reasoning of Release Medical Board for denying disability pension to applicant is 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 30.06.1994 and the disability has started after more than 25 years of Army service i.e. in the year 2020. As far as disability "**SIMPLE OBESITY**" assessed @ 5% is concerned, it is a lifestyle disease and cannot be treated as attributable to and aggravated by military service. 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 other disabilities of the applicant should be considered as aggravated by military 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 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 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. 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*** 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 benefit of rounding off of disability pension to be rounded off to 50% for life may be extended to the applicant from the next date of his discharge. Applicant is not entitled disability element for the disability "**SIMPLE OBESITY**" which was assessed @ 5% being life style disease.

10. In view of the above, the **Original Application No. 109 of 2022** deserves to be partly allowed, hence partly **allowed**. Impugned order passed by the respondents, rejecting the applicant's claim for grant of disability element of disability pension, is set aside. The disability of the applicant is held as aggravated by Army Service. The applicant is entitled to get disability element @ 45% for life which would be rounded off to 50% 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

11. No order as to costs.

(Vice Admiral Abhay Raghunath Karve) (Justice Umesh Chandra Srivastava)
Member (A) **Member (J)**

Dated : 07 July, 2022

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