

**Court No. 1 (E-Court)**

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

**ORIGINAL APPLICATION No. 754 of 2021**

Friday, this the 04<sup>th</sup> day of March, 2022

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

Santosh Kumar Singh (No. 2985492F Ex. Nk.) S/o Ram Chander Singh, R/o Mohalla Indra Nagar Colony, Bholepur, LOCO Road, Fatehgarh, District – Farrukhabad (U.P.) 209601.

..... **Applicant**

Ld. Counsel for : **Shri Ashok Kumar**, Advocate.  
the applicant

**Versus**

1. Union of India through Secretary, Ministry of Defence, South Block, Delhi-110011.
2. The Officer Incharge Records, Rajput Regiment Centre, PIN-900427.
3. Principal Controller of Defence Accounts (Pensions), Draupadi Ghat, Allahabad.

.....**Respondents**

Ld. Counsel for the: **Dr. Chet Narayan Singh**, Advocate  
Respondents. Central Govt Counsel.

**ORDER**

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:-

- (i) *This Hon’ble Court may graciously be pleased to direct the respondents to give disability pension along with its arrears and interest to the applicant w.e.f. 30.09.2000*

*towards his disability "NODULAR SCLERITIS (RT EYE)" 15-19% for life.*

- (ii) This Hon'ble Court may further be pleased to pass such other and/or further order as deem fit, proper and necessary in the circumstances of this case.*
- (iii) Award costs to the applicant.*

2. The brief facts of the case are that the applicant was enrolled in the Rajput Regiment of Indian Army on 26.04.1985 and was discharged from service on 30.09.2000 after completion of 15 years, 05 months and 02 days of service in Low Medical Category under Rule 13 (3) Item III (v) of the Army Rules, 1954. At the time of discharge, Release Medical Board (RMB) held at 150 General Hospital, C/o 56 APO on 23.07.2000 assessed his disability '**NODULAR SCLERITIS (RT) EYE (378)**' @15-19% for two years and opined the disability to be neither attributable to nor aggravated (NANA) by service. Applicant's claim for grant of disability element of disability pension was rejected vide letter dated 09.04.2001 which was communicated to the applicant vide letter dated 24.04.2001. The applicant preferred First Appeal which too was rejected vide letter dated 15.02.2003. The applicant also preferred Second Appeal which was rejected vide letter dated 19.04.2005. The applicant also preferred application dated 28.08.2017 which too was rejected vide letter dated 13.09.2017. It is in this perspective that the applicant has preferred the present Original Application.

3. Ld. Counsel for the applicant pleaded that the applicant was fully fit at the time of enrolment and the said disability i.e. '**NODULAR SCLERITIS (RT) EYE (378)**' was assessed by the RMB as NANA. 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, 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.

4. On the other hand, Ld. Counsel for the respondents submitted that as the disability of applicant has been assessed as NANA @14-19% for two years i.e. below 20%, he is not entitled to disability element of pension in terms of para 173 of Pension Regulations for the Army, 1961 (Part-I) and his claim was rightly denied by the respondents being disability NANA and below 20%. 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 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. In this case, we find that the applicant was placed in low medical category due to his disability '**NODULAR SCLERITIS (RT) EYE (378)**' and infection contracted in service, therefore, his disability 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/IMB.

11. In view of the above, we are of the considered opinion that applicant's discharge vide Release Medical Board held on

23.07.2000 is to be treated as invalidation in terms of Rule 4 of the Entitlement Rules (supra).

12. Government of India, Ministry of Defence letter No. 16(5)/2008/D(Pen/Policy) dated 29.09.2009 stipulates that *"In pursuance of Government decision on the recommendations of the Sixth Central Pay Commission vide Para 5.1.69 of their Report, President is pleased to decide that Armed Forces personnel who are retained in service despite disability, which is accepted as attributable to or aggravated by Military Service and have foregone lump-sum compensation in lieu of that disability, may be given disability element/war injury element at the time of their retirement/discharge whether voluntarily or otherwise in addition to Retiring/Service Pension or Retiring/Service Gratuity."* In view of aforesaid letter, the applicant is entitled for grant of disability element of disability pension even if he has been discharged on his own request on compassionate grounds.

13. 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.”

14. 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.

15. 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 benefit of rounding off of disability pension @ 20% for two years to be rounded off to 50% for two years may be extended to the applicant from the next date of his discharge.

16. Since the applicant's RMB was valid for two years w.e.f. 30.09.2000, hence, the respondents will now have to conduct a fresh Re-Survey Medical Board for him to decide his future eligibility to disability element of disability pension.

17. In view of the above, the **Original Application No. 754 of 2021** deserves to be allowed, hence 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 Army Service and above @20% for

two years. The applicant is entitled to get disability element @20% for two years which would be rounded off to 50% for two years from the next date of his discharge. The respondents are directed to grant disability element to the applicant @20% for two years which would stand rounded off to 50% for two years from the next date of his discharge. The respondents are further directed to conduct a Re-Survey Medical Board for the applicant to assess his further entitlement of disability pension. 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

18. No order as to costs.

**(Vice Admiral Abhay Raghunath Karve)**  
**Member (A)**

**(Justice Umesh Chandra Srivastava)**  
**Member (J)**

Dated: 04 March 2022  
AKD/-