

Court No. 1

ARMED FORCES TRIBUNAL, REGIONAL BENCH, LUCKNOW

Original Application No. 564 of 2024

Thursday, this the 27th day of March, 2025

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

No. 792920-S, Sgt. Atul Uttam, S/o Ram Pratap Uttam, R/o -
Plot No. 345, Narpat Nagar, Jarauli Phase -1, Barra, District-
Kanpur, State -Uttar Pradesh.

.... Applicant

Ld. Counsel for the : **Shri Rahul Pal**, Advocate and
Applicant

Versus

1. Union of India, through the Secretary, Ministry of Defence,
South Block, New Delhi -110011.
2. Chief of the Air Staff, Integrated HQ, Vayu Sena Bhawan,
New Delhi -110011.
3. Directorate Air Headquarters of Air Veterans, Subroto
Park, New Delhi -110010.
4. The Principal Controller of Defence Accounts (Pension),
Draupadi Ghat, Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh -211014.

... Respondents

Ld. Counsel for the: **Ms. Kavita Mishra**, Advocate
Respondents. Central Government Standing Counsel.

ORDER

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

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

- A. To issue/order quash the respondents letter dated 19.07.2022.*
- B. To issue a directive or order to the opposite parties to decide the first appeal in favour of the applicant.*
- C. To issue a directive or order to the opposing parties, mandating the provision of the disability element of the disability pension to the applicant, calculated at a rate of 20% to 50%, effective from the date following his superannuation, i.e. 01.07.2022. Additionally, please ensure the accrual of 12% interest on the arrears, aligning with the judgment rendered by the Hon’ble Apex Court and the government letter dated 31.01.2001.*
- D. To issue/pass any other order or directive that this Hon’ble Tribunal may deem just, fitting, and proper under the circumstances of the case, in favour of the applicant.*
- E. To award the cost of the case of the applicant from the opposite parties.*

2. Briefly stated, applicant was enrolled in the Indian Air Force on 17.06.2002 and was discharged on 30.06.2022 (AN) in Low Medical Category on fulfilling the conditions of his enrolment after rendering 20 years and 13 days of regular service. The applicant is in receipt of service pension. Before discharge from service, the Release Medical Board (RMB) held at 7 BRD, Air Force on 17.08.2021 assessed his disability ‘**PORTAL CAVERNOMA (OLD) ICD No. 181 Z09.0**’ @ 15% for life opined the disability to be neither attributable to nor aggravated by service (NANA). The

applicant's claim for grant of disability element of disability pension was rejected vide letter dated 19.07.2022. The applicant preferred First Appeal dated 08.02.2023 which too was rejected vide letter dated 07.03.2024. 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 Air Force and there is no note in the service documents that he was suffering from any disease at the time of enrolment in Air Force. The disease of the applicant was contracted during the service, hence it is 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.

4. On the other hand, learned counsel for the respondents opposed the submissions of learned counsel for the applicant and submitted that since the assessment of the disability element is 15% i.e. below 20% as NANA, therefore, condition for grant of disability element of pension does not fulfil in terms of Regulation 153 of Pension Regulations for the Indian Air Force, 1961 (Part-I) which provides that *"Unless otherwise specifically provided, disability pension may be granted to an individual who is invalided from service on account of a disability which is attributable to or*

aggravated by Air Force service and is assessed at 20% or over”

and, therefore, the competent authority has rightly denied the benefit of disability element of pension to applicant. She pleaded for dismissal of Original Application.

5. We have given our considerable thoughts to both sides and have carefully perused the records including Release Medical Board proceedings. The question in front of us is straight; whether the disability is attributable to/aggravated by military service, whether it is above or below 20% and whether applicant was invalidated out of service on account of the disability or was discharged on completion of terms of engagement?

6. It is undisputed case of the parties that applicant was enrolled in the Indian Air Force on 17.06.2002 and was discharged from service on 30.06.2022 on fulfilling the conditions of his enrolment. The applicant was in low medical category and his Release Medical Board was conducted on 17.08.2021 at 7 BRD, Air Force. The Release Medical Board assessed applicant's disability @ 15% for life as neither attributable to nor aggravated by military service.

7. As per Regulation 153 of Pension Regulations for the Indian Air Force, 1961 (Part - I), disability element of pension is eligible only when the disability is assessed at 20% or more and accepted as attributable to or aggravated by military service. Since, applicant's disability element is 15% for life, applicant does not

fulfil the requirement of Regulation 153 of Pension Regulations for the Indian Air Force, 1961 (Part-I).

8. Since applicant was discharged from service on fulfilling the conditions of enrolment, his case does not fall within the category of invalidation in which circumstance he would have become eligible for grant of disability element of pension @ 20% in terms of reported judgment in the case of **Sukhwinder Singh vs Union of India & Ors**, (2014) STPL (WEB) 468 where the operative part of the order reads:-

“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 per cent and seems to us to be logically so. Fourthly, wherever 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.”

9. Further, contrary view to Release Medical Board dated 17.08.2021 to the extent of holding the applicant's disability at 15% for life as NANA is not tenable in terms of Hon'ble Apex Court judgment in the case of **Bachchan Prasad vs Union of**

India & Ors, Civil Appeal No. 2259 of 2012, decided on 04th September, 2019 wherein their Lordships have held as under:-

“..... After examining the material on record and appreciating the submissions made on behalf of the parties, we are unable to agree with the submissions made by the learned Additional Solicitor General that the disability of the appellant is not attributable to Air Force Service. The appellant worked in the Air Force for a period of 30 years. He was working as a flight Engineer and was travelling on non pressurized aircrafts. Therefore, it cannot be said that his health problem is not attributable to Air Force Service. However, we cannot find fault with the opinion of the Medical Board that the disability is less than 20%.”

(underlined by us)

10. In light of the above judgment, inference may be drawn that Medical Board is a duly constituted body and findings of the board should be given due credence.

11. In addition to above, a bare reading of Regulation 153 of Pension Regulations for the Indian Air Force, 1961 (Part-I), makes it abundantly clear that an individual being assessed disability below 20% is not entitled to disability element irrespective of disability being attributable to or aggravated by the military service. The Hon’ble Supreme Court in Civil Appeal No 10870 of 2018 **Union of India & Ors vs Wing Commander SP Rathore**, has made it clear vide order dated 11.12.2019 that disability element is inadmissible when disability percentage is below 20%. Para 9 of the aforesaid judgment being relevant is quoted as under:-

“9. As pointed out above, both Regulation 37 (a) and Para 8.2 clearly provide that the disability element is not admissible if the disability is less than 20%. In that view of

the matter, the question of rounding off would not apply if the disability is less than 20%. If a person is not entitled to the disability pension, there would be no question of rounding off.”

12. In view of the discussions made above, **Original Application No. 564 of 2024** lacks merit and same is accordingly **dismissed**.

13. Pending application, if any, stands disposed of.

14. No order as to costs.

(Vice Admiral Atul Kumar Jain)
Member (A)

(Justice Anil Kumar)
Member (J)

Dated: 27 March, 2025

AKD/-