

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

Original Application No 941 of 2022

Tuesday, this the 16th day of May, 2023

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

654905-H EX WO (HFL) Ram Murti , S/O Shri Ram Baksh Verma,
R/O : Village & Post: Kusaila, District: Sitapur (Uttar Pradesh)
PIN – 261141.

-----Applicant

Ld. Counsel for the Applicant: **Shri Rama Kant, Advocate**
Shri Shiv Narain Kaushal, Advocate

Versus

1. Union of India, through the Secretary, Ministry of Defence, New Delhi.
2. Chief of Air Staff Air HQ (Vayu Bhawan) Rafi Marg, New Delhi.
3. Principal Director, Directorate of Air Veteran, Subroto Park, New Delhi - 110010
4. Joint Controller of Defence Accounts, Subroto Park, New Delhi - 110010.

..... Respondents

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

ORDER (ORAL)

“Per Hon’ble Mr. Justice Ravindra Nath Kakkar, 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 for the following reliefs:-

- “8.1 Set aside the impugned order dated 06 Jul 2021 & direct to the respondents to treat the Ex soldier’s physical disability as attributable to military service and Grant disability pension to the applicant for life.*
- 8.2 Order to rounding off his disability pension from @ 50% to @ 75% by broad banding.*
- 8.3 Order to release the arrears from the next date of retirement i.e. from 31.12.2020 till the date of payment with 09% interest per annum.*
- 8.4 Award the cost of litigation Rs. 50,000 (Rupees Fifty thousand Only) in favour of the Applicant.*
- 8.5 Pass any other order that this Hon’ble Tribunal may deem fit in the facts and circumstances of the case.”*

2. Briefly stated, applicant was enrolled in the Indian Air Force on 06.02.1985 and discharged on 31.12.2020 (AN) in Low Medical Category on fulfilling the conditions of his enrolment. At the time of discharge from service, the Release Medical Board (RMB) held at 505, SU, Air Force Station Memaura – U.P. on 30.06.2020 assessed his disabilities (i) **‘PRIMARY HYPERTENSION (OLD) (I-10.0)’@30%** for life (ii) **‘DYLIPIDEMIA –OLD (E-78.5)’ @5%** for life and (iii) **‘DIABETES MELLITUS TYPE-II-OLD (E11.0)’ @20%** for life **composite disabilities @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 17.11.23020. Thereafter, applicant preferred first appeal dated 12.01.2021 which has been rejected by the respondents vide order dated 06.07.2021. Being unsatisfied, applicant preferred second appeal dated 11.11.2021 which has not yet been responded 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 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 diseases of the applicant were contracted during the service, hence they are attributable to and aggravated by Air Force Service. He pleaded that various Benches of Armed Forces Tribunal have granted disability element of disability pension in similar cases, as such the applicant be granted disability element of disability pension and its rounding off to 75%.

4. On the other hand, Ld. Counsel for the respondents contended that applicant was discharged from service on completion of terms of engagement after rendering 35 years 10 months and 27 days of service. The disabilities (i) and (iii) i.e.

Primary Hypertension and **Diabetes mellitus** are considered as life style disorder which have no casual connection to service and have occurred while posting at Peace locations viz. Trivandrum and Jaisalmer respectively. Disability (ii) i.e. Dyslipidemia assessed @ 5%, is a metabolic disease with inherited enzyme deficiency, developed due to lack of regular physical exercise, alcohol and tobacco usage and excessive intake of saturated fats. Hence this disability cannot be treated as attributable to military service. Further, as per Regulation 153 of Pension Regulations for the IAF, 1961 (Part – I) the applicant is not entitled to disability element of disability pension as his disabilities are assessed as NANA. 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 two folds:-

- (a) Whether the disabilities of the applicant are attributable to or aggravated by Air Force Service?
- (b) Whether the applicant is entitled for the benefit of rounding off the disability element of 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 assessed (ii) disability i.e. **Dylipidemia- Old @ 5%**. The cause of this disease is due to metabolic inherited enzyme deficiency, lack of physical exercise and excessive intake of saturated fat, hence it cannot be considered as attributable to military service.

8. So far as disabilities (i) and (ii) are concerned, RMB has denied attributability to the applicant only by endorsing that the disabilities **DIABETES MELLITUS TYPE-II-OLD** and **PRIMARY HYPERTENSION** are neither attributable to nor aggravated (NANA) by service on the ground that onset of disabilities are in Nov 2004 and Nov 2015 while posted in Peace locations (Triandrum and Jaisalmer), therefore, applicant is not entitled to

disability element of 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 Air Force training and associated stress and strain of Air Force service. The applicant was enrolled in Indian Air Force on 06.02.1985 and the disabilities have been started after more than 19 years of Air Force service i.e. in Nov 2004. 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 the disability of the applicant should be considered as aggravated by Air Force service.

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 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.”

10. In para 17 A (a) of Chapter VII of the Guide to Medical Officer (Military Pensions), 2002 the provision for composite assessment has been mentioned which reads as under :-

“17A. Composite Assessment

(a) Where there are two or more disabilities due to service, compensation will be based on the composite assessment of the degree of disablement. Generally speaking, when separate disabilities have entirely different functional effects, the composite assessment will be the arithmetical sum of their separate assessment. But where the functional effects of the disabilities overlap, the composite assessment will be reduced in proportion to the degree of overlapping. There is a tendency for some Medical Boards to reduce the composite assessment in the former group of cases. This is not correct.”

11. In the instant case there are functional effects of the first and third disabilities overlapping, as such composite assessment is to be reduced in proportion to the degree of overlapping. The degree of first disability is @ 30% and third disability is @20% for which we are of the view that there is overlapping of 10%. Accordingly, we reduce the total by 10% and we hold that composite assessment of first and third disabilities is @40% for life.

12. As such, we are of the considered view that (ii) disability i.e. **‘Dylipidemia – Old’** cannot be considered as attributable to Air Force Service as reason of this disease is due to metabolic inherited enzyme deficiency, lack of physical exercise and excessive intake of saturated fat. Now Composite assessment for both remaining diseases will be 40% and after rounding of, the

applicant shall be entitled disability element @ 50% for life from the next date of his discharge.

13. In view of the above, the **Original Application No. 941 of 2022** deserves to be partly allowed, hence partly **allowed**. The impugned order, rejecting the applicant's claim for grant of disability element of disability pension, is set aside. The composite disabilities **DIABETES MELLITUS TYPE-II-OLD** and **'PRIMARY HYPERTENSION'** are held as aggravated by Air Force Service. Now Composite assessment for both remaining diseases will be 40% and after rounding of, the applicant shall be entitled disability element @ 50% for life from the next date of his discharge. The respondents are directed to grant disability element to the applicant for both diseases @ 40% which shall 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

14. No order as to costs.

(Vice Admiral Atul Kumar Jain)
Member (A)

(Justice Ravindra Nath Kakkar)
Member (J)

Dated :16th May 2023
RK/-