

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

Transfer Application No.13 of 2023

Monday, this the 15th day of May, 2023

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

Sgt Amrendra Kumar Prasad (Retd) (Service No. 797350-T) Sainik
Vihar Colony, Bakshi Ka Talab, Lucknow (UP) – 226201.

-----Applicant

Ld. Counsel for the Applicant: **Shri Vinay Pandey, Advocate**

Versus

1. Union of India, through Secretary, Ministry of Defence,
Room No. 101 A, South Block, DHQ PO - New Delhi, PIN -
110011
2. Chief of the Air Staff, Air HQ (Vayu Bhavan), Rafi Marg,
New Delhi - 110106.
3. Air HQ, Dte of Air Veterans, Subroto Park, New Delhi -
110010.
4. Joint Controller, Defence Accounts (Air Force), Subroto
Park, New Delhi - 110010.

..... Respondents

Ld. Counsel for the Respondents : **Shri Gyan Singh,**
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:-

- “(a) To direct the respondents to grant the disability pension @20% broad banded to 50% for life in view of the Hon’ble Apex Court Judgment in Rajbir Singh (Supra) and Dharamvir Singh (Supra) by treating the disabilities as attributable and aggravated to Military service.*
- (b) To direct the respondents to set aside the Impugned Order and pay the due arrears of disability pension with interest @ 10% p.a. with effect from the date of retirement with all the consequential benefits, or*
- (c) To pass such further order or orders, direction/directions as this Hon’ble Tribunal may deem fit and proper in accordance with law.”*

2. The facts of the case, in brief, are that applicant was enrolled in the Indian Air Force on 14.12.2000 and was discharged from service on 31.12.2020 (AN) in low medical category after serving 20 years of service. The Release Medical Board (RMB) assessed his disabilities (i) **“DIABETES MELLITUS TYPE II (OLD) (E11.0)(Z09.0)”** @ 20% and (ii) **“NON ALCOHOLIC STEATO**

HEPTITIS (OLD) (K70.9)” @5% for life. Composite assessment for both the disabilities has been done @20% for life and opined that the disabilities of the applicant were neither attributable to nor aggravated by military service (NANA). The applicant’s claim for grant of disability pension was rejected by the respondents vide order dated 24.08.2020. Thereafter, applicant submitted a representation/appeal which has not yet been replied by the respondents and is still pending with the respondents. Being denied by disability pension, the instant Original Application has been filed.

3. Learned Counsel for the applicant submitted that applicant was medically fit when he was enrolled in the service and any disability not recorded at the time of enrolment should be presumed to have been caused subsequently. The action of the respondents in not granting disability pension to the applicant is illegal. In this regard, he relied on the decision of the Hon’ble Supreme Court in the case of **Dharamvir Singh vs. Union of India and others**, (2013) AIR SCW 4236 and **Sukhvinder Singh vs. Union of India & Others** (2014 STPL (Web) 468 SC and submitted that for the purpose of determining attributability of the disease to military service, what is material is whether the disability was detected during the initial pre-commissioning medical tests and if no disability was detected at that time, then it is to be presumed that

the disabilities arose while in service, therefore, the disabilities of the applicant are to be considered as aggravated by service and he is entitled to get disability pension @ 20%. Prayer for rounding off of disability pension from 20% to 50% has been made in the Original Application. During the arguments, learned counsel for the applicant also prayed for rounding off of disability pension.

4. On the other hand, Ld. Counsel for the respondents contended that applicant was discharged from service after rendering 20 years of service. RMB assessed disabilities '**DIABETES MELLITUS TYPE-II**' @20% for life and (ii) **NON ALCOHOLIC STEATO HEPTITIS** @ 5% for life but considered as neither attributable to nor aggravated by Air Force service with 20% disablement and NIL percentage of disability qualifying for disability pension for life. The disease has no casual connection to Air Force service. Hence the disability cannot be treated as attributable to military service under the provisions of Rule 153 of Pension Regulations for the IAF 1961 (Part-I). The applicant is not entitled to disability element of disability pension as his disability has been 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 disability of the applicant is 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 denied attributability to the applicant only by endorsing that the disabilities '**DIABETES MELLITUS TYPE-II**' and **NON ALCOHOLIC STEATO HEPTITIS** are neither attributable to nor aggravated (NANA) by service on the ground that diagnosed diseases are due to metabolic and life style disorder. Moreover, onset of disabilities occurred in July 18 and Dec 2019 respectively while posted in Peace locations (Vadsar & Jorhat). There is no evidence of close time association with military service, 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 Air Force on 14.12.2020 and the disabilities have been started after more than 17 years of Air Force service i.e. in Jul 2018. 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.

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. In view of the above, the **Transfer Application No. 13 of 2023** deserves to be allowed, hence allowed. The impugned order, 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 Air Force Service. The applicant is entitled to get disability element @20% for life which would be rounded off to 50% for life from the date of his discharge. The respondents are directed to grant disability element to the applicant @20% for life which would

stand rounded off to 50% for life from the 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.

10. No order as to costs.

(Vice Admiral Atul Kumar Jain)
Member (A)

(Justice Ravindra Nath Kakkar)
Member (J)

Dated: 15th May, 2023
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