

Court No. 1

ARMED FORCES TRIBUNAL, REGIONAL BENCH, LUCKNOW

ORIGINAL APPLICATION No. 1522 of 2023

Wednesday, this the 29th day of May, 2024

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

JC-571623W Ex. Nb. Sub. Shinde Ramchandra Sitaram, Son of Shri Sitaram Narsu Shinde, Resident of Village : Jakhinwadi, Post Jadhawwadi, District : Sangli (Mah), at present residing at H. No. 242A, Gali No. 6, New Karhera Colony, Mohan Nagar, Ghaziabad (UP)-201007.

..... Applicant

Ld. Counsel for the : **Shri R. Chandra**, Advocate
Applicant

Versus

1. Union of India, through the Secretary, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, New Delhi-110011.
2. Chief of the Army Staff, Integrated Headquarters, New Delhi-110011.
3. The Officer-In-Charge, Records The Mahar Regiment, PIN-900127, C/o 56 APO.
4. The Chief Controller of Defence Accounts (Pension), Draupadi Ghat, Allahabad-14 (UP).

.....Respondents

Ld. Counsel for the : **Shri R.K.S. Chauhan**, Advocate
Respondents. Central Govt. Standing Counsel

ORDER

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

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

- (I) *The Hon’ble Tribunal may be pleased to set aside the rejection order dated 30.04.2022 (Annexure No. A-1).*
- (II) *The Hon’ble Tribunal may be pleased to direct the respondents to grant Disability Element with effect from 01.05.2022 (next date of discharge) along with its arrears and interest thereon at the rate of 18% per annum.*
- (III) *Hon’ble Tribunal may be pleased further to grant benefit of rounding of disability pension @50 Percent in terms of Ram Avtar’s Case.*
- (IV) *Any other appropriate order or direction which the Hon’ble Tribunal may deem just and proper in the nature and circumstances of the case.*

2. Briefly stated, applicant was enrolled in the Indian Army on 16.04.1996 and discharged on 30.04.2022 in Low Medical Category on fulfilling the conditions of his enrolment under Rule 13 (3) Item I (i) (a) of the Army Rules, 1954. At the time of discharge from service, the Release Medical Board (RMB) held at Command Hospital (Eastern Command), Alipore, Kolkata-27 on 06.01.2022 assessed his disabilities (i) **‘PRIMARY HYPOTHYROIDISM (ICD E-3.8’ @15% as aggravated by service,** (ii) **‘OBESITY (ICD E66)’**

@5% as neither attributable to nor aggravated by service (NANA),
(iii) '**PRIMARY HYPERTENSION (ICD I10)**' @30% as NANA and
(iv) '**IMPAIRED GLUCOSE TOLERANCE (ICD R73.2)**' @15% as
NANA, **composite disabilities @50% for life**. The applicant's
claim for grant of disability pension was rejected vide letter dated
30.04.2022. The applicant preferred First Appeal dated 28.05.2022
but of no avail. 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 disease at the time of enrolment in
Army. The first disability has been regarded as aggravated by
service but its degree of disability has been assessed @15% for
life. The other diseases of the applicant were also contracted
during the service, hence they are also 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 element of
disability pension and its rounding off to 75%.

4. On the other hand, Ld. Counsel for the respondents
contended that although the first disability of the applicant has been
regarded as aggravated by service but its degree of disability has

been assessed @15% for life which is less than 20% and the other disabilities of the applicant have been regarded as NANA by the RMB, hence as per Regulation 53(a) of the Pension Regulations for the Army, 2008 (Part-I) which provides that *“An individual released/retired/ discharged on completion of terms of engagement or on completion of service limits or on attaining the prescribed age (irrespective of his period of engagement), if found suffering from a disability attributable to or aggravated by military service and so recorded by Release Medical Board, may be granted disability element in addition to service pension or service gratuity from the date of retirement/discharge, if the accepted degree of disability is assessed at 20% or more”* the applicant is not entitled to disability element of disability pension. He further submitted that the Court should not ignore finding for the reason that Medical Board is specialized authority composed of expert medical doctors and it is a final authority to give opinion regarding attributability and aggravation of the disabilities due to military service and the condition of service resulting in the disablement of the individual. 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 two folds:-

- (a) Whether the second, third and fourth disabilities of the applicant are attributable to or aggravated by Military 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 third and fourth disabilities i.e. '**PRIMARY HYPERTENSION (ICD I10)**' and '**IMPAIRED GLUCOSE TOLERANCE (ICD R-73.2)**' are neither attributable to nor aggravated (NANA) by service on the ground of onset of these disabilities in April, 2018 while posted in Peace location (Shimla), 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 element of 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 16.04.1996 and the third and fourth disabilities have started after more than 21 years of Army service i.e. in April, 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 third and fourth disabilities of the applicant should also be considered as aggravated by military service.

8. With regard to second disability i.e. '**OBESITY**' we are agree with the opinion of the RMB as NANA as it is a life style disorder not related to military service conditions.

9. 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.”

10. In the instant case there are functional effects of the first, third and fourth disabilities overlapping, as such composite assessment is to be reduced in proportion to the degree of overlapping. The degree of first disability is @15%, third disability is @30% and fourth disability is @15% for which we are of the view that there is some overlapping. The composite assessment of all the four disabilities have been assessed @50% by the RMB. Hence, we hold that composite assessment of first, third and fourth disabilities is less than @50% for life.

11. 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.”

12. Additionally, consequent upon the issue of Government of India, Ministry of Defence letter No. 17(01)/2017/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.

13. 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/D(Pen/Policy) dated 23.01.2018, we are of the considered view that benefit of rounding off of disability element of disability pension less than @50% for life to be rounded off to 50% for life may be extended to the applicant from the next date of his discharge.

14. In view of the above, the **Original Application No. 1522 of 2023** 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. Be it is mentioned that the first disability of the applicant has already been regarded as aggravated by military service by the RMB. The third and fourth disabilities i.e. '**PRIMARY HYPERTENSION (ICD I10)**' and '**IMPAIRED GLUCOSE TOLERANCE (ICD R-73.2)**' of the

applicant are held as aggravated by Army Service. The applicant is entitled to get disability element less than @50% for life which would be rounded off to 50% for life from the next date of his discharge. The respondents are directed to grant disability element to the applicant less than @50% for life which would stand 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.

15. No order as to costs.

(Vice Admiral Atul Kumar Jain)
Member (A)

(Justice Anil Kumar)
Member (J)

Dated : 29 May, 2024

AKD/-