

Court No. 1 (E-Court)**ARMED FORCES TRIBUNAL, REGIONAL BENCH, LUCKNOW****ORIGINAL APPLICATION No. 32 of 2021**

Thursday, this the 26th day of August, 2021

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

Ex. Sub. (Clk. SD) Rakesh Kumar (JC-421949F), S/o Late Shri Mohan Lal, R/o Gali No. 3, Canal Raod, Gumaniwala, Tehsil – Rishikesh, District Dehradun.

..... Applicant

Ld. Counsel for the: **Col. A.K. Srivastava (Retd.)**, Advocate.
Applicant

Versus

1. The Secretary, Government of India (MoD), South Block, DHQ P.O., New Delhi-110001.
2. The Chief of Army Staff, IHQ of MoD (Army), South Block, DHQ P.O., New Delhi-110001.
3. The Senior Record Officer, Records Army Air Defence, C/o 56 APO.
4. The Principal Controller of Defence Accounts PCDA (P), Draupadi Ghat, Allahabd (U.P.).

.....**Respondents**

Ld. Counsel for the
Respondents.

: **Shri Yogesh Kesarwani**,
Central Govt. Counsel

ORDER

“Per Hon’ble Mr. Justice Umesh Chandra Srivastava, Member (J)”

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

- (a) *Issue/Pass an order or direction of appropriate nature to the respondents to set aside Addl. Dte. Gen. Personnel Service, AG’s Branch, IHQ of MoD (Army) letter No. B/38046A/447/2018/AG/PS-4 (2nd Appeal) dated 06 May 2019, rejecting Second Appeal of the applicant and grant him 40% disability element of pension, duly rounded off to 50% w.e.f. 01 Nov 2016 due to disabilities of (i) SUPEROTEMPORAL BRANCH RETINAL VEIN OCLUSION (LEFT EYE) (H-34.83) (ii) POST ANTI VEGF STATUS (LEFT EYE) (Z.98) (Annexure No. A-1).*
- (b) *Issue/Pass an order or direction of appropriate nature to the respondents to set aside AG’s Branch, IHQ of MoD (Army) letter No. B/40502/475/2017/AG/PS-4 (Imp-II) dated 18.04.2018 rejecting First Appeal of the applicant and grant him 40% disability element of pension, duly rounded off to 50% w.e.f. 01 Nov 2016, due to disabilities of (i) SUPEROTEMPORAL BRANCH RETINAL VEIN OCLUSION (LEFT EYE) (H-34.83) (ii) POST ANTI VEGF STATUS (LEFT EYE) (Z.98) (Annexure No. A-2).*
- (c) *Issue/Pass an order or direction of appropriate nature to the respondents to set aside Records The Mech If Regt letter No. JC-421949/01/DP dated 08 February 2017, intimating that the applicant’s 40% disability element of pension claim was rejected since the*

disability viz (i) SUPEROTEMPORAL BRANCH RETINAL VEIN OCLUSION (LEFT EYE) (H-34.83), (ii) POST ANTI VEGF STATUS (LEFT EYE) (Z.98) being neither attributable to nor aggravated by Military Service. Leading to denial of his 40% disability element of pension duly rounded off to 50% w.e.f. 01.12.2016.

- (d) Issue/Pass an order or direction of appropriate nature to the respondents to set aside remarks 'disabilities neither attributable to nor aggravated by Military Service' endorsed in Part-IV of Release Medical Board proceedings dated 14.10.2016 (Annexure No. A-4) and thereafter grant his disability element of pension duly rounded off to 50%.*
- (e) Issue/Pass an order or direction of appropriate nature to the respondents to grant 40% disabilities pension to the applicant, on being released from service on 30.11.2016, duly rounded off to 50% for life w.e.f. 01.12.2016 in terms of Mod Letter No. 1(2)/97/D (Pen-C) dated 31.01.2001 and supported by the Judgment of Hon'ble Supreme Court in Civil appeal No. 5591 of 2006 Titled as K.J.S. Butter v. U.O.I.*
- (f) Issue/Pass any other order or direction as this Hon'ble Tribunal may deem fit in the circumstances of the case.*
- (g) Allow this application with costs and 18% rate of compound interest.*

2. Briefly stated, applicant was enrolled in The Mech Inf Regiment of Indian Army on 05.03.1990 and was discharged on 30.11.2016 (AN) in Low Medical Category on fulfilling the conditions of his enrolment under Rule 13 (3) Item I (ii) (a) of the

Army Rules, 1954. At the time of discharge from service, the Release Medical Board (RMB) held at 167 Military Hospital on 14.10.2016 assessed his disabilities (i) **SUPEROTEMPORAL BRANCH RETINAL VEIN OCLUSION (LEFT EYE) (H-34.83)** and (ii) **POST ANTI VEGF STATUS (LEFT EYE) (Z.98)**, composite assessment @40% for life and opined the disabilities to be neither attributable to nor aggravated (NANA) by service. The applicant's claim for grant of disability element of pension was rejected vide letter dated 06.02.2017. The applicant preferred First Appeal and Second Appeal which too were rejected vide letter dated 18.04.2018 and 06.05.2019 respectively. The said facts were communicated to the applicant vide letters dated 05.05.2018 and 22.05.2019 respectively. 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 disease of the applicant was contacted 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, as applicant is also entitled to disability pension and its rounding off to 50%.

4. On the other hand, Ld. Counsel for the respondents contended that composite disabilities of the applicant @ 40% for life have been regarded as NANA by the RMB, hence applicant is not entitled to disability element of pension. 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 Military Service?
- (b) Whether the applicant is entitled for the benefit of rounding off the 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 **SUPEROTEMPORAL BRANCH RETINAL VEIN OCLUSION (LEFT EYE) (H-34.83)** and **POST ANTI VEGF STATUS (LEFT EYE) (Z.98)** are neither attributable to nor aggravated (NANA) by service on the ground of onset of disabilities on 09.03.2015 while posted in Peace location (Pathankot), 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 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 05.03.1990 and the disabilities have started after more than 25 years of Army service i.e. on 09.03.2015. 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 disabilities of the applicant should be considered as aggravated by military 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 invalidated 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. It is also observed that claim for pension is based on continuing wrong and relief can be granted if such continuing wrong creates a continuing source of injury. In the case of **Shiv Dass vs. Union of India**, reported in 2007 (3) SLR 445, Hon'ble Apex Court has observed:

"In the case of pension the cause of action actually continues from month to month. That, however, cannot be a ground to overlook delay in filing the petition. It would depend upon the fact of each case. If petition is filed beyond a reasonable period say three years normally the Court would reject the same or restrict the relief which could be granted to a reasonable period of about three years. The High Court did not examine whether on merit appellant had a case. If on merits it would have found that there was no scope for interference, it would have dismissed the writ petition on that score alone."

10. As such, in view of the decision of Hon'ble Supreme Court in the case of **Shiv Dass (supra)**, we are of the considered view that benefit of rounding off of disability element of disability pension @40% for life to be rounded off to 50% for life may be extended to the applicant from three preceding years from the date of filing of the Original Application.

11. In view of the above, the **Original Application No. 32 of 2021** deserves to be allowed, hence **allowed**. The impugned orders dated 06.05.2019, 18.04.2018 and 08.02.2017, annexed as Annexure No. A-1, A-2 and A-3 with Original Application, are set aside. Both the disabilities of the applicant are held as aggravated by Army Service. The applicant is entitled to get disability element @40% for life which would be rounded off to 50% for life w.e.f. three years preceding the date of filing of Original Application. The respondents are directed to grant disability element to the applicant @40% for life which would stand rounded off to 50% for life w.e.f. three years preceding the date of filing of Original Application. The date of filing of Original Application is 07.01.2021. 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

12. No order as to costs.

(Vice Admiral Abhay Raghunath Karve)
Member (A)

(Justice Umesh Chandra Srivastava)
Member (J)

Dated : 26 August, 2021

AKD/-