

Court No. 1

ARMED FORCES TRIBUNAL, REGIONAL BENCH, LUCKNOW

ORIGINAL APPLICATION No. 141 of 2022

Tuesday, this the 02nd day of August, 2022

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

MS-15934P Ret. Maj. (Dr.) Barkha Singh, R/o-House No. 397/2,
Shastri Nagar, Kanpur, U.P.-208005.

..... Applicant

Ld. Counsel for the : **Shri Ajay Sharma**, Advocate.
Applicant

Versus

1. Union of India, through Secretary, Ministry of Defence, New Delhi.
2. Chairman, Appellate Committee on First Appeals (ACFA), MPRS(O), AG’s Branch, Integrated HQ of MoD (Army), L-Block, New Delhi-110001.
3. Additional Directorate General of Personnel Services, Adjutant General’s Branch/PS-4 Imp-I, Integrated HQ of Ministry of Defence (Army), Brassey Avenue, New Delhi-110001.
4. The Principal Controller of Defence Accounts (P), Draupadi Ghat, Allahabad (U.P).

.....Respondents

Ld. Counsel for the : **Dr. Chet Narayan Singh**, Advocate
Respondents. 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 :-

- (I) To extend the benefit of disability pension to the applicant w.e.f. date of discharge i.e. 16.04.2019.*
- (II) To pay arrears of disability pension along with 12% interest from the date of his discharge i.e. 16.04.2019 till date of actual payment.*
- (III) To direct the opposite party No.2 to consider and decide the appeal of the petitioner dated 29/01.10.2019, contained as Annexure No.1 of this O.A.*

2. Briefly stated, applicant was commissioned in the Army Medical Corps of Indian Army on 30.09.2008 as Short Service Commissioned Officer and was released from service on 15.04.2019 after an interim extension of service in Low Medical Category. At the time of release from service, the Release Medical Board (RMB) held at Command Hospital (AF), Bangolore on 13.04.2019 assessed his disabilities (i) '**SCHIZOPHRENIA (F20)**' @40% for life (ii) '**PRIMARY AUTOIMMUNE HYPOTHYROIDISM (E06.3)**' @20% for life and (iii) '**OBESITY (E66.0)**' @5%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 30.08.2019 which was communicated to the applicant vide letter dated 05.09.2019. The applicant preferred First Appeal

which too was rejected vide letter dated 17.03.2020. 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 commissioning , 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 diseases at the time of commissioning in Army. The diseases of the applicant were contracted during the service, hence they 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 and its rounding off to 75%.

4. On the other hand, Ld. Counsel for the respondents contended that composite disabilities of the applicant @50% for life have been regarded as NANA by the RMB, she has not been invalidated out from service as she was a Short Service Commissioned Officer, her services were not extended further due to low medical category, hence as per Regulations 37 and 81 of Pension Regulations for the Army, 2008 (Part – I) the applicant is not entitled to disability 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 second disabilities i.e. '**PRIMARY AUTOIMMUNE HYPOTHYROIDISM (E06.3)**' is neither attributable to nor aggravated (NANA) by service on the ground of onset of disabilities in March 2018 while posted in Peace location

(Bangalore), therefore, applicant is not entitled to disability pension for this disability. 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 military training and associated stress and strain of military service. The applicant was commissioned in Indian Army on 30.09.2008 and the second disability has started after more than 9 years of Army service i.e. in March 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 second disability of the applicant should be considered as aggravated by military service.

8. However, we are in agreement with the opinion of the RMB as NANA with regard to first and third disabilities i.e. '**SCHIZOPHRENIA (F20)**' and '**OBESITY (E66.0)**' as it is well known that mental disorders can escape detection at the time of commissioning, hence benefit of doubt cannot be given to the applicant merely on the ground that the first disability could not be detected at the time of commissioning and the second disability is a lifestyle disorder due to indisciplinary dietary habits/lack of exercises.

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 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."*

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

11. 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*** as well as Government of India, Ministry of Defence letter No. 17(01)/2017(01)/D(Pen/Policy) dated 23.01.2018, we are of the considered view that benefit of rounding off of disability pension @ 20% for life to be rounded off to 50% for life may be extended to the applicant from the next date of his release .

12. In view of the above, the **Original Application No. 141 of 2022** deserves to be partly allowed, hence **partly allowed**. The impugned orders, rejecting the applicant's claim for grant of disability pension, are set aside. The second disability of the applicant is held as aggravated by Army Service. The applicant is entitled to get disability pension @20% for life which would be rounded off to 50% for life from the next date of his release. The respondents are directed to grant disability pension to the applicant @20% for life which would stand rounded off to 50% for life from the next date of his release. 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

13. No order as to costs.

(Vice Admiral Abhay Raghunath Karve)
Member (A)

(Justice Umesh Chandra Srivastava)
Member (J)

Dated : 02 August, 2022

AKD/-