

Court No. 1**ARMED FORCES TRIBUNAL, REGIONAL BENCH, LUCKNOW****ORIGINAL APPLICATION No. 310 of 2021**Wednesday, this the 24th day of November, 2021**“Hon’ble Mr. Justice Umesh Chandra Srivastava, Member (J)
Hon’ble Vice Admiral Abhay Raghunath Karve, Member (A)”**

No. 15664961M Ex. Hav. Akhilesh Kumar Ojha, S/o Late Paras Nath Ojha, R/o Village – Arazi No. 276 Bhawanipur, P.O. – Pisaur, District Varanasi, Pin – 221003 (UP).

..... ApplicantLd. Counsel for the : **Shri K.P. Datta**, Advocate
Applicant

Versus

1. Union of India, through its Secretary, Ministry of Defence, New Delhi-110011.
2. The Chief of Army Staff, Integrated HQ of MoD (Army), South Block, Sena Bhawan, New Delhi-110001.
3. Officer in Charge, The Records Signals, Jabalpur, Pin-908770 C/o 56 APO.
4. PCDA (P), Draupadi Ghat, Allahabad, Pin-211014 (UP).

.....RespondentsLd. Counsel for the : **Shri Devesh Kumar Mishra**, 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 :-

- A. *To issue/pass an order or direction to set-aside/quash The Records Signals rejection letter No. P/15664961M/NER dated 04.02.2021 mentioned in para 1 above.*
- B. *To grant him Disability Element of disability Pension @36% and benefit of Rounding of/Broad banding of Disability Pension @36% to @50% wef 31.12.2020 along with arrears and interest @18% p.a. from the date of discharge wef 31.12.2020.*
- C. *To issue/pass order/direction to the respondents to decide the appeal of the applicant dated 20.06.2021.*
- D. *To issue/pass any other order or direction as this Hon'ble Tribunal may deem just, fit and proper under the circumstances of the case in favour of the applicant.*

2. Briefly stated, applicant was enrolled in the Corps of Signals of Indian Army on 24.12.1996 and was discharged on 31.12.2020 (AN) in Low Medical Category on completion of terms of engagement under Rule 13 (3) Item III (i) of the Army Rules, 1954. At the time of discharge from service, the Release Medical Board (RMB) held at Command Hospital (Central Command), Lucknow in October, 2020 assessed his disabilities (i) **'FRACTURE ILIAC BONE (ICD-S32.3)'** @ 20% for life, and (ii) **'DIABETES MELLITUS TYPE – II (ICD – E-11)'** @20% for life, **composite disabilities @36% 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 04.02.2021. The applicant preferred First Appeal dated 20.06.2021

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 diseases/injury of the applicant were contacted during the military service, hence they are 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 the applicant fell down from the stairs and sustained first injury on 18.03.2013 while he was on leave from 17.03.2013 to 06.04.2013 and there is no causal connection between the said injury and military service. He further contended that composite disabilities of the applicant @36% for life have been regarded as NANA by the RMB, hence applicant is not entitled to disability element of 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 disability '**DIABETES MELLITUS TYPE – II (ICD – E-11)**' is neither attributable to nor aggravated (NANA) by service on the ground of onset of disability in June, 2019 while posted in Peace location (Varanasi, U.P.), 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 commissioned in Indian Army on 24.12.1996 and the second disability has started after more than 22 years of Army service i.e. in June, 2019. 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 and third disability of the applicant should be considered as aggravated by military service.

8. With regard to first disability i.e. '**FRACTURE ILIAC BONE (ICD-S32.3)**' we are agree with the opinion of the RMB as NANA as the applicant, while on Annual Leave from 17.03.2013 to 06.04.2013, at outliving quarter on 18.03.2013 during stepping down (stairs) unbalanced and slipped his foot and fall down from second floor to the first floor and sustained injury on his left leg resulting into disability of to the extent of 20% for life, on account of '**FRACTURE ILIAC BONE (ICD-S32.3)**'. The activity in which he sustained injury being not connected with his military duties in any manner, he is not entitled to the disability element of disability pension for this disability/injury.

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. 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)***, 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 discharge.

11. In view of the above, the **Original Application No. 310 of 2021** deserves to be partly allowed, hence **partly allowed**. The impugned orders rejecting the applicant's claim for grant of disability element 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 element @20% 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 @20% 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

12. No order as to costs.

(Vice Admiral Abhay Raghunath Karve)
Member (A)

(Justice Umesh Chandra Srivastava)
Member (J)

Dated : 24 November, 2021

AKD/-