

Reseved
Court No. 1

ARMED FORCES TRIBUNAL, REGIONAL BENCH, LUCKNOW

ORIGINAL APPLICATION No. 778 of 2020

Tuesday, this the 07th day of September, 2021

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

No. 707398-G, Ex. Sgt. Akhilesh Kumar Singh, S/o Narendra Bhadur Singh, R/o Village and PO – Brahmanpur, District Jaunpur, UP-222148.

..... Applicant

Ld. Counsel for the : **Shri Parijaat Belaura**, Advocate.
Applicant

Versus

1. Union of India, through Secretary, Ministry of Defence, New Delhi.
2. Officer-in-Air Force Record Office, Subroto Park, New Delhi-110010.
3. The Joint Controller of Defence Accounts (Air Force), Subroto Park, New Delhi-110010.

.....**Respondents**

Ld. Counsel for the : **Shri Arun Kumar Sahu**, 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 set aside Order dated 29.10.2015, 05.04.2017 and 13.03.2020 (Anx 1).*
- (II) *to grant disability pension @40% and round off the same to 50% giving the benefit of Govt. of India, Min. of Def. Letter dated 31.01.2001, w.e.f. date of discharge of the applicant i.e. 01.05.2016.*
- (III) *To pay arrear of disability pension along with 12% interest from the date of his discharge i.e. 01.05.2016 till it is actually paid.*
- (IV) *Any other suitable relief this Hon'ble Court deems fit and proper may also be granted.*

2. Briefly stated, applicant was enrolled in the Indian Air Force on 10.04.1987 and was discharged on 30.04.2016 in Low Medical Category on fulfilling the conditions of his enrolment. At the time of discharge from service, the Release Medical Board (RMB) held at 40 Wing, Air Force, Gwalior on 05.06.2015 assessed his disability '**UNSPECIFIED NON ORGANIC PSYCHOSIS (OLD) ICD F-29, Z-09.0**' @ 40% for life and opined the disability to be neither attributable to nor aggravated (NANA) by service. The applicant's claim for grant of disability pension was rejected vide letter dated 29.10.2015. The applicant preferred First Appeal and Second Appeal which too were rejected vide letters dated 05.04.2017 and 13.03.2020 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 Air Force and there is no note in the service

documents that he was suffering from any disease at the time of enrolment in Air Force. The disease of the applicant was contacted during the service, hence it is attributable to and aggravated by Air Force 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 disability of the applicant @ 40% for life has been regarded as NANA by the RMB, hence 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 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 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 disability '**UNSPECIFIED NON ORGANIC PSYCHOSIS (OLD) ICD F-29, Z-09.0**' is neither attributable to nor aggravated (NANA) by service on the ground of onset of disability in April, 2009 while posted in Peace location (Varodara, 36 Wing Air Force), therefore, applicant is not entitled to 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 Indian Air Force on 10.04.1987 and the disability has started after more than 22 years of Air Force service i.e. in April 2009. 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. 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 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. 778 of 2020** deserves to be allowed, hence **allowed**. The impugned orders dated 29.10.2015, 05.04.2017 and 13.03.2020, annexed as Annexure No. 1 with Original Application, is set aside. The disability of the applicant is held as aggravated by Air Force 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 f w.e.f. three years preceding the date of filing of Original Application. The date of filing of Original Application is 16.12.2020. 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) (Justice Umesh Chandra Srivastava)
Member (A) Member (J)

Dated : 07 September, 2021

AKD/-