

**Court No. 1****ARMED FORCES TRIBUNAL, REGIONAL BENCH, LUCKNOW****ORIGINAL APPLICATION No. 638 of 2020**Wednesday, this the 15<sup>th</sup> day of December, 2021**“Hon’ble Mr. Justice Umesh Chandra Srivastava, Member (J)  
Hon’ble Vice Admiral Abhay Raghunath Karve, Member (A)”**Ex. LAC Amit Kumar Service No. 799744B, S/o Birendra Singh,  
R/o Village Shyamnagar, Post – Hapur, District Hapur, U.P.,  
Pincode-245101.**..... Applicant**Ld. Counsel for the : **Shri Satendra Kumar Singh**, Advocate.  
Applicant

Versus

1. Union of India, through Chief of Air Staff, Vayu Bhawan,  
New Delhi.
2. Central Command Head Quarter, I.A. Vayu Sena Nagar,  
Nagpur.
3. Air Head Quarters, Directorate of Air Veterans, Subroto  
Park, New Delhi-110010.
4. Air Officer Commanding 402 Air Force Station, Chakeri,  
Kanpur.
5. Chief Account Officer, Pension Office of the P.C.D.A. (P),  
Draupadi Ghat, Prayagraj-211014.

**.....Respondents**Ld. Counsel for the Respondents. : **Shri Amit Jaiswal**, Advocate  
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) *Hon’ble Tribunal may kindly please to quash/set aside order dated 24.09.2019 issued by opposite party i.e. Wg. Cdr. Air Headquarter Director of Air Veterans New Delhi and order dated 04.04.2019 medical board proceeding passed by opposite party i.e. President medical board 32 Wing Air Force as contained in Annexure No. 1 and 9 with the O.A. application.*
- (ii) *To issue order or direction to the authorities concern for release of disability pension in favour of the applicant which has been arises during service as observed by medical board on dated 04.04.2019 for the disability 40% for life in favour of the applicant.*
- (iii) *To issue order or direction to the authorities concern to provide disability pension in favour of the applicant since discharge from service @18% interest inspite of medical board consideration for 40% disability in favour of the applicant for life even though in several judgment Apex Court observation provided in catena of judgment in favour of the army personal who has been disabled during service which has not been observed by the opposite party till yet.*
- (iv) *Any such other order or direction which this Hon’ble Tribunal may deem fit and proper may also be passed in favour of the applicant on the basis of circumstances of the case.*
- (iv) *Allow the petition with cost in favour of the applicant.*

2. Briefly stated, applicant was enrolled in the Indian Air Force on 28.09.2004 and was discharged on 30.09.2019 in Low Medical Category on transfer to pension establishment otherwise than at his own request after rendering 15 years and 03 days of service. At the time of discharge from service, the Release Medical Board (RMB) held at Air Force Station, Tambaram on 10.03.2019 assessed his disability '**SEVERE DEPRESSIVE EPISODE WITH PSYCHOTIC SYMPTOMS (OLD) F32.3, Z09.0**' @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 30.06.2019 which was communicated to the applicant vide letter dated 27.09.2019. The applicant preferred First Appeal dated 18.02.2020 and Second Appeal dated 29.07.2020 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 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 element of 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 '**SEVERE DEPRESSIVE EPISODE WITH PSYCHOTIC SYMPTOMS (OLD) F32.3, Z09.0**' is neither attributable to nor aggravated (NANA) by service on the ground of onset of disability on September, 2005 while posted in Peace location (Hakimpet), 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. 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 10<sup>th</sup> 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. 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 @ 40% for life to be rounded off to 50% for life may be extended to the applicant from the next date of his discharge.

10. In view of the above, the Original Application No. 638 of 2020 deserves to be allowed, hence **allowed**. The impugned order dated 27.09.2020, annexed as Annexure No. 1 with Original Application, rejecting the applicant's claim for grant of disability element, 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 from the next date of his discharge. The respondents are directed to grant disability element to the applicant @40% 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

11. No order as to costs.

(Vice Admiral Abhay Raghunath Karve)  
Member (A)

(Justice Umesh Chandra Srivastava)  
Member (J)

Dated : 15 December, 2021

AKD/-