

Court No. 1

ARMED FORCES TRIBUNAL, REGIONAL BENCH, LUCKNOW

Original Application No 720 of 2022

Wednesday, this the 14th day of December, 2022

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

No. JC-267058N Naib Subedar Munna Lal
S/o Shri Ram Narayan
R/o C/o Indian Bank, Jhilahi Bazar,
PO – Jhilahi Bazar,
District - Gonda – 271322 (UP)

..... Applicant

Ld. Counsel for the Applicant: **Shri Manoj Kumar Awasthi**, Advocate

Versus

1. Union of India, through its Secretary, Ministry of Defence South Block, New Delhi-110011.
2. The Chief of Army Staff, Integrated Headquarters of MoD (Army), South Block, New Delhi – 110011.
3. Officer-In-charge Records, Topkhana Abhilekh, Artillery Records, Nasik Road Camp – 422102.
4. Additional Directorate General Personnel Services/AG's Branch Integrated HQ of Ministry of Defence (Army), PIN – 900256, C/o 56 APO.
5. The PCDA (Pension), Draupadi Ghat, Allahabad (Prayagraj).

..... Respondents

Ld. Counsel for the Respondents : **Ms. Amrita Chakraborty**,
Central Govt Counsel

ORDER

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

“(a) To issue pass an order or directions to the respondents to grant disability element of disability pension at the percentage as assessed in Release/Invalid Medical Board proceedings after summoning the original copy of same from the date of discharge 01.08.2007 (FN) alongwith @ 12% interest on arrear in light of Hon’ble Apex Court judgment.

(b) To issue pass an order or directions to the respondents to grant benefit of rounding off disability pension in light of Hon’ble Apex Court judgments from the date of discharge 01.08.2007 (FN) alongwith @ 12% interest on arrear.

(c) Any other relief which the Hon’ble Tribunal may deem fit and proper in the fact and circumstances of the case is also granted alongwith cost of the OA.

2. Briefly stated facts of the case are that applicant was enrolled in the Indian Army on 30.07.1981 and was discharged from service on 31.07.2007 (AN) in low medical category under Rule 13 (3) I (i) (a) of Army Rules, 1954. The Release Medical Board (RMB) assessed his disability “**PRIMARY HYPOTHYROIDISM**” @ 20% for life and opined the disability as neither attributable to nor aggravated by military

service (NANA). Disability pension claim of the applicant was rejected by the respondents. The applicant submitted a representation dated 18.04.2022 for grant of disability element of disability pension which has not been replied by the respondents. It is in this perspective that the applicant has preferred the present O.A.

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 Indian Army and there is no note in the service documents that he was suffering from any disease at the time of enrolment. The disease of the applicant (Primary Hypothyroidism) was contracted during the service, hence it is attributable to and aggravated by Military Service. He placed reliance on the judgment of the Hon'ble Apex Court in the case of ***Dharamvir Singh vs. Union of India & Ors***, (2013) 7 SCC 316 and ***Sikhwinder Singh vs. Union of India (Civil Appeal No. 5605 of 2010, decided on 25.06.2014)*** and pleaded that applicant be granted disability pension @ 20% duly rounded off to 50% in view of the Hon'ble Apex Court judgment in the case of ***Union of India vs. Ram Avtar***, decided on 10.12.2014.

4. Ld. Counsel for the respondents contended that disability of the applicant has been assessed @ 20% for life by RMB as neither attributable to nor aggravated by military service and being a

metabolic disorder, not connected with service. Hence, as per Para 179 of Pension Regulations for the Air Force 1961 (Part-1), applicant is not meeting primary conditions for grant of disability pension, hence, he is not entitled for disability pension. He pleaded for dismissal of the O.A.

5. Heard learned counsel for the parties and perused the material placed on record. We have also gone through the RMB and the rejection order of disability pension claim. The question before us is simple and straight i.e. – is the disability of applicant attributable to or aggravated by military service?

6. The disability of the applicant “**PRIMARY HYPOTHYROIDISM**” has been assessed @ 20% for life as NANA and the law on attributability of a disability has already been well settled by the Hon’ble Supreme Court in the case of ***Dharamvir Singh Vs. Union of India and Ors***, (2013) 7 SCC 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/aggravation, we find that the RMB has denied attributability/aggravation to applicant for his disability for the reason by declaring the disease as NANA and a metabolic disorder not connected to service. However, on further scrutiny, we have observed that the disability was initially detected in the year 2003 after about 22 years of service. We are, therefore, of the considered opinion that the reasons given in RMB for declaring disability as NANA is very brief

and cryptic in nature and do not adequately explain the denial of attributability. Hence, we are inclined to give benefit of doubt in favour of the applicant as per the Hon'ble Supreme Court judgment of ***Dharamvir Singh*** (supra) and his disability should be considered as aggravated by military service.

8. In view of the above, applicant is held entitled to 20% disability element for life from his date of discharge from service. The applicant will also be eligible for the benefit of rounding off of disability element to 50% for life in terms of the decision of Hon'ble Supreme Court in ***Union of India and others v. Ram Avtar*** (Civil Appeal No 418 of 2012 dated 10.12.2014).

9. As a result of foregoing discussion, the O.A. is **allowed**. The impugned order, if any, passed by the respondents is set aside. The disability of the applicant is to be considered as aggravated by military service. The applicant is entitled to disability element of disability pension @ 20% for life duly rounded off to 50% for life from the next date of discharge from service. The respondents are directed to grant disability element @ 50% for life from the next date of discharge from service. However, due to law of limitations settled by the Hon'ble Supreme Court in the case of ***Shiv Dass v. Union of India and others*** (2007 (3) SLR 445), the arrears of disability

element will be restricted to three years preceding the date of filing of the instant O.A. The date of filing of this O.A is 05.09.2022. The respondents are directed to give effect to this order within a period of four months from the date of receipt of certified copy of the order. Default will invite interest @ 8% per annum till actual payment.

10. No order as to costs.

11. Pending Misc. Application(s), if any, shall stand disposed off.

(Vice Admiral Abhay Raghunath Karve) (Justice Umesh Chandra Srivastava)
Member (A) Member (J)

Dated: December, 2022

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