

Court No. 1**ARMED FORCES TRIBUNAL, REGIONAL BENCH, LUCKNOW****ORIGINAL APPLICATION No. 795 of 2023**Tuesday, this the 16th day of January, 2024**“Hon’ble Mr. Justice Anil Kumar, Member (J)”****“Hon’ble Vice Admiral Atul Kumar Jain, Member (A)”**

Wg. Cdr. Sher Singh Dagur (30364B) (Retd.), S/o Hajari Lal, C9-702,
Prateek Grand City, Siddarth Vihar, Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh –
201009.

..... Applicant

Ld. Counsel for the : **Shri Raj Kumar Mishra**, Advocate.
Applicant **Ms. Upasna Mishra**, Advocate
Shri Kapil Sharma, Advocate

Versus

1. Union of India, through Secretary, Ministry of Defence, South Block, DHQ PO, New Delhi -110011.
2. Chief of the Air Staff, Air Headquarters, Vayu Bhawan, Rafi Marg, New Delhi -110106.
3. The Director General Medical Service (Air), Air Headquarters, R.K. Puram, West Block-VI, New Delhi -110066.
4. Joint Controller of Defence Accounts (Air Force), 2nd Floor, AFCAO building, Subroto Park, New Delhi -10.

.....Respondents

Ld. Counsel for the : **Dr. S.N. Pandey**, Advocate
Respondents. Central Govt. Standing Counsel
Assisted by MWO S.K. Mishra,
Departmental Representative

ORDER

“Per Hon’ble Mr. Justice Anil Kumar, 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) *Issue/pass an order or direction to the respondents to quash /set aside illegal and unjust rejection of disability for PRIMARY HYPERTENSION and GOUTY ARTHRITIS 16.02.2023.*
- (b) *Issue/pass an order or direction to the respondents to quash/ set aside illegal and unjust rejection order of disability pension for PRIMARY HYPERTENSION and GOUTY ARTHRITIS in first appeal.*
- (c) *Issue/pass an order or direction to respondents to grant disability for PRIMARY HYPERTENSION assessed 30% and GOUTY ARTHRITIS assessed 5% (composite 33.5%) from the next date of retirement i.e. 01.06.2023 for life, with arrears and interest, and benefit of rounding off to 50%.*
- (d) *Issue/pass any other order or direction as this Hon’ble Tribunal may deem fit in the circumstances of the case.*
- (e) *Allow this application with exemplary cost.*

2. Briefly stated, applicant was commissioned in the Indian Air Force on 26.05.2009 as Short Service Commissioned (SSC) Officer and retired on 25.05.2023 in Low Medical Category on completion of 14 years of SSC service. At the time of retirement from service, the Release Medical Board (RMB) held at New Delhi/SMC HQ WAC(U), Air Force on 14.11.2022 assessed his disabilities (i) ‘**PRIMARY HYPERTENSION (OLD) I10**’ @30% for life and (ii) ‘**GOUTY**

ARTHRITIS (OLD) M 10.9' @ 5% for life, composite disabilities @33.5% 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 returned unactioned for reconciliation vide letter dated 16.02.2023. The applicant preferred representation cum Appeal dated 24.02.2023 which too was rejected vide letter dated 12.04.2023. The applicant claim for the grant of disability pension was also rejected vide letter dated 14.08.2023, annexed as Annexure R-1 of the Counter Affidavit filed by the respondents. 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 Air Force and there is no note in the service documents that he was suffering from any disease at the time of commissioning in Air Force. The diseases of the applicant were contracted during the service, hence they are attributable to and aggravated by Air Force Service. He pleaded that various Benches of Armed Forces Tribunal have granted disability element of disability pension in similar cases, as such the applicant be granted disability element of disability pension and its rounding off to 50%.

4. On the other hand, Ld. Counsel for the respondents contended that composite disabilities of the applicant @ 33.5% for life have been regarded as NANA by the RMB, hence, as per Regulation 37 of Pension Regulations for the Indian Air Force, 1961 (Part – I) which provides that

“An officer who is retired from Air Force service on account of a disability which is attributable to or aggravated by such service and is assessed at 20% or over may, on retirement, be awarded disability pension consisting of a service element and a disability element in accordance with the regulations in this section” 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 three folds:-

- (a) Whether the disabilities of the applicant are attributable to or aggravated by Air Force Service?
- (b) Whether Short Service Commissioned Officer are entitled for the grant of Disability Pension?
- (c) 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 disabilities '**PRIMARY HYPERTENSION (OLD) I10**' and '**GOUTY ARTHRITIS (OLD) M 10.9**' are neither attributable to nor aggravated (NANA) by service on the ground of onset of disabilities in March 2022 while posted in Field Area (Jorhat) and awarding aggravation for Primary Hypertension is not tenable vide O/o DGMS (Air) letter No. Air HQ/26445/30364/Med-7 dated 16 Feb 23, 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 cryptic not convincing and doesn't reflect the complete truth on the matter. Field Areas have their own pressure of rigorous Air Force training and associated stress and strain of Air Force service. The applicant was commissioned in Indian Air Force on 26.05.2009 and the disabilities have started after more than 12 years of Air Force service i.e. in March 2022. 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 both the disabilities of the applicant should be considered as aggravated by Air Force service.

8. Further, consequent upon the issue of Government of India, Ministry of Defence, Department of Ex-Servicemen Welfare, New Delhi

letter No. 1(9)/2006/D(Pen-C) dated 30.08.2006 and letter No. 16(01)/2012-D(Pen-Pol) dated 23.03.2015, Principal Controller of Defence Accounts (Pensions), Prayagraj has issued Circular No. 23 dated 27.05.2015 wherein it is provided that *“in the case of aggravation too, service element of disability pension in respect of non-regular officers would be calculated after taking into account the full commissioned service rendered by them as calculated in the case of Regular Commissioned Officer. As such EC/SSC officers in aggravation cases would also be allowed the benefit of revision w.e.f. 30.08.2006 as allowed to attributable cases vide MoD letter dated 30.08.2006.”*

9. In view of the Circular No. 23 dated 27.05.2015 issued by the Principal Controller of Defence Accounts (Pension), Prayagraj the applicant is entitled for disability pension which include disability element as well as service element also.

10. 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 noded in disapproval of the policy of the Government of India in granting the benefit of rounding off of disability element 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.”

11. 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.

12. As such, in view of the decision of Hon'ble Supreme Court in the case of ***Union of India and Ors vs Ram Avtar & (supra)*** 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 @ 33.5% for life to be rounded off to 50% for life may be extended to the applicant from the next date of his retirement.

13. In view of the above, the **Original Application No. 795 of 2023** deserves to be allowed, hence **allowed**. The impugned orders, rejecting the applicant's claim for grant of disability pension, are set aside. Both the disabilities of the applicant are held as aggravated by Air Force Service. The applicant is entitled to get disability pension @33.5% for life which would be rounded off to 50% for life from the next date of his retirement. The respondents are directed to grant disability pension to the applicant @33.5% for life which would stand rounded off to 50% for life from the next date of his retirement. 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

14. No order as to costs.

15. Master Warrant Officer S.K. Mishra, Departmental Representative for the respondents orally submitted to grant Leave to Appeal against the above order which we have considered and no point of law of general public importance being involved in the case the plea is rejected.

(Vice Admiral Atul Kumar Jain)
Member (A)

(Justice Anil Kumar)
Member (J)

Dated : 11 January, 2024

AKD/-