

Court No. 1**ARMED FORCES TRIBUNAL, REGIONAL BENCH, LUCKNOW****ORIGINAL APPLICATION No. 178 of 2023**

Wednesday, this the 26th day of July, 2023

**“Hon’ble Mr. Justice Ravindra Nath Kakkar, Member (J)
Hon’ble Vice Admiral Atul Kumar Jain, Member (A)”**

No. 5849831-Y Ex Rfn Deepak Kumar
 2/9 Gorkha Rifles, C/o 56 APO
 R/o Village – Bharuwala Grant,
 Post Office – Clement Town, Tehsil – Dehradun,
 District – Dehradun (Uttarakhand) – 248002

..... Applicant

Ld. Counsel for the Applicant : **Shri KK Singh Bisht**, Advocate
Shri Prakhar Kankan, Advocate

Versus

1. Union of India, through the Secretary, Ministry of Defence, South Block, New Delhi – 110011.
2. Chief of the Army Staff, Integrated Headquarters of Ministry of Defence (Army) South Block, New Delhi – 110011.
3. Officer in Charge, Records, 39 Gorkha Rifles, PIN – 900445, C/o 56 APO.
4. Principal Controller Defence Accounts (Pension), Draupadi Ghat, Prayagraj (UP) – 211014.

.....Respondents

Ld. Counsel for the Respondents. : **Shri D.K. Pandey**, Advocate
 Central Govt. Counsel

ORDER**“Per Hon’ble Mr. Justice Ravindra Nath Kakkar, 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 the Respondents to quash/set aside the impugned order dated 31 October 2014 passed by Records, respondent No. 3, contained in annexure No. A-1 being arbitrary and illegal.*
- (b) *To issue/pass an order or direction to the respondents to grant disability element @ 30% for life which after rounding off will be @ 50% for life from the next date of discharge i.e. from 01 November 2014.*
- (c) *Any other relief as considered proper by this Hon'ble Tribunal be awarded in favour of the applicant.*
- (d) *Cost of the Original Application be awarded to the applicant."*

2. Briefly stated, applicant was enrolled in the Indian Army on 23.10.1997 and discharged from service on 31.10.2014 (AN) in Low Medical Category under Rule 13 (3) Item I (i)(a) of the Army Rules, 1954 on completion of terms of engagement after rendering more than 17 years of service. At the time of discharge from service, the Release Medical Board (RMB) held at Military Hospital, Ranikhet on 08.08.2014 assessed his disabilities, (i) '**PRIMARY HYPERTENSION**' @ 30% for life and (ii) '**HYPERLIPIDEMIA**' @ 1-5% for life, composite @ 30% 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 31.10.2014. No appeal was preferred by the applicant, however, a RTI application dated 28.02.2022 was submitted by the applicant which was replied by the respondents vide Records letter

dated 23.03.2022. 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 of the applicant were contracted during the service, hence both are attributable to and aggravated by Military Service. He placed reliance on the judgment of the Hon'ble Apex Court in **Dharamvir Singh vs. Union of India & Others**, 2013 7 SCC 316 and pleaded that various Benches of Armed Forces Tribunal have granted disability pension in similar cases, as such the applicant be granted disability pension @ composite 30% for life to be rounded off to 50% for life.

4. On the other hand, Ld. Counsel for the respondents contended that disabilities of the applicant, composite @ 52% for life have been regarded as NANA by the RMB, hence under the provisions of para 53(a) of Pension Regulations for the Army, 2008 (Part-1) applicant is not entitled to disability element of 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 first disability, '**PRIMARY HYPERTENSION**' is neither attributable to nor aggravated (NANA) by service on the ground of onset of disability in 2014 while posted in Peace location, 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 element of 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 enrolled in Indian Army on 23.10.1997 and the disability has started after more than 16 years of Army service i.e. in the year 2014. 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 first disability (Primary Hypertension) of the applicant should be considered as aggravated by military service.

8. As far as second disability (HYPERLIPIDEMIA) is concerned, we are in agreement with the RMB that this disability is neither attributable to nor aggravated by service and not connected with military service.

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 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 invalided 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. 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."

11. As such, in view of the decision of Hon'ble Supreme Court in the case of **Ram Avtar** (supra) and **Shiv Dass** (supra), we are of the considered view that benefit of rounding off of disability element of pension for first disability @ 30% 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.

12. In view of the above, the **Original Application No. 178 of 2023** deserves to be partly allowed, hence **partly allowed**. The impugned order rejecting the applicant's claim for grant of disability element of disability pension for first disability (Primary Hypertension), is set aside. The first disability of the applicant is held as aggravated by Army Service. The applicant is entitled to get disability element @ 30% for life which would be rounded off to 50% for life from three years preceding the date of filing of Original Application. The respondents are directed to grant disability element of pension to the applicant @ 30% for life which would stand rounded off to 50% for life from three years preceding the date of filing of Original Application. The date of filing of Original Application is 13.02.2023. 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.

13. No order as to costs.

14. Misc. Application(s), pending if any, shall stand disposed off.

(Vice Admiral Atul Kumar Jain)
Member (A)

(Justice Ravindra Nath Kakkar)
Member (J)

Dated : 26th July, 2023

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