

Form No. 4
{See rule 11(1)}
ORDER SHEET
ARMED FORCES TRIBUNAL, REGIONAL BENCH, LUCKNOW

Court No.1 (E. Court)

O.A. No. 170 OF 2020

Ex Dfr Rajesh Kumar
By Legal Practitioner for the Applicant

Applicant

Versus

Union of India & Others
By Legal Practitioner for Respondents

Respondents

Notes of the Registry	Orders of the Tribunal
	<p><u>12.02.2021</u> <u>Hon'ble Mr. Justice Umesh Chandra Srivastava, Member (J)</u> <u>Hon'ble Vice Admiral Abhay Raghunath Karve, Member (A)</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Heard Col YR Sharma (Retd), learned counsel for the applicant and Shri Yogesh Kesarwani Singh, learned counsel for the respondents.</p> <p>1. The instant Original Application has been filed on behalf of the applicant under Section 14 of the Armed Forces Tribunal Act, 2007, whereby the applicant has sought following reliefs:-</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">“(a) The Hon'ble Tribunal may be pleased to set aside the orders dated 18.05.2018 (Annexure No A-3), 15.10.2018 (Annexure No A-5), 18.04.2019 (Annexure No A-7) and 30.01.2020 (Annexure No A-9).</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">(b) Direct respondents to grant @ 30% disability element of the pension to be rounded off to 50% to applicant for disability 'CORONARY ARTERY DISEASE' for life treating it as Attributable to Aggravated by military service.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">(c) Direct ht respondents to pay an interest @ 12% per annum on the arrears with effect from 30.09.2018.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">(d) Issue/pass an order or direction as the Hon'ble Tribunal may deem fit in the circumstances of the case.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">(e) Allow this Original Application with costs”.</p> <p>2. Brief facts of the case giving rise to this application are that applicant was enrolled in the Indian Army on 28.09.1994 and after having served for more than 24 years, he was discharged from service under the provisions of Army Rule 13 (3) Item III (i) in low medical category 'S1H1A1P2E1' (Permanent) on 30.09.2018. Prior to discharge from service, applicant was brought before Release Medical Board (RMB) on 18.05.2018 which assessed</p>

applicant to be suffering from 'CORONARY ARTERY DISEASE' with disability @ 30% for life neither attributable to nor aggravated by military service (NANA). Disability claim was rejected vide order dated 15.10.2018. Thereafter, first and second appeals were also rejected vide orders dated 24.11.2018 and 30.01.2020 respectively. It is in this perspective that this O.A. has been filed.

3. Learned counsel for the applicant submitted that the applicant was enrolled in the Army in medically and physically fit condition and there is no note in his service documents with regard to suffering from any disease prior to enrolment, therefore, any disability suffered by applicant after joining the service should be considered as attributable to or aggravated by military service and applicant should be entitled to disability pension. Learned counsel for the applicant further submitted that disability pension claim of the applicant has been rejected in a cavalier manner without assigning any meaningful reason. Further submission of learned counsel for the applicant is that since the aforesaid disease is due to stress and strain related rigors of military service, this should be considered either attributable to or aggravated by military service. Learned counsel for the applicant submitted that the instant O.A. is fully covered under various pronouncements of Armed Forces Tribunals and Hon'ble Apex Court. Therefore, the applicant be held entitled to grant of disability pension.

4. On the other hand, learned counsel for the respondents argued that since RMB has declared the applicant's disability as NANA, he is not entitled to disability pension. His further submission is that the competent authority has rightly rejected applicant's disability pension claim on the ground of disability being originated in peace area, therefore, O.A. deserves to be dismissed. While filing counter affidavit, the respondents have conceded in para 4.21 that the disability of the applicant may be regarded as aggravated by military service being disability of Coronary Artery disease.

5. 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 213. In this case the Hon'ble 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)."

6. In view of the settled position of law on attributability/aggravation, we find that the RMB has denied attributability/aggravation to the applicant only by endorsing a cryptic sentence in the proceedings i.e. the disability has occurred at peace station (Patiala) on 01.12.2016. We feel that such a discrimination between peace posting and a posting to Field/High Altitude Area/Counter

Insurgency operations amounts to saying that there is no stress and strain of military service in peace area, which is not the absolute truth. It is trite law that any disability not recorded at the time of recruitment must be presumed to have been caused subsequently, and, unless proved to the contrary is to be considered as a consequence of military service. The benefit of doubt, therefore, shall be rightly extended in favour of the applicant. In the instant case, since the applicant was found to be suffering from disability when he had put in more than 18 years of service, it should be deemed to be aggravated by military service since it has occurred subsequently after prolonged service. We are, therefore, of the considered opinion that the benefit of doubt should be given to the applicant as per the Hon'ble Supreme Court judgment of **Dharamvir Singh** (supra) and the disability of the applicant should be considered as aggravated by military service. It is also well settled law in terms of **Union of India & Ors vs Wing Commander SP Rathore**, Civil Appeal No. 10870 of 2018 decided on 11.12.2019 that if the disability is assessed @ 20% and more when the person is discharged on completion of terms of engagement, he will be eligible for disability pension. In the case in hand, applicant's disability element is 30% which fully meets aforesaid requirement.

7. In view of the above, applicant is held entitled to 30% disability element for life which shall stand rounded off to 50% disability element for life from the date of his discharge.

8. As a result of foregoing discussion, the O.A. is **allowed**. The impugned orders are set aside. The disability of applicant is held aggravated by military service and the benefit of rounding off to 50% for life is extended. The applicant is entitled to disability element @ 30% for life rounded off to 50% for life from date of discharge. The respondents are directed to complete the entire exercise within four months from today and pay disability element to applicant with arrears.

9. Default will invite interest @ 8% p.a.

10. No order as to costs.

11. Pending applications, if any, are disposed off.

(Vice Admiral Abhay Raghunath Karve)
Member (A)

(Justice Umesh Chandra Srivastava)
Member (J)

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