

**ARMED FORCES TRIBUNAL, REGIONAL BENCH, LUCKNOW
CIRCUIT BENCH AT NAINITAL**

ORIGINAL APPLICATION No.706 of 2022

Thursday, this the 14th day of March, 2024

**“Hon’ble Mr. Justice Anil Kumar, Member (J)
Hon’ble Maj. Gen. Sanjay Singh, Member (A)”**

No. 10313268M Sep. Gusain Singh (Retd.), R/o Village – Sarshon, P.O. – Sarai Khet, Tehsil – Syalde, District – Almora (Uttarakhand)-263661.

..... Applicant

Ld. Counsel for the Applicant : **Shri Bipin Bihari**, Advocate

Versus

1. Union of India, Through the Secretary, Ministry of Defence, South Block, New Delhi.
2. Chief of the Army Staff (Dte of AV), Rajaji Marg, New Delhi-110010.
3. O IC Records, Security Corps Records, Post – Burnacherry, Kannur (Kerala)-670013.
4. The PCDA (P), Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh-211012.

..... Respondents

Ld. Counsel for the Respondents. : **Shri Neeraj Upreti**, Advocate
Central Govt. Counsel
Assisted by **Major M.S. Chauhan**,
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) *To call all the records from the respondents and set aside the par of the Medical Board (Annexure A-2) and the consequent rejection (Annexures A-1) wherein the disability has been opined to be neither attributable to nor aggravated by military service and quash the same.*
- (b) *to direct the respondents to pay the disability pension to the applicant and issue the revised service Pension PPO with benefits of disability pension to the applicant from date of discharge w.e.f. 14.05.1989.*
- (c) *To round of the disability percentage from 50 to 75% as per policy dated 31.01.2001.*
- (d) *to grant arrears of disability pension with interest @12% p.a. with effect from the date of retirement with all the consequential benefits.*
- (e) *Award the cost of application to the applicant.*
- (f) *to pass such further order or orders, direction/Directions as this Hon’ble Tribunal may deem fit and proper in accordance with law.*

2. During the course of arguments, Ld. Counsel for the applicant submits that he is claiming for the grant of disability element of disability pension. He is not pressing for the grant of service element of disability pension as the applicant is already in receipt of service pension.

3. Briefly stated, applicant was enrolled in 124 Infantry Battalion of Territorial Army on 15.07.1968 and discharged on 14.04.1980 under TA Rules 16(2) of TA Regulations 1980 (Revised Edition) at his own request after rendering 10 years and 234 days of service. He was re-enrolled in the Defence Security Corps (DSC) on 23.04.1980 and invalided out from DSC service on 13.05.1989 in Low Medical Category under Rule 13 (3) Item III (iii) of the Army Rules, 1954 after rendering 19 years and 254 days qualifying service i.e. 10 years 234 days former service and 09 years and 20 days DSC service for which he was granted service pension. At the time of discharge from service, the Invaliding Medical Board (IMB) held at Command Hospital (Central Command), Lucknow on 13.03.1989 assessed his disability '**SCHIZOPHRENIA (OLD) (ICD 295, V-67)**' @50% for two years 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 13.12.1990. The applicant served Legal Notice dated 06.02.2021 through his Counsel which too was rejected vide letter dated 07.03.2022. It is in this perspective that the applicant has preferred the present Original Application.

4. Learned Counsel for the applicant pleaded that at the time of enrolment, the applicant was found mentally and physically fit for service in the Territorial Army/DSC and there is no note in the service documents that he was suffering from any disease at the

time of enrolment in Territorial Army/DSC. The disease of the applicant was contracted during the service, hence it is attributable to and aggravated by Military/DSC Service. Ld. Counsel for the applicant relied upon the law laid down by the Hon'ble Apex Court in the case of **Commander Rakesh Pande Versus Union of India & Others**, (Civil Appeal No. 5970 of 2019) decided on 28.11.2019 submitted that the applicant's disability is a permanent nature and it cannot be assessed for two years rather it should be assessed for life. He pleaded that various Benches of Armed Forces Tribunal have granted disability pension in similar cases, as such the applicant be granted disability element of disability pension and its rounding off to 75% for life.

5. On the other hand, Ld. Counsel for the respondents contended that disability of the applicant @50% for two years has been regarded as NANA by the IMB, hence as per Regulation 179 of the Pension Regulations for the Army, 1961 (Part-I) the applicant is not entitled to disability element of disability pension. He pleaded for dismissal of the Original Application.

6. We have heard Ld. Counsel for the applicant as also Ld. Counsel for the respondents. We have also gone through the Invaliding 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 disability of the applicant is attributable to or aggravated by Territorial Army/DSC Service?
- (b) Whether the disability of the applicant is permanent in nature and it should be assessed for life?
- (c) Whether the applicant is entitled for the benefit of rounding off the disability element of disability pension?

7. 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)."

8. In view of the settled position of law on attributability, we find that the IMB has denied attributability to the applicant only by endorsing that the disability '**SCHIZOPHRENIA (OLD) (ICD 295, V-67)**' is neither attributable to nor aggravated (NANA) by service on the ground of constitutional disease not connected with military service, therefore, applicant is not entitled to disability element of 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 disability pension to applicant is cryptic, not convincing and doesn't reflect the complete truth on the matter. Although the applicant's disability is a mental disorder but considering that the applicant was enrolled in Territorial Army on 15.07.1968, after discharge from Territorial Army re-enrolled in DSC on 23.04.1980 and the disability has started after more than 19years of Territorial Army/DSC service i.e. on 25.11.1987 we are of the 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 military service.

9. Since the applicant was invalided out from service before completion of terms of engagement of DSC service in category 'E', we are of the considered opinion that the applicant's disability is a permanent nature.

10. In the case of ***Commander Rakesh Pande Versus Union of India & Others*** (supra) Hon'ble Apex Court has held as under :-

"Para 7 of the letter dated 07.02.2001 provides that no periodical reviews by the Resurvey Medical Boards shall be held for reassessment of disabilities. In case of disabilities adjudicated as being of permanent nature, the decision once arrived at will be for life unless the individual himself requests for a review. The applicant is afflicted with diseases which are of permanent nature and he is entitled to disability pension for his life which cannot be restricted for a period of 5 years. The judgment cited by Ms. Praveena Gautam, learned counsel is not relevant and not applicable to the facts of this case. Therefore, the appeal is allowed and the appellant shall be entitled for disability pension @50% for life."

11. In view of the law laid down by the Hon'ble Apex Court in the case of **Commander Rakesh Pande Versus Union of India & Others** (supra), as the applicant's disability is a permanent nature, the decision once arrived at will be for life and applicant is entitled disability element of disability pension for life which cannot be restricted for a period of two years.

12. 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 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."*

13. 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.

14. 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.”

15. As such, in view of the decision of Hon'ble Supreme Court in the cases of **Union of India and Ors vs Ram Avtar & ors (supra)** and **Shiv Dass (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 element of disability pension @50% for life to be rounded off to 75% for life may be extended to the applicant from three preceding years from the date of filing of the Original Application.

16. In view of the above, the **Original Application No. 706 of 2022** deserves to be partly allowed, hence **partly allowed**. The impugned orders, rejecting the applicant's claim for grant of disability element of disability pension, are set aside. The disability of the applicant is held as aggravated by Army Service. The applicant is entitled to get disability element @50% for life which

would be rounded off to 75% for life w.e.f. three years preceding the date of filing of Original Application. The respondents are directed to grant disability element to the applicant @50% for life which would stand rounded off to 75% for life w.e.f. three years preceding the date of filing of Original Application. The date of filing of Original Application is 05.09.2022. 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.

17. No order as to costs.

18. Major M.S. Chauhan, 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.

(Maj. Gen. Sanjay Singh)
Member (A)

(Justice Anil Kumar)
Member (J)

Dated : 14 March, 2024

AKD/-