

Court No. 1

ARMED FORCES TRIBUNAL, REGIONAL BENCH, LUCKNOW

ORIGINAL APPLICATION No. 1233 of 2023

Tuesday, this the 28th day of May, 2024

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

Army No. JC-820624P, Ex. Sub. Prabhu Singh, Son of Raja Ram Singh, R/o Village – Shisho Bigha, P.O. – Fakharpur, Tehsil – Jehanabad, District – Jehanabad, Bihar-804401,
Presently residing at – House No. 34, Vijay Nagar, Ekta Nagar, Kalli Pashchim, Lucknow, U.P., Pin No. 226301.

..... Applicant

Ld. Counsel for the Applicant : **Mohd. Zafar Khan**, Advocate

Versus

1. Union of India, through Secretary, Ministry of Defence (Army), South Block, New Delhi-110010.
2. Chief of the Army Staff, IHQ of MoD (Army), South Block, New Delhi.
3. Officer in Charge Records/Senior Recor Officer, Sena Police Corps Abhilekh Karyalaya, Corps of Military Police Records, PIN-900493, C/o 56 APO,
4. Adjutant General, PS Directorate, AG’s Branch, IHQ of MoD (Army), New Delhi-0110001.
5. PCDA (Pension), Draupadi Ghat, Allahabad.

.....Respondents

Ld. Counsel for the Respondents. : **Shri Bipin Kumar Singh**, Advocate
Central Govt. Standing Counsel

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 issue/pass an order or directions to set-aside/quash the orders of rejection of the claim for disability pension communicated vide order/letter No. JC 820624P/NE(D.Pen) dated 07 May 2022, by respondent No. 3 and rejection of First Appeal order communicated through vide order/letter No. JC-820624P/NE(D.Pen) dated 24 February, 2023 by respondent No. 3 annexed as Annexure No. 1 and Annexure No. 2, after summoning the relevant original records.*
- B. *To issue/pass an order or directions to the respondents to grant disability element of disability pension @50% from date of discharge i.e. 30.04.2022 along with 12% interest on arrear in light of Hon’ble Apex Court judgment.*
- C. *To issue/pass an order or directions to the respondents to grant subsequently benefit of rounding off/broad banding off disability pension @50% to @75% to the applicant from the date of discharge i.e. 30.04.2022 along with 12% interest on arrear in light of Hon’ble Apex Court judgment and Government letter dated 31.01.2001.*
- D. *To issue/pass any other order or direction as this Hon’ble Tribunal may deem just, fit and proper under the circumstances of the case in favour of the applicant.*

E. To allow this original application with costs.

2. Briefly stated, applicant was enrolled in the Corps of Military Police of Indian Army on 28.04.1994 and discharged on 30.04.2022 in Low Medical Category on completion of terms of engagement under Rule 13 (3) Item III (i) (a) of the Army Rules, 1954. At the time of discharge from service, the Release Medical Board (RMB) held at Command Hospital (Eastern Command), Kolkata on 20.12.2021 assessed his disabilities (i) '**HIGH MYOPIA BOTH EYES (ICD-H52.11)**' @20% and (ii) '**PRIMARY HYPERTENSION (ICD - I10)**' @30%, **composite disabilities @40% 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 07.05.2022. The applicant preferred First Appeal which too was rejected vide letter dated 30.01.2023 which was communicated to the applicant vide letter dated 24.02.2023. 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 they are attributable to and aggravated by Military

Service. 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%.

4. On the other hand, Ld. Counsel for the respondents contended that composite disabilities of the applicant @40% for life have been regarded as NANA by the RMB, hence as per Regulation 53(a) of the Pension Regulations for the Army, 2008 (Part-I) which provides that *“An individual released/retired/discharged on completion of terms of engagement or on completion of service limits or on attaining the prescribed age (irrespective of his period of engagement), if found suffering from a disability attributable to or aggravated by military service and so recorded by Release Medical Board, may be granted disability element in addition to service pension or service gratuity from the date of retirement/discharge, if the accepted degree of disability is assessed at 20% or more”* the applicant is not entitled to disability element of 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 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 element of 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 '**HIGH MYOPIA BOTH EYES (ICD-H52.11)**' @20% and '**PRIMARY HYPERTENSION (ICD – I10)**' are neither attributable to nor aggravated (NANA) by service on the ground that first disability is an inherited disorder with no causal relationship with military service and onset of second disability in August, 2016 while posted in Peace location (Meerut) and it is a multi factorial disorder, multiple factors like age, sex, genetics, life style, eating, habits etc. Play a major role in onset and further

progression of the disease, 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. 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 28.04.1994 and the disabilities have started after more than 14 and 22 years of Army service respectively i.e. in February, 2009 and August, 2016. 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 military service.

8. In para 17 A (a) of Chapter VII of the Guide to Medical Officer (Military Pensions), 2002 the provision for composite assessment has been mentioned which reads as under :-

“17A. Composite Assessment

(a) Where there are two or more disabilities due to service, compensation will be based on the composite assessment of the degree of disablement. Generally speaking, when separate disabilities have entirely different functional effects, the composite assessment will be the arithmetical sum of their separate assessment. But where the functional effects of the disabilities overlap, the composite assessment will be

reduced in proportion to the degree of overlapping. There is a tendency for some Medical Boards to reduce the composite assessment in the former group of cases. This is not correct.”

9. In the instant case there are functional effects of the first and second disabilities overlapping, as such composite assessment was reduced in proportion to the degree of overlapping by the RMB. The degree of first disability is @20% and second disability is @30%, hence, the composite assessment was assessed @40% for life by the RMB. We do not find any reason to interfere with the composite assessment made by the RMB. Accordingly, we hold that the composite assessment of both the disabilities is @40% for life.

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 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.”

11. Additionally, consequent upon the issue of Government of India, Ministry of Defence letter No. 17(01)/2017/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 & ors (supra)*** as well as Government of India, Ministry of Defence letter No. 17(01)/2017/D(Pen/Policy) dated 23.01.2018, we are of the considered view that benefit of rounding off of disability element of disability pension @40% for life to be rounded off to 50% for life may be extended to the applicant from the next date of his discharge.

13. In view of the above, the **Original Application No. 1233 of 2023** 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. Both the disabilities of the applicant are held as aggravated by Army Service. Composite assessment for both the disabilities is held @40% for life as has been opined by the RMB. The applicant is entitled to get disability element @40% for life which would be rounded off to 50% for life from the next date of his discharge. The respondents are directed to grant disability element to the applicant @40% for life which would stand rounded off to 50% for life from

the next date of his discharge. 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.

(Vice Admiral Atul Kumar Jain)
Member (A)

(Justice Anil Kumar)
Member (J)

Dated : 28 May, 2024

AKD/-