

**ARMED FORCES TRIBUNAL, REGIONAL BENCH, LUCKNOW
(CIRCUIT BENCH NAINITAL)**

Original Application No 179 of 2022

Wednesday, this the 7th day of September, 2022

**Hon'ble Mr. Justice Umesh Chandra Srivastava, Member (J)
Hon'ble Vice Admiral Abhay Raghunath Karve, Member (A)**

No. 4084968M L/Nk Ravi Bhatt
S/o Shri Narayan Dutt Bhatt
R/o Village – Falsua, PO – Dandi, Tehsil – Rishikesh,
District – Dehradun-248145 (Uttarakhand)

..... Applicant

Ld. Counsel for the Applicant: **Shri Kishore Rai**, Advocate

Versus

1. Union of India, Ministry of Defence through its Secretary, South Block, New Delhi-110011.
2. P.C.D.A. (P) Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh.
3. Chief of the Army Staff, Integrated Headquarters of Ministry of Defence (Army), South Block, New Delhi – 110011.
4. Senior Record Officer Records The Garhwal Rifles, Lansdowne, Pauri Garhwal, C/o 56 APO.

..... Respondents

Ld. Counsel for the Respondents : **Shri Rajesh Sharma**,
Central Govt Counsel

ORDER

1. The instant Original Application has been filed on behalf of the applicant under Section 14 of the Armed Forces Tribunal Act, 2007 for the following reliefs:-

- “i. A direction to the respondents to grant the benefits of Second Modified Assured Career progression Scheme on completion of 16 years of service on 15.01.2017.

- ii. To summon the entire records of the applicant pertaining to computation of the benefits to the applicant under Modified Assured Career progression Scheme.
- iii. Any other relief to which the applicant is found entitled may also very kindly be granted to the applicant.”

2. The factual matrix on record is that the applicant was enrolled in the Army on 15.12.2001 and was discharged from service on 31.12.2018 after rendering more than 17 years of service in terms of Rule 13 (3) III (i) of Army Rules, 1954 on fulfilling the conditions of his service. The applicant was granted first Modified Assured Career Progression (MACP) in the year 2009 on completion of 08 years of service and was due for second financial upgradation on completion of 16 years of service in the year 2017. On account of submission of unwillingness certificate applicant was denied further promotion with regard to MACPS and was discharged from service without granting benefits of second MACP. This O.A. has been filed for grant of benefit of 2nd MACP on completion of 16 years of service as on 15.12.2017.

3. Learned counsel for the applicant submitted that the Government had introduced Assured Career Progression (ACP) Scheme on recommendation of Vth Central Pay Commission. The said scheme was revised with three financial up-gradations i.e. after 8 years, after 16 years and after 24 years of service. Subsequently, in May 2011, the Government introduced a Modified Assured Career Progression Scheme (in short, MACPS) for Personnel Below Officer Rank superseding the previous ACP scheme. The scheme was made

to take effect from 01.09.2008. The crux of grievance of applicant is that applicant has been denied the benefits of the said scheme on the ground that he had expressed unwillingness to undergo promotion cadre. It is further submitted by learned counsel for the applicant that despite executing the undertaking of unwillingness, the right of the applicant to receive benefits conferred by MACPS did not extinguish for the reason that the applicant did not get opportunity of promotion. It is also submitted that the applicant after discharge from service approached the respondents for benefits of the scheme but was denied the same merely on the ground that he had given unwillingness certificate. He further submitted that there are no enabling provision in the MACPS which could disentitle the applicant as the applicant had already completed his terms of engagement. The applicant was due to be granted first Modified Assured Career Progression (MACP) in the year 2009 on completion of 08 years of service and second financial upgradation on completion of 16 years of service in the year 2017. He further submitted that the only condition that was available to the applicant that if the applicant has no opportunity for promotion for want of vacancy in the next higher rank, the benefit of MACP could not be denied to him merely on the basis of unwillingness certificate given by the applicant.

4. Learned counsel for the applicant further submitted that applicant never given his unwillingness to forgo the promotion further mere undertaking given by the applicant would not extinguish the right for grant of the benefits of Second MACP. He placed reliance upon

the judgment of AFT, Kochi Bench in O.A. No. 170 of 2016, ***Ex Hav Zubair P vs Union of India & Others***, and submitted that in view of the aforesaid judgment, applicant is entitled for grant 2nd MACP on completion of 16 years of service.

5. The contentions advanced by learned counsel for the respondents, per contra, are that subsequent to issue of MACPS, detailed Administrative Instructions for grant of MACPS were issued by the Army Headquarters in June 2011 vide letter dated 13.06.2011. Para 21 of the aforesaid instructions clarified that if an individual refuses promotion, MACPS will also be denied. Para 15 of the Appendix to the instructions clarified that unwillingness to attend promotion cadre amounts to unwillingness or refusal for promotion. The applicant was granted 1st MACPS w.e.f. 15.12.2009 on completion of eight years of service and was due for grant of 2nd MACP w.e.f. 15.12.2017. Thereafter, applicant came up in seniority for promotion cadre on a number of occasions, however, the applicant has rendered unwillingness certificate on each occasion to appear in promotion cadre. Further contention made by learned counsel for the respondents is that as per Govt of India, Ministry of Defence (Army) letter dated 11.07.2018 when a regular promotion offered to an employee was refused by him before becoming entitled to a financial upgradation, no financial upgradation shall be allowed. As such applicant was not granted stagnation due to lack of opportunities. His contention is that since applicant had denied to undergo promotion

cadre, he was not granted 2nd MACP in terms of aforesaid provisions. He pleaded for dismissal of O.A.

6. We have heard learned counsel for the parties and perused the material placed on record.

7. The only contention of the respondents is that applicant was denied 2nd MACP on the ground that he had submitted an unwillingness certificate, as such he was ineligible for promotion and consequently for benefits accruing from MACPS. Attention of the Tribunal was invited to Para 15 of Appendix 'X' to Army Headquarters Administrative Instructions which postulates that unwillingness to attend promotion cadre course also amounts to unwillingness/refusal for promotion. The learned counsel also contended that the applicant did not submit his willingness which made him ineligible for the benefits of the MACPS.

8. It is worthy of notice that ACP scheme of 2003 as well as MACP scheme of 2011 merely envisaged grant of financial benefits to Personnel Below Officer Rank (PBOR) through placement in a higher pay scale and was not to be considered as functional or regular promotion. It cannot be said that unwillingness certificates rendered for promotion cadre in accordance with Record Office Instructions were irrevocable.

9. It may be noted that it is not the first case. Earlier also, the Kochi Bench of Armed Forces Tribunal examined and dealt on this aspect in O.A. No. 170 of 2016, ***Ex Hav Zubair P vs Union of India***

& Others, and converged to the conclusion leaning in favour of the applicant in the O.A. Hence the question whether a person who had refused to undergo promotion cadre/course or had given unwillingness for promotion cadre was eligible for MACPS is no more *res integra*. The Armed Forces Tribunal, Regional Bench, Kochi had an occasion to consider this aspect of the matter and observed as under:-

*“As observed, the applicant had given unwillingness certificate on 20th Jun 2003, in accordance with the provisions of AEC Record Office Instructions specifying mandatory criteria courses for promotion and impact of unwillingness to undergo such courses. The ROI specified that an individual who is unwilling to attend criteria course/promotion cadre, relinquishes his claim for next higher rank as he has not qualified the necessary promotion course. At the stage of signing such a certificate, there was no MACP Scheme which was introduced only in May 2011 to be effective from 01 Sept 2008. Even the earlier ACP was Scheme introduced in August 2003, which, as such was not applicable to direct entry Havildars like the applicant. The ACP Scheme of 2003 as well as the MACP Scheme of 2011 merely envisaged grant of financial benefits to Personnel Below Officer Rank (PBOR) of the three services through placement in a higher pay scale and was not to be considered as functional or regular promotion. It is also observed that the unwillingness certificate rendered in accordance with ROI is not really irrevocable as there were provisions to apply for withdrawal of unwillingness certificate and for subsequent detailment of the course provided the individual made such an application to obtain the sanction of Additional DG AE. The Additional DG AE could then consider the submission made by the individual and grant necessary waiver. The aspect of whether a person who had refused to undergo promotion course or had given permanent unwillingness for promotion was eligible for MACP is no more *res integra* as this Bench had examined the issue in O.A.No.73/14 and connected cases and more recently in O.A.Nos.26 and 40 of 2015 and O.A.No.25/2016 and connected cases. In our view, the question to be considered is whether the applicants had any opportunity for promotion based on vacancies available from the date of coming into effect of MACP till their retirement. If the applicants had no opportunity for promotion for want of vacancy in the next higher rank, then their claim for MACP could not be denied only on the basis of the undertaking executed by them. While the respondents have also contended that unwillingness to*

undergo mandatory/criteria course for promotion amounts to unwillingness/refusal for promotion, it is observed that there is no such provision in the Government letters at Annexures A2 and A4 or in the Administrative Instructions issued by Army Headquarters (Annexure R1). The provisions of Para 15 quoted by the respondents is only in Appendix 'A' to the Administrative Instructions which is essentially a compilation of frequently asked questions on MACPS. While the answer to question No.15 states that unwillingness to attend promotion cadre amounts to unwillingness/refusal for promotion, since there are no enabling provisions in the Policy letters governing the issue, a mere question/ answer in the Appendix cannot be claimed as a provision to deny the benefit of MACPS. Therefore, we do not see any merit in such a contention and the benefit of MACP Scheme could not be denied to the applicant merely on the basis of an unwillingness certificate given by him prior to the introduction of the Scheme, if he had no opportunity for promotion for want of vacancy in the next higher rank. 11. When the MACP Scheme was introduced to be effective from 01 September 2008, the applicant, who had been enrolled on 20 Apr 1990, had a little over 18 years of service. Therefore, in accordance with the provisions, he was eligible by requisite service for second MACP with effect from 01 September 2008 as he had more than 16 years of service as on that date provided he did not have any chance for promotion prior to that date. The respondents have submitted that the immediate senior as well as the immediate junior of the applicant were promoted with effect from 01 Feb 2011 ie more than 2 years after the date of introduction of MACP Scheme. Therefore, in our view, the applicant did not have any opportunity for promotion to next higher rank for want of vacancy prior to 01 Sep 2008 even if he had qualified in the criteria course. Hence, he was eligible for the benefit of second MACP with effect from 01 Sep 2008 provided he was found fit after due screening in accordance with law.”

10. Coming to the present case, the moot question which arises for adjudication is whether the applicant had any opportunity for promotion based on vacancies available from the date of coming into effect of MACPS till his discharge? We observe that merely because the applicant was in the seniority list for promotion cadre course he was offered the promotion cadre course on four occasions in the period 2017 to 2018. This does not automatically imply that he would have been promoted to the next higher rank

also, because that would depend on the vacancy position at the time of actual promotion. Attending a promotion cadre course only allows a person to become eligible for promotion. It is one among several eligibility criteria necessary for promotion. Others inter alia being medical category, ACR, courses attended, vacancy, age etc. In the reply statement the respondents have not alluded to the vacancy position for the next higher rank, and therefore, it cannot be presumed that a post in the next higher rank was readily available for the applicant had he undergone the promotion cadre course. Therefore, the respondents have not been able to show that a assured vacancy in next higher rank was available for the applicant, and thus his unwillingness to attend promotion cadre course is not tantamount to refusal for promotion. If the applicant had no opportunity for promotion for want of vacancy in the next higher rank, then his claim for MACPS could not be denied only on the basis of the undertaking containing his unwillingness.

11. The contention that unwillingness to undergo promotion cadre course for promotion amounts to unwillingness/refusal for promotion, does not impress inasmuch as there is no such provision in the Administrative Instructions issued by Army Headquarters. The provisions of para 15 quoted by the respondents is only in Appendix 'A' to the Administrative Instructions issued by Army Headquarters, as observed in the case of **Ex Hav Zubair P** (supra), is essentially a compilation of frequently asked questions on MACPS. While the answer to question No. 15 states that

unwillingness to attend promotion cadre course amounts to unwillingness/refusal for promotion, since there is no enabling provision in the policy letters governing the issue, a mere question/answer in the Appendix cannot be claimed as a provision to deny the benefit of MACPS. There appears to be no substance in the contention of the respondents that benefits of MACP scheme were not available to the applicant on account of unwillingness certificate given by him to undergo promotion cadre course.

12. The applicant was enrolled on 15.12.2001 and was discharged from service on 31.12.2018, meaning thereby he was entitled to be granted first MACPS on completion of 08 years of service and second MACPS on completion of 16 years of service which he rendered prior to his discharge from service after completion of terms of engagement.

13. As stated above, in our considered view, there was no enabling provision in the MACPS which could disentitle the applicant merely because he submitted his unwillingness certificate. The only condition that was available was that if the applicant had no opportunity for promotion till his retirement, the benefit of MACPS could not be denied to him merely on the basis of unwillingness certificate rendered by him at the time of his promotion cadre course.

14. As a result of foregoing discussion, the O.A. is **allowed**. The respondents are directed to give due consideration to the claim of the applicant for the benefit of 2nd MACPS due to him on 15.12.2017 by ignoring the unwillingness certificate given by him at the time of

promotion cadre course. The appropriate decision shall be intimated to the applicant within a period of four months from the date of receipt of a copy of this order. Default will invite interest @ 8% p.a.

15. No order as to costs.

16. Pending Miscellaneous Application(s), if any, shall stand disposed off.

(Vice Admiral Abhay Raghunath Karve) (Justice Umesh Chandra Srivastava)
Member (A) Member (J)

Dated: September, 2022

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