

COURT NO. 1
ARMED FORCES TRIBUNAL
PRINCIPAL BENCH, NEW DELHI

OA 1664/2024 WITH MA 2120/2024

Ex SEA-I A.P. Singh ... Applicant
Versus
Union of India & Others Respondents

For Applicant : Mr. Devendra Kumar, Advocate
For Respondents : Ms. Jyotsna Kaushik, Advocate

CORAM:

HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE RAJENDRA MENON, CHAIRPERSON
HON'BLE REAR ADMIRAL DHIREN VIG, MEMBER (A)

ORDER
21.03.2025

MA 2120 /2024

This is an application filed under section 22(2) of the Armed Forces Tribunal Act, 2007, seeking condonation of delay of 325 days in filing the present OA. In view of the judgments of the Hon'ble Supreme Court in the matter of Union of India v. Tarsem Singh [2009 (1) AISLJ 371] and in Ex Sep Chain Singh v. Union of India & Ors. (Civil Appeal No. 30073/2017) and the reasons mentioned, the MA 2120 of 2024 is allowed and the delay of 325 days in filing the OA 2120/2024 is thus allowed.

2. The MA is disposed off accordingly.

MA 766/2025

3. Counter affidavit has been filed. There being some delay in filing the counter affidavit, this application has been filed seeking condonation of delay. Delay condoned. Counter affidavit is taken on record. MA stands disposed off.

OA 1664/2024

4. Invoking the jurisdiction of this Tribunal under Section 14 of the Armed Forces Tribunal Act, 2007 (hereinafter referred to as 'AFT Act'), the applicant has filed this OA and the reliefs claimed in Para 8 read as under:

"It is therefore humbly prayed that this Hon'ble Tribunal may graciously be pleased to: -

(a) Quash the impugned letter dated 11.08.1989

(b) Direct the respondents to grant Disability Pension w.e.f. his date of discharge

OR

(c) Direct the respondents to grant Invalid Pension w.e.f. his date of discharge

(d) Direct the respondents to pay the arrears of pension with interest 12% p.a.

(e) Any other relief which the Hon'ble Tribunal may deem fit and proper in the fact and circumstances of the case along with cost of the application in favor of the applicant and against the respondents."

BRIEF FACTS

5. The applicant was enrolled in the Indian Navy on 03.01.1981 and was invalided out from service solely on

medical ground on 24.06.1988 after having served for 07 years, 05 months and 22 days. At the time of discharge, the applicant was placed in Low Medical Category (LMC) S5A5 (P) for his disabilities namely; 'NEUROSIS ICD 300 (d)' and 'FITS (NYD) ICD 780 (d)' which was compositely assessed by the IMB vide AFMSF-16 dated 16.05.1988 at @ 40% for two years and recommended the same as Neither Attributable to Nor Aggravated (NANA) by the military service.

6. The applicant had made a representation dated 20.03.2023 against the rejection of disability element of pension vide impugned letter dated 11.08.1989 which the applicant submits that it has not been replied to by the respondents till the filing of the OA filed by the applicant on 24.04.2024.

7. Aggrieved by the decision of the respondents, the applicant has filed the instant OA. In the interest of justice, in accordance with Section 21(1) of the AFT Act, we take up the present OA.

CONTENTIONS OF THE PARTIES

8. Though the applicant, through this OA, sought for the grant of the disability pension, however, during the course of hearing on 21.03.2025, the learned counsel for the applicant sought to confine the prayer made in the OA for seeking the grant of invalid

pension only. Thus, the present case is being considered qua the prayer for the grant of invalid pension only.

9. The learned counsel for the applicant submitted that the Applicant was enrolled in the Indian Navy on 03.01.1981 and due to the disabilities namely 'NEUROSIS ICD 300 (d)' and 'FITS (NYD) ICD 780 (d)' was invalided out on being found medically unfit on 24.06.1988.

10. The learned counsel for the applicant placed reliance on the decision of the Hon'ble Supreme Court in case no. CA-5605/2010 titled Sukhvinder Singh Vs Union of India (2014 STPL (web) 468 SC) decided on 25.06.2014, wherein it was held that any disability not recorded at the time of recruitment must be presumed to have been caused subsequently and unless proved to the contrary to be a consequence of military service.

11. The learned counsel for the applicant also placed reliance on the decision of the Hon'ble Supreme Court in CA No. 16438-16440/2017 titled Ex Rect Mithlesh Kumar Vs UOI & Ors. wherein the Hon'ble Supreme Court by placing reliance upon Regulation 197 of the Pension Regulations for the Army 1961 (Part-1) granted invalid pension to the applicant who was boarded out before completion of the initial 10 years of military service.

12. The learned counsel for the applicant also placed reliance on the decision of this Tribunal in OA No. 1051/2016 titled Bhagat Singh Vs Union of India & Ors. wherein the relief of invalid pension was granted to the applicant who was invalided out from the military service.

13. *Per contra*, the learned counsel for the respondents submitted that the applicant was discharged from service on 24.06.1988 under the clause 'medically boarded out from service' after completion 07 years 05 months and 22 days of military service.

14. It is submitted by the learned counsel for the respondents that the applicant at the time of discharge was sanctioned Invaliding Gratuity and Death cum Retirement Gratuity of Rupees 7420/- and Rs. 5962/- respectively vide letter No. DP/D/146172 dated 27.03.1989.

15. The learned counsel for the respondents further submitted that the GoI-MoD letter No. 12(06)2019/D(Pen/Policy) dated 16.07.2020 clarifies in Para 4 that the provision of this letter shall apply to those Armed Forces Personnel who were/are in service on or after 04 Jan 2019. The cases in respect of personnel invalided out before 04th January will not be re-opened and since the applicant

was invalided out on 24.06.1988, he is not entitled for Invalid Pension.

ANALYSIS

16. On the careful perusal of the material available on record and also the submissions made on behalf of the parties, we are of the view that it is not in dispute that the applicant was invalided out on medical ground from service on 24.06.1988 due to the disabilities; 'NEUROSIS ICD 300 (d)' and 'FITS (NYD) ICD 780 (d)' which was compositely assessed by the IMB at @ 40% and recommended as NANA.

17. After perusal of the records produced before us and arguments advanced by either side, we hold that the applicant is entitled to invalid pension, as the applicant was enrolled in the Indian Navy on 03.01.1981 and was invalided out from service on 24.06.1988 on medical grounds after rendering 07 years 05 months and 22 days of service, which in our view is deemed invaliding from service.

18. Lest it be contended that the applicant being invalided out after serving 07 years 05 months and 22 days, however may not be eligible for getting the invalid pension, however, it is apposite to mention the order of the Armed Forces Tribunal (Regional Bench) Lucknow in *Ex. Recruit. Chhote Lal Vs Union*

of India & Ors. in OA No.368 of 2021, wherein the MoD letter No. 12(06)/2019/D(Pen-Pol) dated 16.07.2020 has been examined in detail. The said MoD letter is reproduced below:

"Subject: Provision of Invalid Pension to Armed Forces Personnel before completion of 10 years of qualifying service- Reg.

Sir,

1. Government of India, Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances & pensions, Department of Pension & Pensioners, Welfare vide their O.M 21/01/2016-P&PW(F) dated 12th February 2019 has provided that a government servant, who retires from service on account of any bodily or mental infirmity which permanently incapacitates him from the service before completing qualifying service of ten years, may also be granted invalid pension subject to certain conditions. The provisions have been based on Government of India, Gazette Notification No. 21/1/2016- P&PW(F) dated 04.01.2019.

2. The Proposal to extend the provisions of Department of Pension & Pensioners Welfare O.M No. 21/01/2016 -P&OW(F) dated 12.02.2019 to Armed Forces personnel has been under consideration of this Ministry. The undersigned is directed to state that invalid Pension would henceforth also be admissible to Armed Forces Personnel with less than 10 years of qualifying service in cases where personnel are invalidated out of service on account of any bodily or mental infirmity which is Neither Attributable to Nor Aggravated by Military Service and which permanently incapacities them from military service as well as civil reemployment.

3. Pension Regulation of the Services will be amended in due course.

4. The provision of this letter shall apply to those Armed Forces Personnel were / are in service on or after 04.01.2019. The Cases in respect of personnel who were invalidated out from service before 04.01.2019 will not be re-opened.

5. All other terms and conditions shall remain unchanged.

The AFT, Regional Bench, Lucknow Bench while disposing off the OA No. 368 of 2021 has examined Para 4 of the MoD letter

dated 16.07.2020 and has held the said Para 4 of the letter as unconstitutional on the grounds that:

“ 20...

letter dated 16.07.2020 fails to meet the aforesaid twin test. The letter arbitrarily denies the benefit of invalid pension to those armed force's personnel, who happened to be invalided out from service prior to 04.01.2020. There cannot be any difference on the ground of invalidment as both in the cases of personnel invalided out before and after 04.01.2020 (ought to be read as 04.01.2019), they faced the similar consequences. In fact, the persons who have retired prior to 04.01.2020 (ought to be read as 04.01.2019) have faced more difficulties as compared to the persons invalided out on or after 04.01.2020. The longer period of suffering cannot be a ground to deny the benefit by way of a policy, which is supposed to be beneficial. Such a provision amounts to adding salt to injury.

21. ...

22. As per policy letter of Govt. of India, Ministry of Def dated 16.07.2020, there is a cut of date for grant of invalid pension. As per para 4 of policy letter, "provision of this letter shall apply to those Armed Forces Personnel who were/ are in service on or after 04.01.2019". Para 4 of impugned policy letter dated 16.07.2020 is thus liable to be quashed being against principles of natural justice as such discrimination has been held to be ultra vires by the Hon'ble Apex Court because the introduction of such cut of date fails the test of reasonableness of classification prescribed by the Hon'ble Apex Court viz (i) that the classification must be founded on an intelligible differentia which distinguishes persons or things that are grouped together from those that are left out of the group; and (ii) that differentia must have a rational relation to the objects sought to be achieved by the statute in question.

23. From the foregoing discussions, it may be concluded that the policy pertaining to invalid pension vide letter date 16.07.2020 will be applicable in the case of the applicant also as para 4 of the letter cannot discriminate against the petitioner based on a cut of date.

.....”

19. Significantly vide judgment dated 07.01.2025 of the Hon'ble Division Bench of the High Court of Punjab and Haryana in CWP 28442/2023 in *Union of India & Ors. Vs Ex. AC UT Sandeep Kumar and Anr.* the cut-off date of 04.01.2019 for grant of invalid pension only to those who *'were/are in service on or after 04.01.2019'* vide the MOD letter dated 16.07.2020 bearing reference no. 12(06)/2019/D(Pen/Pol) has been observed to be arbitrary not being based on any intelligible differentia with no nexus to the objects thereto, as observed under Para 14 of the said judgment which reads to the effect: -

"14. Conspicuously also when the prescription as made in Annexure P-4, contents whereof become extracted hereinafter, thus on plain reading thereof, after making relaxations in the period of rendition of service, yet makes a cut-off date, vis-a-vis, the applications thereof. However, the prescriptions therein vis-a-vis the apposite cut-off date for the benefits thereof becoming assigned to the concerned, but also is rather arbitrary. The reason for so concluding stems from the factum that since the soldier qua whom the benefits of Annexure P-4, become purveyed when do constitute a homogeneous in-segregable class. Resultantly each member of the homogeneous class was to be co equally endowed the benefits of Annexure P-4. Therefore, the segregations created through Annexure P-4, thus amongst the same class, rather through the makings therein of a cut-off date, and that too when the said cut-off date, is not based on any intelligible differentia nor when it has any nexus with the beneficent thereto objects, but are required to be discountenanced.

"4. The provision of this letter shall apply to those Armed Forces Personnel who were/are in service on or after 04.01.2019. The cases in respect of personnel who were invalided out from service before 04.01.2019 will not be re-opened."

20. To this effect, reliance is also placed on para 27 of the order of Lt. A.K. Thapa Vs Union of India & Ors. in OA 2240/2019, and Para 27 thereof of the said order reads as under: -

“...

27. In view of the law laid down by the Hon'ble Supreme Court in *Sukhvinder Singh v. Union of India (2014 STPL (WEB) 468 decided on 25.06.2014 (Supra)* and in *Balbir Singh (Supra)* on invalidment, the personnel of the Armed Forces who is invalided out is presumed to have been so invalided out with a minimum of twenty percent disability which in terms of the verdict in *Sukhvinder Singh (Supra)* is to be broad-banded to 50% for life, the incorporation by the respondents vide the MoD letter dated 16.07.2020 of a term of a **necessary permanent incapacity for civil re-employment**, is an apparent overreach on the verdict of the Hon'ble Supreme Court in *Sukhvinder Singh (Supra)*. Furthermore, the said clause of a requirement of an Armed Forces Personnel to be permanently incapacitated from Military service as well as Civil re-employment is wholly vague and arbitrary and does not take into account the extent of incapacity for Civil reemployment. This is so for the personnel of the Armed Forces who is invalided out with all limbs incapacitated may still have a functional brain and functional voice, may be able to speak, sing, paint and earn a livelihood. The utilization of the words 'permanently incapacitates from civil re-employment, apparently requires a permanent brain-dead armed forces personnel. We thus hold that the requirement of the Armed Forces Personnel 'to be permanently incapacitated from civilian employment as well' (apart from permanent incapacitation from military service) for the grant of invalid pension in terms of the MoD letter No. 12(06) /2019 /D (Pen/Pol) dated 16.07.2020 to be wholly arbitrary and unconstitutional and violative of Article 14 of the Constitution of India which is in Part-III of the Fundamental Rights with the sub heading thereto of 'Right to Equality', and lays down to the effect:-

“14. Equality before law - The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India.

Article 21 of the Constitution of India lays down to the effect: -

“21. Protection of life and personal liberty - No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law.”

21. It is essential to observe that, the Hon'ble Delhi High Court vide judgment dated 26.11.2024 in W.P.(C) 13577/2024 titled *Lt. A K Thappa Vs. Union of India and Ors.*, in the matter of *LT A K THAPA (RELEASED) Vs UNION OF INDIA & ORS.*, arising out of the decision of this Tribunal in OA No. No. 2240 of 2019 has upheld the decision of this Tribunal, for the grant of invalid pension to the applicant, vide Paras 25 and 29 of the Judgment. Paras 25 and 29 of the said judgment respectively read as follows:

"25. The learned AFT also referred to the answers provided by the Commanding Officer of INS Virbahu, Visakhapatnam on 21.09.1982 and found that since 10.02.1982, the petitioner had been performing 'Sedentary Duties Ashore' and he was not assigned to a submarine or sailing duties. The learned AFT took note of responses of the said Commanding Officer, stating that petitioner's disability was neither attributable to nor aggravated by service. It also noted the response of IMB proceedings of March, 1982, that the petitioner's disability existed before entering the service, thus referring to all of the above, the learned AFT concluded that petitioner's disability cannot be held to be attributable to nor aggravated by Military service in the peculiar facts and circumstances of the case. The learned AFT, thus, passed a detailed and reasoned Order after noting all the submissions of the parties, the decisions cited before it, as well as the documents produced for its perusal and consequently, granted Invalid Pension to the petitioner, however, not the Disability element of Pension."

"29. In light of these circumstances, we are constrained to hold that there is no infirmity in the Impugned Order passed by the learned AFT and it would not be appropriate for this Court to interfere with the order passed by it, specifically when the order passed is well reasoned."

22. Furthermore, vide judgment dated 11.12.2024 of the Hon'ble High Court of Delhi, W.P. (C) 17139/2024, filed by the Union of India, to assail the order dated 07.07.2023 in

OA 2240/2019 in Lt. AK Thapa (Released) Vs Union of India and Ors. has been dismissed, in view of leave to appeal having been granted by this Tribunal vide order dated 17.05.2024 in OA 1721/2024 with MA No. 34608-4609/2023 to assail the order dated 07.07.2023 in OA 2240/2019. The observations in Para 6-11 of the Hon'ble HC of Delhi in W.P. (C) 17139/2024 are to the effect:

"6. On the other hand, the learned counsel for the respondent, who appears on advance notice, submits that by an Order dated 17.05.2024 passed in M.A. 1721/2024 with M.A Nos. 4608-4609/2023 passed in the above OA by the learned AFT, leave has been granted to the petitioners to assail the Order dated 07.07.2023 passed in the above OA before the Supreme Court.

7. Placing reliance on Section 31(3) of the Armed Forces Tribunal Act, 2007 (in short, 'AFT Act'), he submits that once leave is granted, the appeal is deemed to be pending before the Supreme Court. He submits that, therefore, this Court should not exercise its powers under Article 226 of the Constitution of India to examine the plea raised by the petitioners.

8. We have considered the submissions made by the learned counsels for the parties.

9. Section 31 of the AFT Act reads as under: -

"31. Leave to appeal.— (1) An appeal to the Supreme Court shall lie with the leave of the Tribunal; and such leave shall not be granted unless it is certified by the Tribunal that a point of law of general public importance is involved in the decision, or it appears to the Supreme Court that the point is one which ought to be considered by that Court.

(2) An application to the Tribunal for leave to appeal to the Supreme Court shall be made within a period of thirty days beginning with the date of the decision of the Tribunal and an application to the Supreme Court for leave shall be made within a period of thirty days beginning with the date on which the application for leave is refused by the Tribunal.

(3) An appeal shall be treated as pending until any application for leave to appeal is disposed of and if leave to appeal is granted, until the appeal is disposed of; and an application for leave to appeal shall be treated as disposed of at the expiration of the time within which it might have been made, but it is not made within that time.

10. Sub Section (3) of Section 31 of the AFT Act, creates a deeming fiction providing that if the leave to appeal is granted by the learned AFT, until the appeal is disposed of, such appeal shall be treated to be pending before the Supreme Court.

11. In the present case, the effect of the Order dated 17.05.2024 passed by the learned AFT, therefore, shall be that the appeal filed by the petitioners to challenge the Order dated 07.07.2023 is pending before the Supreme Court. There cannot be two alternate remedies simultaneously taken by the petitioners to challenge the same order."

There is no stay granted so far by the Hon'ble Supreme Court of the operation of the order dated 07.07.2023 in OA 2240/2019 of the Tribunal, in *Lt. AK Thapa (Released)* (supra).

CONCLUSION

23. We find no reason to differ from the law laid down in Chhote Lal (supra) and in A.K. Thapa (supra), and we are therefore of the considered view that the applicant has to be deemed to be invalided out of service on account of the disabilities namely; 'NEUROSIS ICD 300 (d)' and 'FITS (NYD) ICD 780 (d)' as the applicant had rendered around 07 years 05 months and 22 days of service and was invalided out before completing his term of initial engagement. Thus, the applicant is held entitled to the grant of invalid pension.

24. The respondents are thus directed to calculate, sanction and issue the necessary PPO to the applicant within a period of three months from the date of receipt of copy of this order but the amount of arrears shall be restricted to commence to run from a period of 03 (three) years prior to the date of filing of the present OA i.e., 24.04.2024, and shall be paid by the respondents after adjusting the amount already paid towards the Invaliding Gratuity and Death cum Retirement Gratuity, failing which the applicant will be entitled for interest @6% p.a. from the date of receipt of copy of the order by the respondents.

25. Accordingly, the OA stands disposed of.

[JUSTICE RAJENDRA MENON]
CHAIRPERSON

[REAR ADMIRAL DHIREN VIG]
MEMBER (A)

/PRGX/