

*William*

**DECISION**



**THE COMPTROLLER GENERAL  
OF THE UNITED STATES  
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20548**

*18963*

**FILE:** B-200601

**DATE:** July 31, 1981

**MATTER OF:** Thomas Anderson - Weekend Return Travel

- DIGEST:**
1. Forest Service employee who is on temporary duty (TDY) assignment and receiving per diem returned home for weekend. His travel expenses amounted to a total of \$203.14. If he had remained at TDY station, he would have been entitled to a total of \$70 per diem. Since employee's weekend round-trip travel was more than what would have been allowed had he remained at TDY station, employee was properly reimbursed \$70. See Federal Travel Regulations (FTR) (FPMR 101-7) paras. 1-7.5c and 1-8.4f (May 1973).
  2. Until such time as General Services Administration issues guidelines concerning cost analysis, agencies can still effectively perform comparative analyses of costs of periodic weekend return travel versus any savings associated with increased efficiency and productivity, as well as costs of recruitment and retention. However, mere statement by agency that 3 week TDY assignment is sufficient to allow employees' travel expenses for voluntary weekend return travel does not comply with above analysis as no basis exists upon which to determine that net savings would accrue to Government as required in 55 Comp. Gen. 1291 (1976).
  3. Where employee did not perform official duties during weekend return to residence and travel expenses of \$203.14 substantially exceed \$70, which would have been incurred had he remained at TDY station, travel expenses may not be authorized under agency's discretionary authority to direct employees to return to official station.

*[Request For Reimbursement of Travel Expenses]*

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Mr. H. Larry Jordan, an authorized certifying officer of the National Finance Center, Department of Agriculture, New Orleans, Louisiana, has requested a decision concerning the claim of Mr. Thomas Anderson, an employee of the Forest Service, Department of Agriculture. Pursuant to 31 U.S.C. § 82d (1976), Mr. Jordan seeks an opinion on whether any part of Mr. Anderson's claim for travel expenses resulting from weekend return travel is reimbursable and whether the claim can be paid under the Forest Service's authority to direct employees who are working at temporary duty (TDY) stations to return to their permanent duty stations for nonworkdays. For the reasons stated below, payment may be authorized for the weekend return travel not to exceed the amount that would have been allowed Mr. Anderson had he remained at his TDY station.

The agency report indicates that from March 16, 1980, through April 11, 1980, Mr. Anderson was assigned to perform TDY at the Ozark-St. Francis National Forest, Russelville, Arkansas. Mr. Jordan states that Mr. Anderson voluntarily left his TDY station for his home at 4 p.m. on March 28, 1980, and he returned to his TDY station on Sunday, March 30, 1980, at 3:45 p.m.

Mr. Anderson was paid for his original claim in the amount of \$70, based on the per diem he would have received had he spent the weekend at his TDY station. Mr. Jordan states that, due to an administrative error, Mr. Anderson received a second payment in the amount of \$133.14, for the balance of his expenses for the round-trip travel from his TDY station to his residence and return. It is the propriety of paying the \$133.14, which is the subject of this decision.

Reimbursement for official travel is governed by the standards set forth in the Federal Travel Regulations (FTR) (FPMR 101-7)(May 1973). FTR paragraph 1-7.5c provides that an employee on TDY may voluntarily return on nonworkdays to his official station or residence and be reimbursed for transportation and per diem not to exceed the per diem or actual subsistence and travel expenses which would have been allowed had the employee remained at his TDY station. 59 Comp. Gen. 293 (1980). Under this rule, Mr. Anderson was entitled to a total of \$70, based on per

diem at a rate of \$35 per day for 2 days. However, Mr. Anderson claims the full cost of his travel expenses for the round trip to his home, an amount totalling \$203.14.

In 55 Comp. Gen. 1291 (1976), we held that employees could be paid their travel expenses for voluntarily returning home on a weekend under the following relevant circumstances:

" \* \* \* if after appropriate cost analysis, the agency determines that the costs of periodic weekend return travel are outweighed by savings in terms of increased efficiency and productivity, as well as reduced costs of recruitment and retention, such return travel may be authorized within the limits of appropriations available for payment of travel expenses. \* \* \* "

We also noted, in 55 Comp. Gen. 1291 (1976), that until such time as the General Services Administration (GSA) takes action to issue guidelines covering this situation, "agencies should make prudent use of the weekend return authority."

In the instant case, the Forest Service states that it was unable to make the required cost analysis because GSA has not issued related guidelines. The Forest Service maintains that since GSA has not issued guidelines on how to prepare the cost analysis required in order to make use of the weekend return authority outlined in 55 Comp. Gen. 1291 (1976), it should be allowed some discretion in reaching such determination. Without the benefit of cost analysis, the Forest Service determined that denying all weekend return trips for employees on extended details (3 weeks or more) away from their families would result in reduced morale and productivity. Accordingly, the Forest Service implemented such determination by establishing a policy to allow an employee to return home for the weekend at least once when detailed on TDY for an extended period of time.

However, in 55 Comp. Gen. 1291 (1976), we held that in the absence of guidelines from GSA, the agencies could still

effectively perform comparative analyses of the cost of periodic weekend return travel versus any savings associated with increased efficiency and productivity, as well as the costs of recruitment and retention. As stated above, the Forest Service made no cost analysis as to when weekend return travel is appropriate. Therefore, in the absence of any cost analysis, we find that Mr. Anderson's subsequent claim in the amount of \$133.14 should not have been paid because the Forest Service has set out no basis upon which to determine that net savings would accrue to the Government.

Mr. Anderson also contends that he was directed to return to his residence by an official having authority to direct travel. Although the agency report indicates that his return trip was authorized by an official having authority to direct travel, the official's authority to authorize travel is limited under the Federal Travel Regulations.

Para. 1-7.5c of the FTR also provides:

"Return to Official Station on Nonworkdays. At the discretion of the administrative officials, a traveler may be required to return to his official station for nonworkdays. \* \* \*"

Thus, when an employee is properly directed to return to his official station for nonworkdays, the cost of such return may be paid by the agency even though it exceeds the cost which would have been incurred had the employee remained at his TDY station. We have held, however, that the discretionary authority contained in paragraph 1-7.5c may not be interpreted by an agency to require an employee to return to his official station on nonworkdays in the absence of official duties, where the cost of such travel substantially exceeds the costs which would have been incurred had the employee remained at his TDY station.  
John F. Fields, B-186200, January 27, 1977.

In the instant case, the agency report contradicts Mr. Anderson's contention that he was directed to return to his official duty station. In any event, whether Mr. Anderson was directed or merely authorized to return home the record does not indicate that Mr. Anderson performed any official duties during his weekend return to his

residence. Moreover, Mr. Anderson's trip was authorized without a cost analysis justification. We also note that his travel expenses of \$203.14 substantially exceed the \$70 which would have been incurred had Mr. Anderson remained at his TDY station. Accordingly, since no cost analysis of Mr. Anderson's return home travel was prepared and since the return was not associated with the performance of any official duties, there is no basis upon which to pay more than \$70 of Mr. Anderson's return home travel.

In view of the foregoing, the Department of Agriculture should make prompt collection of the overpayment.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Milton J. Fowler".

Acting Comptroller General  
of the United States