

DECISION

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

FILE: B-204297**DATE:** December 22, 1981**MATTER OF:** Captain Albert J. Gravallesse, USNR

DIGEST: A Navy Reserve officer who frequently traveled by air for mobilization training claims reimbursement for discount rate air fare tickets he purchased from a travel agency for travel within the United States. The use of a travel agency in such a case is prohibited by regulations because generally purchases directly from air carriers are more efficient and economical. Reimbursement is allowed only if the purchase was inadvertent and the claimant neither knew nor should have known of the prohibition. However, this officer was aware of the prohibition so he may not be reimbursed for such tickets.

This action is in response to an appeal of our Claims Group's denial of reimbursement to Captain Albert J. Gravallesse, USNR, of \$330 he paid to a travel agency for two air fare tickets he used in connection with two periods of active duty for training he performed in August 1980.

Because Captain Gravallesse is a frequent traveler who had been advised of the prohibition against use of travel agencies for procurement of Government travel contained in paragraphs M2200 and M2204, Volume 1, of the Joint Travel Regulations (1 JTR), his claim may not be allowed.

Statement of Facts

Captain Gravellesse, a Navy Reserve officer, was ordered to perform two periods of active duty for training in August 1980--one period at Tampa, Florida, and one at Norfolk, Virginia. The orders stated that he was authorized to travel at his own expense subject to reimbursement. He indicates that in anticipation of receiving these orders, he purchased two round-trip weekend travel "Super Saver" air fare tickets from a travel agency for a total of \$330.

The Navy disallowed Captain Gravallesse's claim for reimbursement of the \$330 since procurement of tickets

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through travel agencies is prohibited in cases such as this and, it is stated, Captain Gravallese had been previously informed that he would not be reimbursed for air travel purchased through a travel agency.

Discussion

Captain Gravallese does not deny knowing of the prohibition at the time he purchased the tickets. Instead, he contends that the practice of purchasing air travel through travel agencies is widespread in the Reserve Forces and Active Forces.

He also contends that he saved the Government money by purchasing discount rate tickets from a travel agent. He contends that the price of tickets purchased through a travel agent is no greater than the air carrier's price and that, in fact, advance purchases from an air carrier are more expensive because the traveler must pay for correspondence or travel expenses to reach the air carriers' more distant offices.

Since Captain Gravallese's claim is for tickets used for travel on official business, the procurement of the transportation must have been in accord with applicable rules and regulations for the claim to be payable.

With few exceptions, Federal employees and military members are prohibited from using travel agents to procure transportation within the United States for travel on official business. See 4 C.F.R. § 52.3 (1981); B-201777, May 6, 1981 (60 Comp. Gen. _____); 59 Comp. Gen. 433 (1980); and 58 Comp. Gen. 710 (1979). The prohibition is specifically applicable to members of the uniformed services through paragraphs M2200 and M2204, 1 JTR.

Initially, we point out that the prohibition against the use of travel agencies is generally premised on the determination that, on a Government-wide basis, procurement of tickets directly from the carrier is more efficient and economical overall than procurement through travel agencies for various reasons, including--

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- the necessity of the airlines paying commissions to travel agents, as middlemen, would increase the operating costs of the carriers and require an increase in air fares;
- reservation changes, ticket cancellations, or refunds, etc., are more readily done directly through carriers;
- increased administrative costs would be incurred to select and monitor the large number of travel agents serving travelers; and
- travel agents are likely to be unfamiliar with Government requirements and regulations.

See 58 Comp. Gen. 710; and Report of the Comptroller General of the United States, "A Look At The Prohibition On Using Commercial Travel Agents," LCD 78-219, August 8, 1978.

The availability of discounts like that obtained by Captain Gravallesse is not limited to travel agencies. They can also be obtained directly from air carriers. The costs or inconvenience of procuring tickets directly from the carrier are minimal (especially for someone such as Captain Gravallesse who is located in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area).

As to Captain Gravallesse's contention that other military travelers have procured transportation through travel agencies, if they did so in like circumstances with knowledge of the prohibition, they too would be subject to denial of reimbursement for their transportation.

As is indicated above, the use of travel agencies by members of the uniformed services to secure transportation within the United States is prohibited by 1 JTR, paragraphs M2200 and M2204. See 58 Comp. Gen. 710 (1979). Both of Captain Gravallesse's trips were within the United States and thus in violation of this prohibition. Paragraph M2204, does include an exception to the prohibition for a traveler who is unaware of the prohibition and inadvertently purchases transportation with personal funds from a travel agent. Such a traveler may be paid

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for travel costs which would have been properly chargeable had the requested services been purchased by the traveler directly from the carrier. Paragraph M2204 further provides that in such a case the traveler will be advised that the recurrence of the use of travel agents will result in denial of any reimbursement for the transportation incurred. Apparently, this advice was given to Captain Gravallesse in connection with previous tickets he had purchased from a travel agency and which he presented to the Navy for reimbursement.

In this case, Captain Gravallesse knew of the prohibition against use of travel agencies before he used the tickets in August 1980. Therefore, the exception to the prohibition does not apply to his claim. Accordingly, the action of the Claims Group in denying reimbursement of this claim is sustained.

Harry R. Jan Cleve
For Comptroller General
of the United States