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DATE: June 23, 2000

In Re:

[Redacted]

Claimant

Claims Case No. 00051706

CLAIMS APPEALS BOARD DECISION

DIGEST

A member who purchased airline tickets for temporary duty official travel did not purchase the tickets from a travel agency under government contract or other approved facility. Reimbursement of the member is not proper because paragraph U3120 of volume 1 of the Joint Federal Travel Regulations (1 JFTR ¶ U3120) requires that the member purchase tickets from one of the facilities described in 1 JFTR ¶ U3120-A unless under 1 JFTR ¶ U3120-B the order-issuing official authorized or later approved purchase from a non-authorized facility due to unusual circumstances when there was no alternative.

DECISION

The member appeals a decision by the Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) to deny his claim for reimbursement for airline tickets he purchased for temporary duty travel (TDY). DFAS denied reimbursement because the member procured his transportation from a source other than those provided in paragraph U3120-A of volume 1 of the Joint Federal Travel Regulations (1 JFTR ¶ U3120-A) and no exception applied. [\(U\)](#) The Claims Appeal Board settles this matter for purposes of administrative convenience.

Background

The record indicates that the member was ordered to travel from Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska, to Orlando, Florida, to perform temporary duty (TDY) for 6 days starting on October 2, 1999. The member purchased his own tickets through Priceline.Com (on September 5, 1999) so that his spouse could accompany him. The member says that he was

not aware of any requirement to purchase his tickets through a government agency, and that he paid \$213 for his tickets while the government cost would have been \$262. He returned to Offutt on October 7, 1999. The member's orders⁽²⁾ included Item 2 from the reverse side, among other standard provisions. Item 2 stated:

"Government procured transportation directed; report to the Traffic Management Office (TMO) as soon as possible. (Failure to procure transportation through TMO when directed will result in non-reimbursement of travel expenses.)"

The order-issuing official has not authorized or approved procurement from a non-authorized source on the basis that unusual circumstances existed indicating that the member had no alternative. The member claims \$213 for his round-trip travel.

Discussion

Preliminarily, we note that the member's orders directed him report to the TMO to obtain government-procured transportation, and warned him that if he failed to do so, he may not be reimbursed. This appears to be in accordance with 1 JFTR ¶ U3110-A which states that a member may not be reimbursed for personally-procured transportation when a specific transportation mode is directed. Government-procured transportation is named as an example of such a mode. Notwithstanding any problem with 1 JFTR ¶ U3120 (explained below) it appears that the member may have experienced difficulty in obtaining reimbursement because he failed to follow this directive in Item 2 on the reverse side of his orders. *Compare* DOHA Claims Case No. 00022909 (May 30, 2000), footnote 3. The member states that he was not aware that he had to go through a government agency to obtain his tickets, but while he may not have been aware of this on September 5, 1999, when he purchased his tickets ahead of the issuance of his orders, he would be deemed to have knowledge of it prior to travel.

Even if the member had been authorized to purchase his own tickets, he cannot be reimbursed because he failed to follow the policy in 1 JFTR ¶ U3120. When a member fails to use a CTO or other approved facility to procure his airline tickets, he must meet an exception in 1 JFTR ¶ U3120 to obtain reimbursement. With respect to domestic travel, the record must contain authorization (beforehand) or approval (afterwards) by the order-issuing official that unusual circumstances prevented the member's use of the CTO or other approved facility, and that the member had no alternative. The member also must demonstrate an attempt to use such facilities. Unfortunately, the record contains no evidence that the member met these requirements, notwithstanding the requirement to purchase through the TMO.

For travel claims, we must base our decisions on the law and implementing regulations applicable to the situation at hand--in this case, the relevant portions of the JFTR in effect at the time the member traveled. *See* DOHA Claims Case No. 96123013 (June 2, 1997). *See also* DOHA Claims Case No. 99101308 (May 5, 2000), a recent decision involving the same JFTR language in paragraph U3120 that controls the present claim. In the context of this regulation, we have held that the fact that the member was not advised to use an approved facility does not provide a basis for payment, since the government is not liable for the erroneous or negligent actions of its officers, agents, or employees. *See, for example*, the discussion in DOHA Claims Case No. 97041009 (July 30, 1997); DOHA Claims Case No. 97030601 (July 30, 1997); DOHA Claims Case No. 97041006 (August 26, 1997); and DOHA Claims Case No. 97031010 (September 16, 1997), all cited in DOHA Claims Case No. 99101308, *supra*. *See also* DOHA Claims Case No. 98051405 (May 20, 1998); and *Petty Officer John R. Blaylock, USN*, 60 Comp. Gen. 257 (1981).

As we explained in DOHA Claims Case No. 99101308, *supra*, the prohibition against disbursements not authorized by statute or regulation is so fundamental that even if an actual government official had specifically misinformed the member that he did not need to use a facility described in 1 JFTR ¶ U3120-A, the member still would not have had the right to reimbursement. The government is neither bound nor estopped by the erroneous or unauthorized acts of its

officers, agents, or employees even though committed in the performance of their official duties, and it is a well-settled rule of law that the government is not bound by the erroneous advice of its officers or employees, when such advice contravenes existing regulations. *See* DOHA Claims Case No. 99092806 (February 4, 2000) citing *Joseph Pradarits*, 56 Comp. Gen. 131 (1976), and *Office of Personnel Management v. Richmond*, 496 U.S. 414 (1990), *reh'g denied* 497 U.S. 1046 (1990).

For all of the above reasons, we find no basis to allow payment of the member's claim.

Conclusion

The member's claim is disallowed.

Signed: Michael D. Hipple

Michael D. Hipple

Chairman, Claims Appeals Board

Signed: Arthur A. Elkins

Arthur A. Elkins

Member, Claims Appeals Board

Signed: Jean E. Smallin

Jean E. Smallin

Member, Claims Appeals Board

1. At the time that the member traveled (JFTR updated through Change 154), 1 JFTR ¶ U3120-A1 provided that in arranging official travel, personnel are required to use a commercial travel office under government contract, an in-house travel office, or a General Services Administration Travel Management Center. But, under 1 JFTR ¶ U3120-B, the order-issuing official may authorize/approve direct purchase from a non-contract travel agent or common carrier when unusual circumstances existed and there was no alternative. The exceptions in 1 JFTR ¶ U3120-B were prefaced with the following note: "When a non-contract CTO is used, the member must demonstrate that use of a contract CTO was attempted. The last paragraph of 1 JFTR ¶ U3120-B contains the following payment limitation: "Reimbursement for transportation arranged through authorized/approved use of a non-contract travel agent or common carrier . . . is limited to the amount the member would have paid if the arrangements had been made directly through the carrier(s)."
2. Special Order TAG 742, dated September 28, 1999, was a group order that included two other members attending the same training.