

12699 Plm-1
Ms. Blatch

DECISION



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

FILE: B-196549

DATE: January 31, 1980

MATTER OF: Larry G. Manning } Reimbursement for Long-Distance
Telephone Calls }

DIGEST: Claim for reimbursement for three long-distance calls made to employee's wife while employee was on temporary duty in Israel is denied since agency advises calls were personal in nature and there is no certification that the calls were necessary in the interest of the Government, as required by 31 U.S.C. § 680a.

This action concerns a request for reconsideration of the claim of Larry G. Manning, an employee of the Department of the Navy, for reimbursement for three long-distance telephone calls made to his wife while he was on temporary duty in Israel. Based on information from the Navy indicating that the telephone calls were of a personal nature, his claim in the amount of \$81.17 was disallowed by our Claims Division by settlement dated August 10, 1979. A/C 00001

Mr. Manning claims that under the circumstances of his temporary duty assignment to Israel, the telephone calls he made to his wife were official rather than personal. He explains that because he had only 48 hours notice of the assignment, he and his wife did not have sufficient time to adjust their personal business in a satisfactory manner before his departure. For this reason and because his wife did not know when he would return home or when to meet him at the airport, Mr. Manning states that the telephone calls were both reasonable and necessary.

Under 31 U.S.C. § 680a (1976) appropriated funds are available only for long distance telephone calls made in the transaction of public business. That section requires the head of an agency or his designee to certify that such calls are necessary in the interest of the Government before payment for said calls is made.

In decision 56 Comp. Gen. 28 (1976), dealing with certification (under 31 U.S.C. § 680a) of travel vouchers containing long distance calls, question 2(a) asked whether the telephone toll charges may be approved by an official and certified by a certifying officer when the traveler notifies his family of his safe arrival and the place he may be contacted in an emergency, or his travel arrangements.

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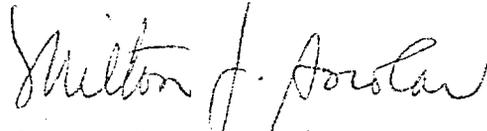
B-196549

In answer thereto, it was stated at page 30, that the telephone call in question 2(a) would normally be considered a personal call since travel plans are generally known well in advance of travel and most travelers arrive safely at their destinations. It was further stated, however, if after investigating all of the facts involved in a given situation, an official designated under 31 U.S.C. § 680a determines and certifies that such a call was in the interest of the Government, we would not question such a determination.

In certain circumstances, calls to relatives to arrange for transportation from the airport to the employee's residence, and to advise that a return flight has been delayed have been allowed as official calls in the interest of the Government, if so certified by the agency. Ivan P. Cook, Jr., B-179823, July 14, 1975. In Mary H. Smith, B-192691, February 20, 1979, based on the agency's certification, we held that the employee could be reimbursed for a long-distance telephone call to notify her family of her location in the event of an emergency. In that case the employee had not had advance notice of the travel required or where she would be staying.

Mr. Manning's telephone calls to his wife to attend to personal business are beyond the scope of the above decisions. While a telephone call to advise a relative of one's return transportation arrangements may be reimbursed in unusual circumstances, as when travel plans are not known in advance, the Navy has not certified any one of the three telephone calls Mr. Manning claims to have made to his wife for this purpose as in the interest of the Government, as required by section 680a.

Accordingly, the determination of our Claims Division is hereby sustained and the claim is denied.



For The Comptroller General
of the United States