



**The Comptroller General
of the United States**

Washington, D.C. 20548

Decision

Matter of: James W. Winchester - Reimbursement of Airline
Ticket Purchased With Personal Credit Card

File: B-223815

Date: March 20, 1987

DIGEST

An employee was authorized official round-trip travel from Washington, D.C., to San Diego, California, in November 1985. His wife accompanied him on the trip, and their airline tickets were purchased by the employee's secretary from the agency's Scheduled Airlines Traffic Office. Although the secretary was instructed by the employee to use his personal credit card and the Government credit card to purchase the tickets separately, she inadvertently used the employee's personal credit card to purchase both tickets. The employee may be reimbursed the total cost of his airline ticket, notwithstanding the \$100 cash purchase limitation contained in Federal Travel Regulations para. 1-10.2b and 41 C.F.R. § 101-41.203-2 (1985). The purchase of his ticket by his secretary with his personal credit card occurred through inadvertence and was contrary to the employee's intent and instructions.

DECISION

This decision is in response to a request by Mr. James W. Winchester, a former Associate Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), United States Department of Commerce, for reimbursement of the cost of an airline ticket purchased for him by his secretary with his personal credit card through the Scheduled Airlines Traffic Office (SATO). For the reasons stated later in this decision, we conclude that the former employee may be reimbursed for the full cost of the airline ticket.

BACKGROUND

Mr. Winchester was authorized to perform round-trip official travel from Washington, D.C., to San Diego, California, in November 1985. He made airline ticket reservations for

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both himself and his wife several weeks in advance of the travel at reduced fares. Prior to travel departure, Mr. Winchester gave his secretary a Government credit card and his personal credit card to purchase the airline tickets from the SATO which provides travel services for Commerce. He instructed his secretary to purchase the tickets separately, i.e., purchase his ticket with the Government credit card and his wife's ticket with his personal credit card. However, his secretary inadvertently used his personal credit card to purchase both tickets which each cost \$298.

Mr. Winchester claimed reimbursement for the total cost of his ticket, but the agency allowed Mr. Winchester reimbursement for only \$100, based upon the \$100 cash purchase limitation contained in the Federal Travel Regulations. FPMR 101-7 (Supp. 9, May 14, 1984) (FTR), incorp. by ref., 41 C.F.R. § 101-7.003 (1985), para. 1-10.2b(2), and 41 C.F.R. § 101-41.203-2 (1985). These provisions generally require the use of a Government Transportation Request (GTR) by an employee in procuring passenger transportation services which cost in excess of \$100 and the observance of the government contracts for discount airline fares.

Upon review, the General Services Administration (GSA) also denied reimbursement of the additional \$198 because their records indicated that this was the second time Mr. Winchester had violated 41 C.F.R. § 101-41.203, which requires travelers to follow GSA's airline city-pair contracts. The GSA report states that in a prior letter to the agency they stated that Mr. Winchester should be counseled regarding the proper use of travel procedures. Finally, the GSA report concludes that since Mr. Winchester did not receive prior approval to deviate from these procedures, his request for reimbursement of the additional \$198 should be disallowed.

DISCUSSION

Generally, Federal agencies must require employees to use a GTR in purchasing common carrier transportation which costs in excess of \$100. Under this system, the Government purchases the ticket and no reimbursement or receipt is required. See FTR para. 1-10.2b(1)(c) and 41 C.F.R. § 101-41.203-2 (1985). However, our Office has allowed reimbursement for a ticket purchased by an employee with his or her personal funds which exceeded the \$100 limitation provided the employee submits a receipt, passenger coupon, or other evidence showing that the amount claimed was actually paid. Joel L. Morrison, 63 Comp. Gen. 592 (1984); John W. Eastham, B-219489, September 8, 1986; and John T. Davis, B-216633, March 27, 1985.

In the present case, the record discloses that Mr. Winchester gave his secretary a Government credit card and his personal credit card to purchase airline tickets, and he instructed her to purchase his ticket with the Government credit card and to purchase his wife's ticket with his personal credit card. Through inadvertence, his secretary purchased both tickets with his personal credit card. Under the circumstances, we find no intent on the part of Mr. Winchester to circumvent or violate the previously cited regulations since he specifically instructed his secretary to purchase his ticket with the Government credit card. Any negligence resulting from the purchase transaction must be attributed to Mr. Winchester's secretary and not to him.

Accordingly, since the record contains a valid receipt evidencing payment by Mr. Winchester of his ticket at a total cost of \$298, he may be reimbursed the sum of \$198, representing the additional cost of his ticket not previously reimbursed.

for *Wilton J. Doonan*
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