



**UNITED STATES
CIVILIAN BOARD OF CONTRACT APPEALS**

September 6, 2013

CBCA 3245-TRAV

In the Matter of JONATHAN JAY RITTLE

Jonathan Jay Rittle, California, MD, Claimant.

Bonnie Petree, Travel Policy, Comptroller Group, Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division, Patuxent River, MD, appearing for Department of the Navy.

DRUMMOND, Board Judge.

Jonathan Jay Rittle, an employee of the Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division (agency), was authorized to travel to Brisbane, Australia, to attend several meetings. Mr. Rittle was scheduled to depart from Dulles International Airport (IAD) to Brisbane on September 28, 2012. When he arrived at IAD to begin his travel, he realized that he had forgotten his passport and he would be unable to retrieve his passport before flight departure. Thereafter, he contacted SATO, the government travel office, to arrange round trip flights departing the next day from IAD. Due to the significant increase in the cost of the airfare and the lack of additional approval from his approving official (AO), Mr. Rittle had to purchase the tickets on September 29, 2013, at the airline counter.

The cost of Mr. Rittle's unused round trip tickets was \$2069.80, which has been reimbursed to his government travel charge card (GTCC). The total cost of Mr. Rittle's completed airfare was \$5075.80, \$3006 more than the original tickets. Upon submitting his travel voucher, Mr. Rittle was reimbursed \$2088.60 for his airfare, which is \$18.80 more than the Government's original ticket costs. Neither party has explained this discrepancy. The agency maintains that Mr. Rittle must bear the extra cost incurred.

Mr. Rittle asserts that he is entitled to additional airfare costs totaling \$2987.20 because: (1) his role at the meetings was essential; (2) his approving official has documented that his attendance was essential; and (3) the SATO agent never mentioned that he may be liable for the increased costs of the tickets under the circumstances that exist in this case. He also asserts that he is entitled to recover an additional late fee of \$29, which he incurred on his GTCC while disputing his responsibility for the increased cost of his airfare.

This Board has observed that federal civilian employees traveling on official business must exercise the same care in incurring expenses that a prudent person would exercise if traveling on personal business. *Carleton Bulkin*, CBCA 1511-TRAV, 09-2 BCA ¶ 34,143, at 168,788; *James M. Cunningham*, CBCA 1106-RELO, 08-2 BCA ¶ 33,944, at 167,959. Here, Mr. Rittle's excess airfare costs were incurred because he forgot his passport. But for that, there would have been no additional charges because he would have traveled on his original flight. Notwithstanding Mr. Rittle's assertions and his AO's willingness to reimburse him if there is a legal basis to do so, we find that Mr. Rittle did not act as a prudent traveler and thus is liable for the additional airfare.

Finally, Mr. Rittle is not entitled to recover the \$29 late fee on his GTCC. Under the Department of Defense Financial Management Regulation (FMR), "[c]ardholders are responsible for payment regardless of the status of their travel reimbursements." FMR, vol. 9, ch. 3: Department of Defense Government Travel Charge Card ¶ 031202(A) (2010). Therefore, Mr. Rittle was obligated to continue payment on the GTCC despite this dispute, and his failure to do so has caused him to incur a late fee for which he is responsible.

Mr. Rittle's claims are denied.

JEROME M. DRUMMOND
Board Judge