Text as published on gao.gov, https://www.gao.gov/products/b-191579, archived 2026-07-11. GAO published no original file for this decision. Rendered by Comptroller Desk.

B-191579, May 22, 1978

Number: B-191579

Date: 1978-05-22

B-191579, MAY 22, 1978

PRECIS-UNAVAILABLE:

MR. CLELAND:

THIS IS IN REPLY TO A MARCH 13, 1978, LETTER FROM THE CONTROLLER, VETERANS ADMINISTRATION, ROUTED THROUGH THE CHIEF DISBURSING OFFICER, DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY (HIS REFERENCE DD:FS:DO:DRY), REQUESTING THAT RELIEF BE GRANTED IN THE AMOUNT OF $3,500, ON BEHALF OF MS. ESTHER HALFON, CLASS-B-CASHIER, VETERANS ADMINISTRATION HOSPITAL, SEATTLE, WASHINGTON, TO COVER A LOSS IN HER ACCOUNT WHICH RESULTED FROM AN ARMED ROBBERY.

THE RECORD DISCLOSES THAT ON JUNE 17, 1977, AT APPROXIMATELY 1:10 P.M., A MAN ENTERED THE CASHIER'S OFFICE IN HOSPITAL BUILDING 15 AND HANDED MS. HALFON A NOTE DEMANDING ALL OF HER TWENTY-DOLLAR BILLS. THE MAN THEN ASSERTED THAT HE WAS ARMED, AND WHILE NOT DISPLAYING A WEAPON, INDICATED THAT HE HAD ONE IN HIS POCKET. MS. HALFON, WHO WAS APPARENTLY ALONE IN THE OFFICE AT THIS TIME, HANDED THE MAN A STACK OF TWENTY DOLLAR BILLS FROM HER CASH BOX, AMOUNTING TO $3,500.

IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE MAN LEFT, MS. HALFON PRESSED AN ALARM BUTTON SUMMONING THE HOSPITAL POLICE, AND REPORTED THE ROBBERY TO THEM. THE HOSPITAL POLICE IN TURN CALLED THE SEATTLE POLICE DEPARTMENT AND THE FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION, AND REPRESENTATIVES FROM BOTH WERE SENT TO THE SCENE. THE POLICE INVESTIGATION PRODUCED THE NAME OF ONE POSSIBLE SUSPECT, A FORMER PSYCHIATRIC PATIENT AT THE HOSPITAL. HOWEVER, THE FBI, WHICH ASSUMED CONTROL OF THE CASE, HAS CLOSED ITS FILE FOR LACK OF EVIDENCE.

PURSUANT TO A DELEGATION FROM THE HEAD OF THE AGENCY, THE CONTROLLER MADE A DETERMINATION THAT THE LOSS OCCURRED WHILE THE CASHIER WAS ACTING IN HER OFFICIAL CAPACITY, WITHOUT FAULT OR NEGLIGENCE ON HER PART. RECOMMENDED THAT OUR OFFICE RELIEVE MS. HALFON OF LIABILITY FOR THIS LOSS UNDER THE PROVISIONS OF 31 U.S.C. SEC. 82A-1 (1970), WHICH PROVIDES IN PERTINENT PART AS FOLLOWS:

"THE GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE IS AUTHORIZED, AFTER CONSIDERATION OF THE PERTINENT FINDING AND IF IN CONCURRENCE WITH THE DETERMINATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE HEAD OF THE DEPARTMENT OR INDEPENDENT ESTABLISHMENT CONCERNED, TO RELIEVE ANY DISBURSING OR OTHER ACCOUNTABLE OFFICER OR AGENT *** CHARGED WITH RESPONSIBILITY ON ACCOUNT OF PHYSICAL LOSS OR DEFICIENCY OF GOVERNMENT FUNDS, VOUCHERS, RECORDS, CHECKS, SECURITIES, OR PAPERS IN HIS CHARGE *** IF THE HEAD OF THE DEPARTMENT OR INDEPENDENT ESTABLISHMENT DETERMINES (1) THAT SUCH LOSS OR DEFICIENCY OCCURRED WHILE SUCH OFFICER OR AGENT WAS ACTING IN THE DISCHARGE OF HIS OFFICIAL DUTIES, OR THAT SUCH LOSS OR DEFICIENCY OCCURRED

BY REASON OF THE ACT OR OMISSION OF A SUBORDINATE OF SUCH OFFICER OR AGENT; AND (2) THAT SUCH LOSS OR DEFICIENCY OCCURRED WITHOUT FAULT OR NEGLIGENCE ON THE PART OF SUCH OFFICER OR AGENT

THE INFORMATION PROVIDED TO US CONCERNING THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THIS LOSS INDICATES THAT IT OCCURRED AS THE RESULT OF A ROBBERY WHICH TOOK PLACE WHILE MS. HALFON WAS ACTING IN THE DISCHARGE OF HER OFFICIAL DUTIES, AND WITHOUT FAULT OR NEGLIGENCE ON HER PART. THERE IS NOTHING IN THE RECORD TO SUGGEST EITHER THAT THE ROBBERY DID NOT OCCUR AS REPORTED, OR THAT THE CASHIER IS IMPLICATED IN ANY WAY IN CONNECTION WITH THE ROBBERY. ACCORDINGLY, WE CONCUR WITH THE VETERANS ADMINISTRATION'S ADMINISTRATIVE DETERMINATION AND GRANT RELIEF FROM LIABILITY TO MS. HALFON UNDER THE PROVISIONS OF 31 U.S.C. SEC. 82A-1 (1970). A CHARGE MAY BE MADE TO THE VETERANS ADMINISTRATION APPROPRIATION AS PROPOSED.