USE CAUTION WHEN PURCHASING AIRLINE TICKETS

When stationed on Okinawa there are many opportunities for Soldiers to travel. Many of these opportunities involve buying airline tickets to another part of Japan, another country, or back home. There are many different agencies and airlines Soldiers can use to buy airline tickets. The cheapest ticket is usually a nonrefundable one. Although Soldiers may save some money buying a nonrefundable ticket, Soldiers could also lose money if they are unable to take the trip. Each company has its own refund policy, but Soldiers should keep in mind that their leave may be cancelled or they may be sent on an unplanned deployment.

Unfortunately, the US Government cannot pay claims for unused airline tickets under either the Personnel Claims Act (PCA) or the Military Claims Act (MCA). Soldiers and their family members are therefore cautioned strongly against buying nonrefundable airline tickets. Department of the Army Pamphlet 27-162, Paragraph 11-6b, addresses claims for unused airline tickets: "*The claim of a Soldier who purchases a nonrefundable airline ticket and whose leave is later cancelled or whose orders are changed so that the tickets become worthless is not compensable. The fact that a Soldier cannot use a purchased ticket does not constitute a loss of tangible property within the meaning of the PCA. An installation's claims education program should publicize this fact to alert Soldiers that purchasing nonrefundable tickets carries this risk.*"

As quoted above, Soldiers take a significant risk if they buy nonrefundable airline tickets. If the ticket is unused, the entire purchase price may be completely lost since a claim is not payable by the US Government. Some airlines are more willing to issue refunds for military personnel when the Soldier cannot fly because of a change in a Soldier's leave or if a Soldier has to deploy. It is wise not to count on a refund[1]. If, however, a Soldier's leave is cancelled, or the Soldier is sent on an unexpected deployment, and the travel insurance (if purchased) does not provide adequate reimbursement, the Soldier should try to negotiate a refund with the agency or airline. Sometimes a letter from the Soldier's command explaining the facts is helpful.

The legal assistance office is available to discuss nonrefundable ticket issues by calling 652-4332.

[1] Soldiers should consider buying travel insurance that would provide reimbursement, if all or part of the ticket is cancelled for a covered reason.