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(54) **BUSINESS CASE WITH EXPANDABLE
INTERNAL COMPARTMENT FOR
OVERNIGHT CLOTHING**

(52) **U.S. Cl.** 190/103; 190/109; 190/113

(76) **Inventor: Richard J. Krulik, Dix Hills, NY (US)**

(57) **ABSTRACT**

Correspondence Address:
ABELMAN FRAYNE & SCHWAB
Attorney at Law
150 East 42nd Street
New York, NY 10017 (US)

A soft-sided business case is convertible from a low-profile configuration to an expanded configuration. The business case comprises a first internal compartment that is zippered and appropriately padded for storing a computer or other personal electronic device and related accessories. The opposite side of business case comprises an interior zippered compartment enclosing a file folio having a plurality of pockets. A third internal compartment is provided between the file folio compartment and the first interior compartment and comprises gusseted expanding central walls for increasing the interior volume of the third internal compartment to receive clothing and/or other personal articles so that the case can also be used as an overnight travel bag. Access to the third interior compartment is through a soft interior dividing wall releasably affixed to the file folio.

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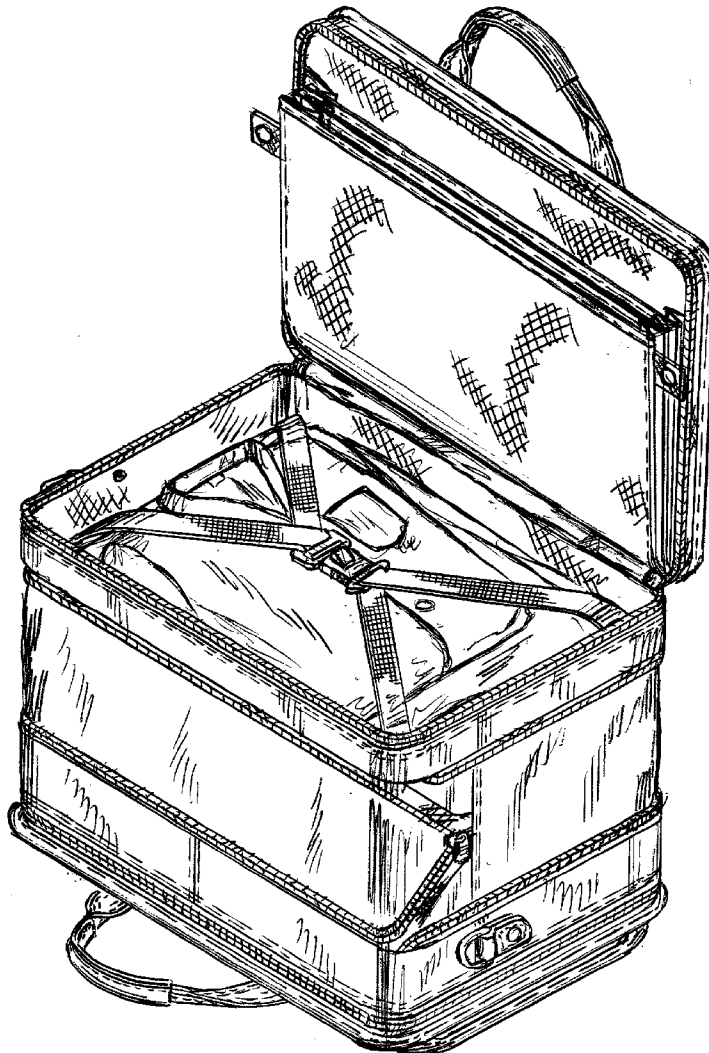
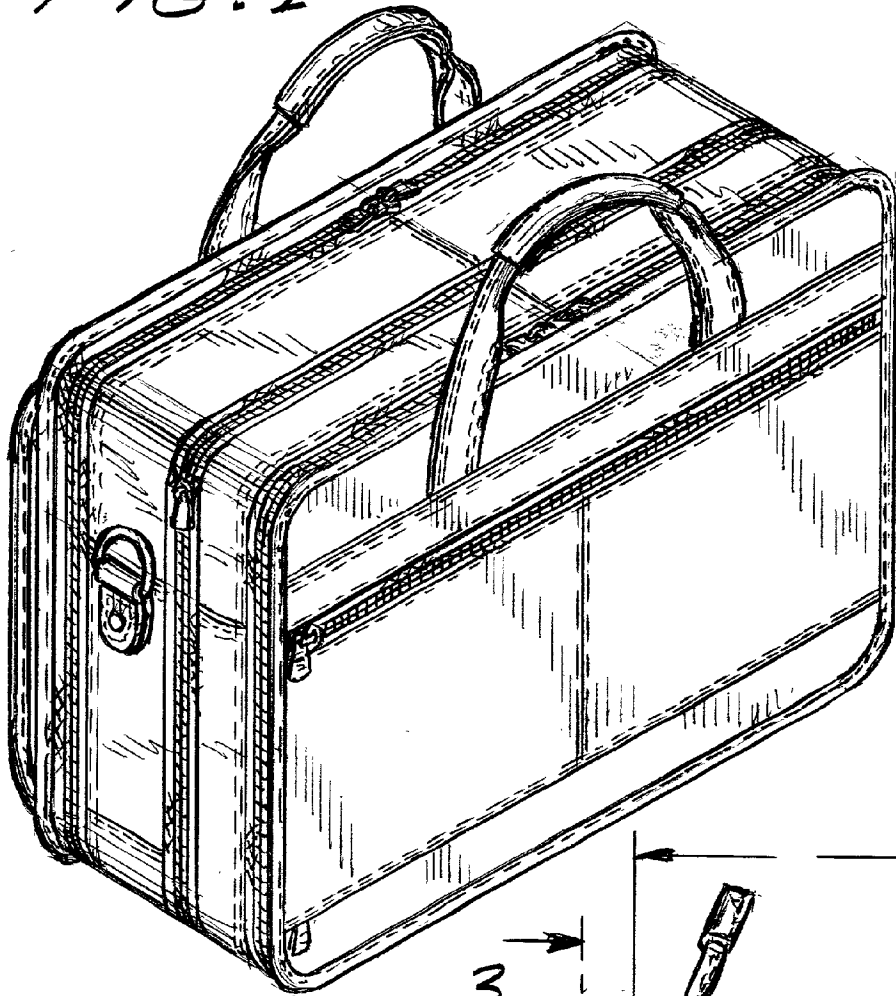


FIG. 1



3

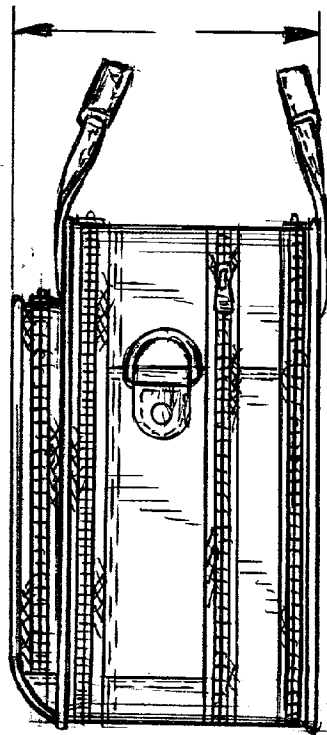
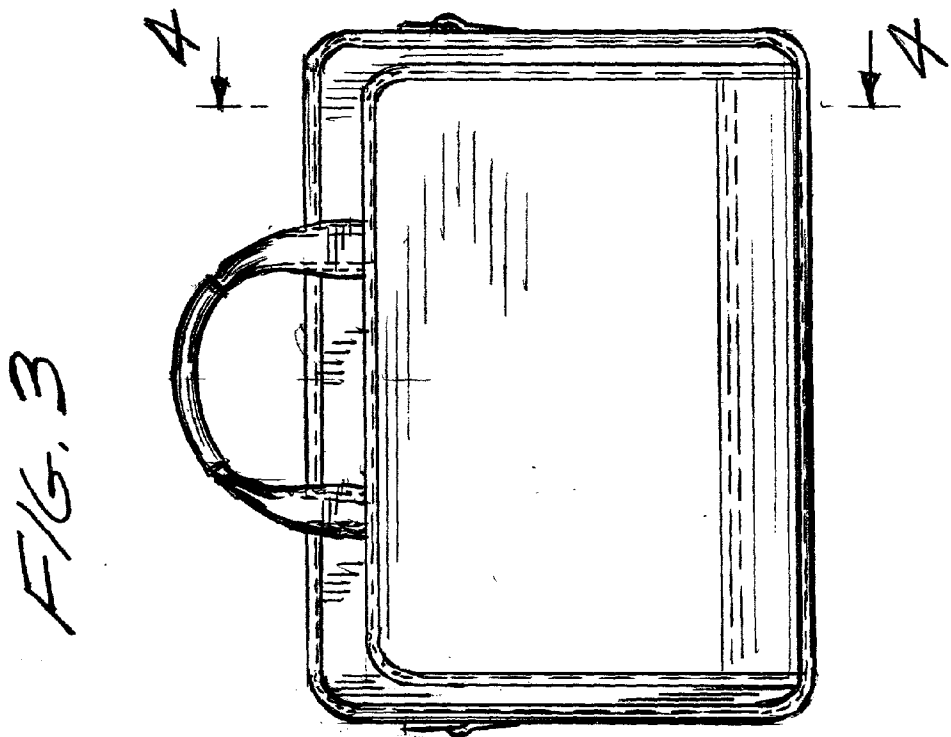
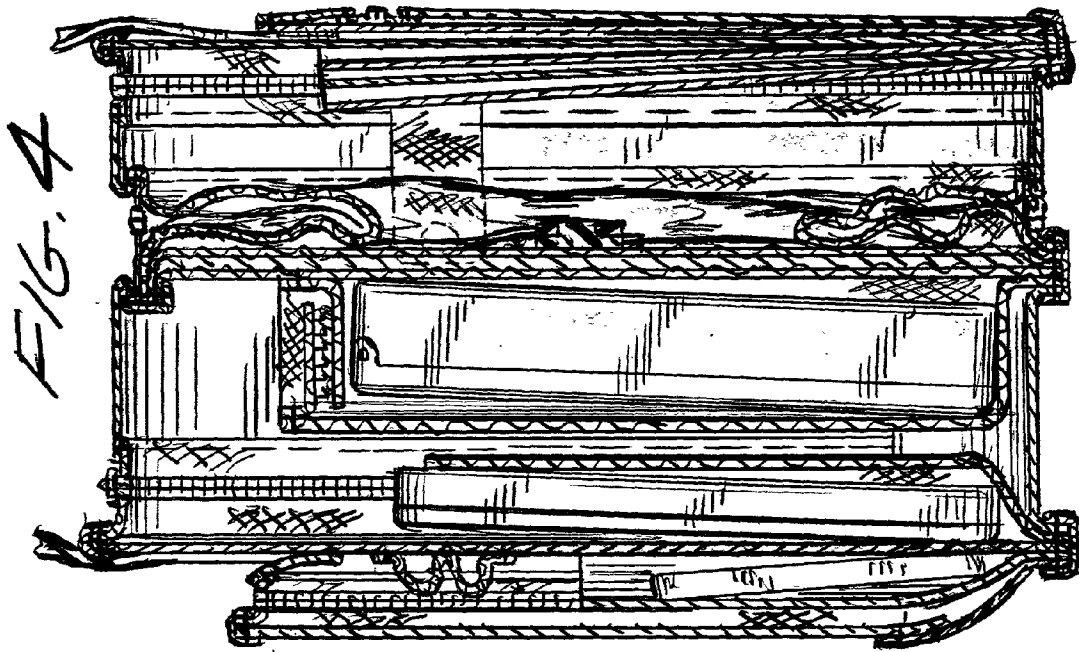


FIG. 2

3



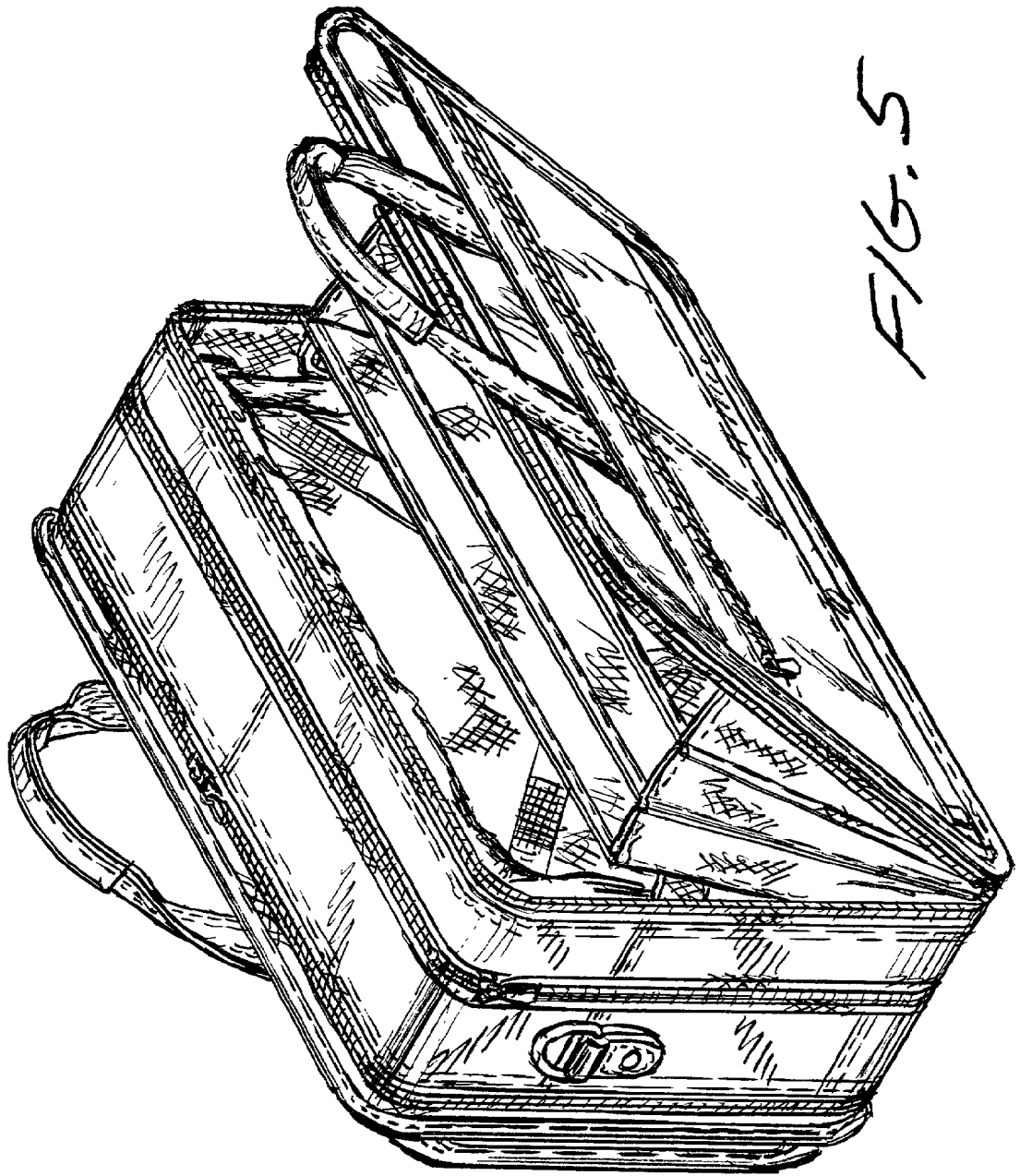
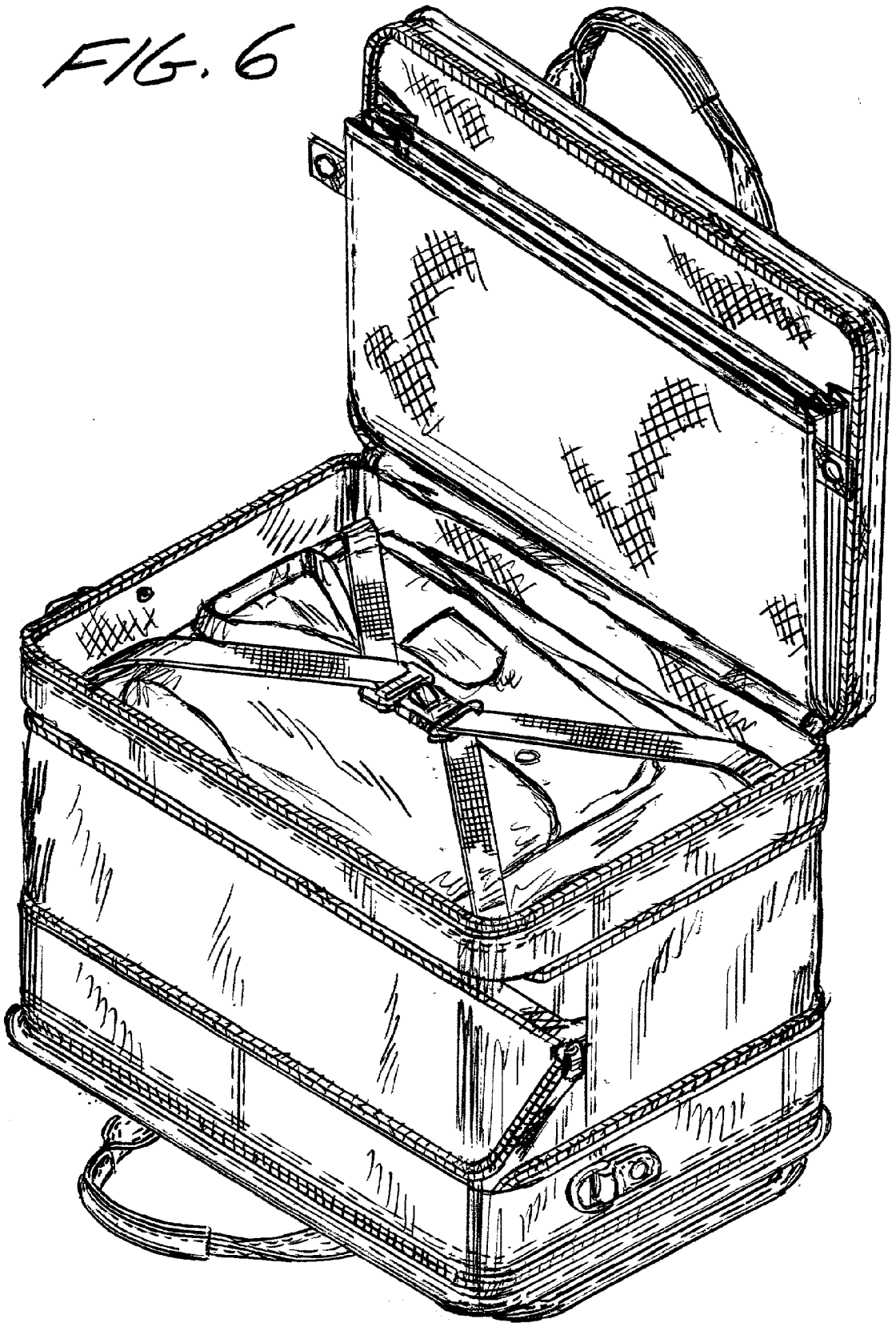


FIG. 5

FIG. 6



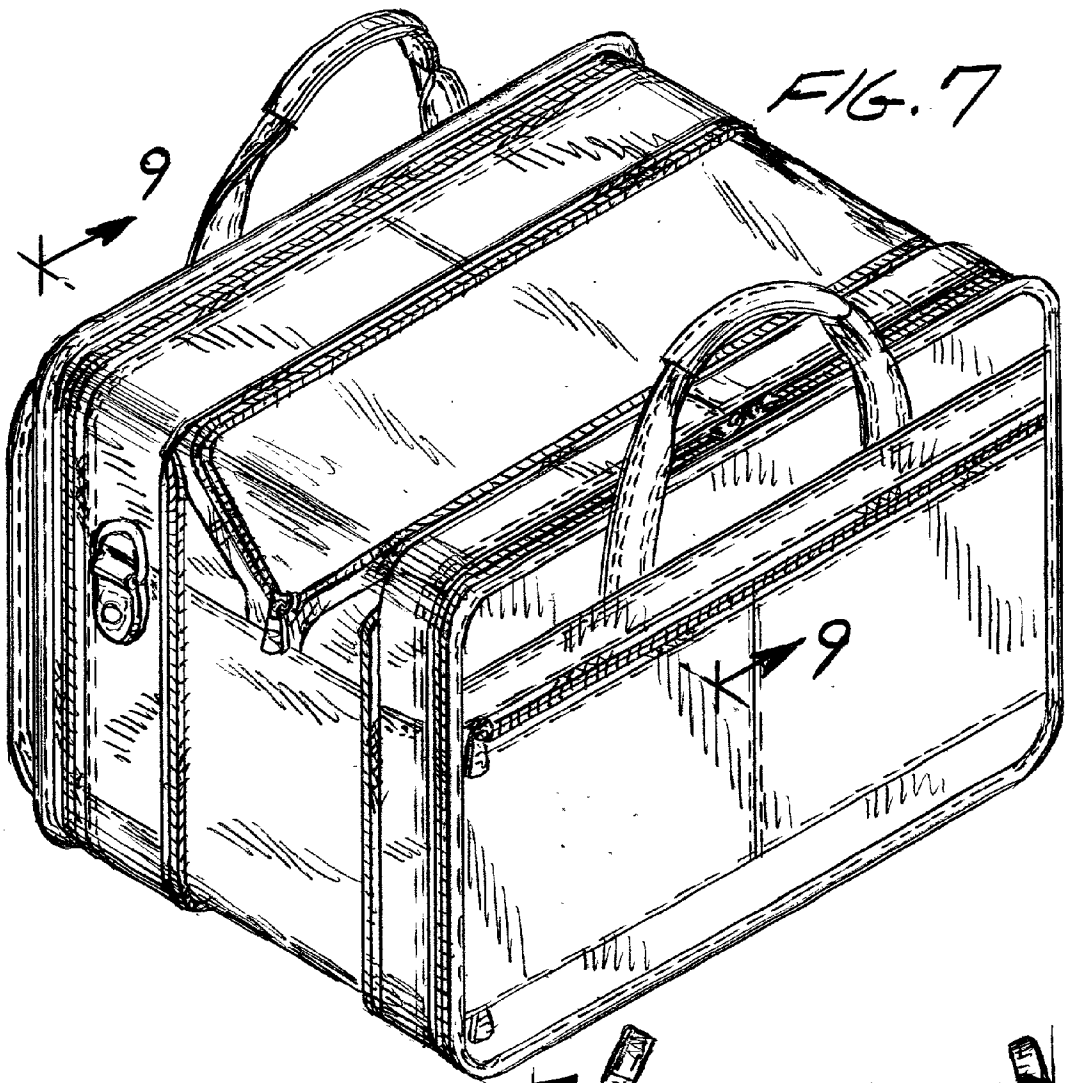


FIG. 8

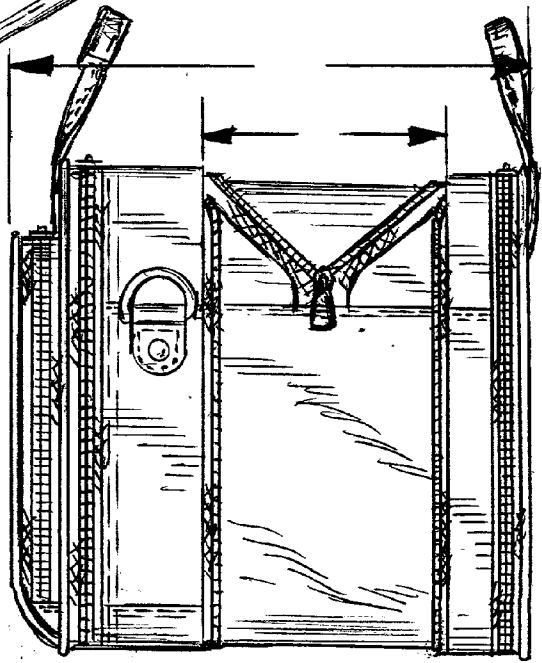
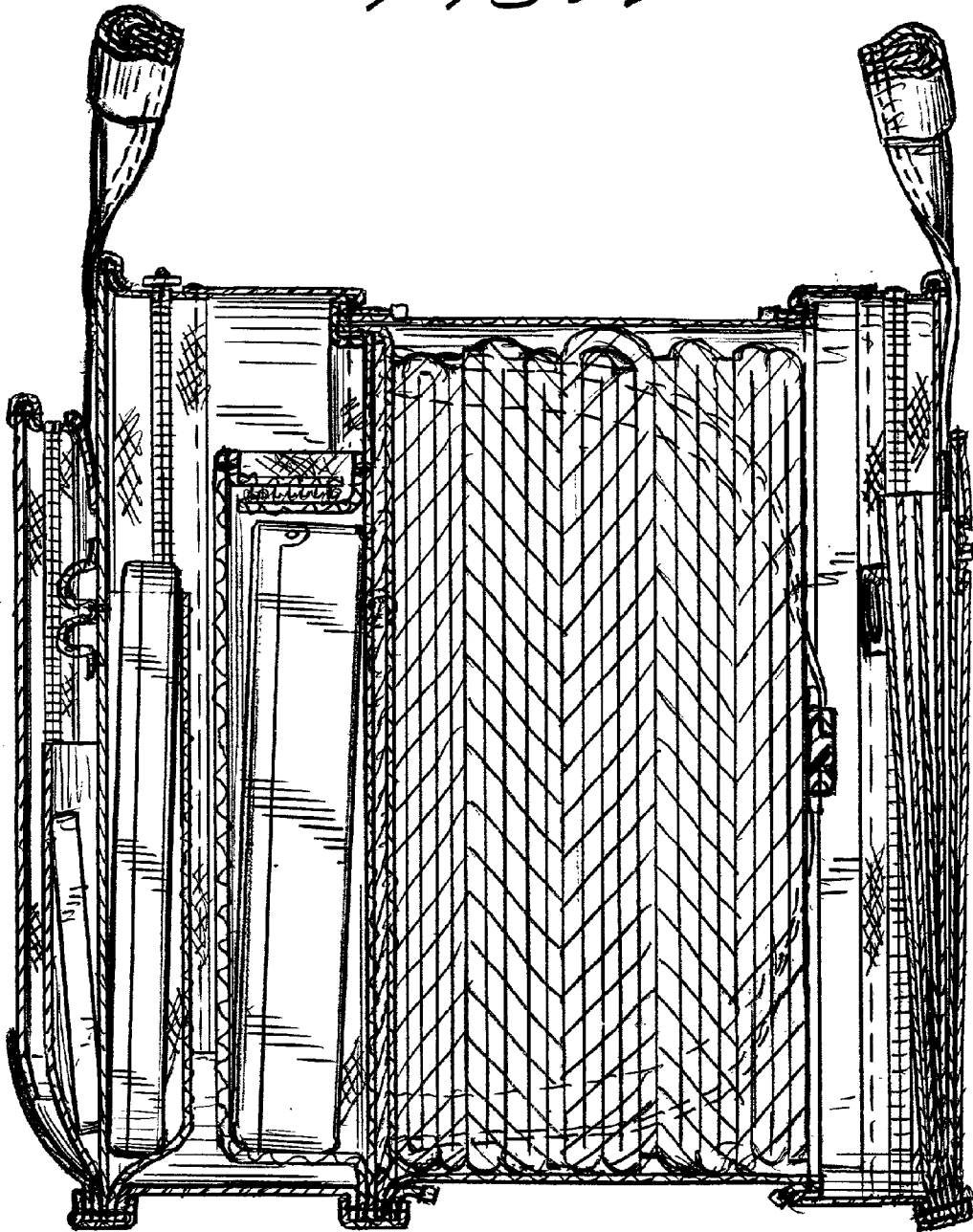


FIG. 9



BUSINESS CASE WITH EXPANDABLE INTERNAL COMPARTMENT FOR OVERNIGHT CLOTHING**FIELD OF THE INVENTION**

[0001] The present invention relates to the field of portable traveling bags and business cases for the transporting and storage of papers, books, computers, portable electronic equipment, school supplies and the like, in addition to portable traveling bags and, more particularly, to a business case with an expandable internal compartment for use as an overnight travel bag.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] Carry bags, backpacks and business cases are well known in the art and are readily available in many shapes and sizes for many types of use. In addition, it is well known in the art to provide carry bags and the like which have small expandable compartments designed for storing or carrying specific items or devices. Specifically, it is common in the art to provide a business case for carrying electronic equipment (i.e., personal laptop computers, personal digital assistants and the like) and paperwork. In addition, it is common in the art to provide expandable compartments for accommodating such items and carrying associated items such as electronic mediums, pens, books and files. Furthermore, it is well known in the art to provide carry bags and garment bags for carrying clothing and related accessories for travel. However, carry cases generally serve a single purpose, thus, a business case designed for carrying business related items is not generally useful for carrying overnight clothing for short-term travel.

[0003] Therefore, a need exists in the art for a dual-purpose carrying case which offers a user the opportunity to carry not only office or work-related items, but also provides the user with sufficient expandable storage capacity as an option for carrying clothing, personal toiletry items, and the like. It is a novel aspect of the present invention to provide a business case with a plurality of expandable internal compartments for storing electronic devices, paperwork, files and the like that is also adapted for carrying clothing and related items for overnight or short-term travel in a compact carrying case, the bulk and volume of which can be minimized after unpacking the personal items.

[0004] Dyke U.S. Pat. No. 3,443,671 discloses an expandable suitcase capable of being enlarged throughout the entire cross-section comprising a transversely extensible collar around the periphery. However, Dyke fails to teach a business case comprising a plurality of expandable internal compartments and an interior padded computer carrying compartment, a file folio and the like. Further, Dyke fails to disclose a business case of sufficient expansion for allowing a user to carry overnight clothing for short-term travel.

[0005] Margerum et al. U.S. Pat. No. 3,904,003 discloses a combination business case and desk allowing the brief case to be converted from one configuration to the other. Margerum teaches of one embodiment providing a pivotable side wall of the brief case which may be lowered to be used as a desk writing area while allowing a user to directly access the contents located in the drawers, file folders and the like therein. However, Margerum fails to disclose a business case having a means for expansion. Specifically, Margerum fails to teach of a business case having a plurality of expandable

internal compartments for storing electronic devices, paperwork, files and the like in addition to overnight clothing and related items for short-term travel.

[0006] Ginat U.S. Pat. No. 4,236,615 discloses several embodiments of packing cases having expandable compartments, including packing cases comprising an expandable partition of flexible material secured along the peripheral edges of a case. The partition is normally disposed within the main compartment of the case to form an auxiliary compartment separate from, but expandable within, the main case compartment and closable by a fastener device. In one embodiment, an opening is formed in an end wall of the case, and the partition is dimensioned such that the expandable auxiliary compartment is approximately the full volume of the main compartment. In two further embodiments, the bottom wall of the case can be opened, and the partition, in addition to being disposable within the main compartment to form an expandable auxiliary compartment therein, may also be projected through the opened bottom wall to form a bottom extension of the main compartment. However, Ginat fails to disclose a business case comprising an interior padded computer carrying compartment, a file folio and the like for retaining business related items therein. Further, Ginat fails to disclose a business case of sufficient size for carrying overnight luggage for short-term travel in addition to business related articles.

[0007] Kotkins, Jr. U.S. Pat. No. 4,773,515 discloses a multi-compartment, expandable luggage bag comprising a main storage compartment with one or more expandable joints to increase the size of the main storage compartment. In conjunction with the main storage compartment, provided is a separable end storage compartment having an inner flexible membrane that can be extended inwardly beyond each of the expansion joints to maximize the volume of the end storage compartment when the expansion joints are open. However, Kotkins, Jr. fails to disclose a business case comprising an interior padded computer carrying compartment, a file folio and the like for retaining business related items therein. Furthermore, Kotkins Jr. fails to disclose sufficient expansion members that allow for carrying business related items in addition to overnight clothing.

[0008] Pulichino, Jr. U.S. Pat. No. 4,925,021 discloses a soft luggage-type suitcase having three compartments enclosed by panels or lids hinged to a container having top, bottom and side walls. Pulichino also teaches of the use of a soft luggage suitcase with a hanger bracket to avoid the common problems traditionally associated with zipper closures. However, Pulichino fails to disclose a means for expanding the interior compartment of a business case for carrying clothing and related toiletries for overnight travel.

[0009] Brown U.S. Pat. No. 5,010,988 discloses an expandable shock protected carrying case. Specifically, Brown discloses a carrying case adapted for use in carrying lap top computers, printers, fax machines and the like, comprising a case having an outer shell formed of a durable waterproof material and a case interior including a main storage compartment and a secondary storage compartment. An expansion zone formed on a surrounding side wall structure allows the secondary storage compartment to be adjustable between a collapsed stowed position and an expanded operative position thereby providing a second compartment to store computer equipment. The carrying

case further includes a shock barrier construction defined by a layer of shock absorbent material fitted between the exterior shell and an inner lining in surrounding protecting relation to the case interior. However, Brown fails to disclose a business case comprising an expandable gusset that allows a user to convert the business case from a low-profile configuration having minimal central volume to an expanded volume for carrying overnight clothing, toiletries and the like.

[0010] Chu U.S. Pat. No. 5,086,888 discloses a folding suitcase with a hard casing consisting of six hard sides, wherein the plate bodies of hard casing on the bottom, left and right sides (i.e. bottom, left and right plate bodies) are separable from their corresponding soft surface materials so that these plate bodies become removable. In addition Chu teaches that when hook-and-loop fasteners are disengaged from each other and the bottom, left and right plate bodies are removed, only the soft surface materials are left on the bottom, left and right sides of the suitcase which become foldable, so the suitcase as a whole can be folded into a flat shape with its front and rear sides overlapping each other in order to reduce the space required for warehousing, shipping and storing it. However, Chu discloses a rigid-sided case and fails to disclose a soft-sided business case which provides for expansion. Although Chu provides for a low-profile configuration, this configuration is only suitable for storage or warehousing and does not provide an interior volume for carrying business related items. Furthermore, Chu fails to disclose a business case comprising an interior file folio, padded computer carrying compartment and the like.

[0011] Marceau U.S. Pat. No. 5,160,001 discloses a soft combination business case and carrying case for the purpose of transporting a portable computer easily and in relative safety with its ancillary supplies. Marceau also teaches of an interior structure for suspending the computer unit in the central zone of the carrying case, spaced from the case bottom for protecting the computer against damage. However, Marceau's improved computer storage bag fails to disclose a business case for storing and transporting business related items in addition to overnight clothing. Furthermore, Marceau fails to disclose a business case comprising an interior file folio and an expansion means for increasing the interior volume of the business case.

[0012] Hollingsworth U.S. Pat. No. 5,217,119 discloses an improved carrying case for a laptop computer or other delicate electronic instrument that is generally rectangular, having front and rear walls. Furthermore, disclosed is a suspension system for the laptop computer or other equipment including a cradle suspended from the front and rear walls for receiving a laptop computer, and elastic panel members supporting the cradle for absorbing shocks and impacts occurring upon placing of the case on a floor or the like. However, Hollingsworth fails to disclose a business case that can be expanded to carry clothing for short-term travel in addition to business related materials. Furthermore, Hollingsworth fails to disclose a business case that can be converted from a low-profile case of minimal volume to an expanded volume case.

[0013] Zia et al. U.S. Pat. No. 5,242,056 discloses a portable office carrying case having a base fabricated of ridged material and at least the front and back sides fabricated of ridged material to protect electronic equipment,

such as a portable computer, placed within the case by the user to be moved and placed on a working surface. Zia et al. further discloses a portable office carrying case having a hinged front ridged side that is detachable from the sides so that the user may lower the front side from a vertical position onto the working surface providing access to the keyboard of the computer at substantially the working surface level; and means for attaching a storage pocket to the outside of the back ridged side and a divider that may be mounted inside the case to define compartments for storing office materials. However, Zia et al. fails to disclose a business case comprising an expandable gusset that allows a user to convert the business case from a low-profile configuration having minimal central volume to an expanded volume for carrying overnight clothing, toiletries and the like.

[0014] Hollingsworth U.S. Pat. No. 5,534,754 discloses a carrying case for electronic equipment, such as a notebook computer, comprising a pair of opposed walls, a plurality of side walls connected there between to define a principal compartment for receiving the notebook computer, and a suspension member affixed to an upper portion of one of the opposed walls and depending downwardly there from into the principal compartment. The suspension member includes upper and lower supports to cradle the notebook computer and an elastic panel disposed between the upper and lower supports to absorb any shock which would otherwise occur due to the carrying case being abruptly dropped. Alternatively, the suspension member can be an elastic panel having opposed ends supported by an upper portion of one of the opposed walls to define an elastic sling which is suspended downwardly from the wall within the principal compartment to receive the notebook computer. The suspension member can also be releasably connected between the opposed walls to define a shock absorbing cradle which can be removed so that the carrying case can be used for other purposes. However, Hollingsworth fails to disclose an expansion gusset for increasing the interior volume of a business case. Furthermore, Hollingsworth fails to disclose a business case that can be converted from a low-profile case of minimal volume to an expanded volume case for carrying overnight clothing for short-term travel.

[0015] Shyr U.S. Pat. No. 5,967,270 discloses a combination business case and computer bag assembly including a housing member having a bottom member, a plurality of side members, and a pair of pivotable top flap members. One of the side members includes a flexible floating compartment that is dimensionally configured to receive a portable computer. When the portable computer is held in the flexible floating compartment, it extends in the business case enclosure to protect the portable computer. However, Shyr fails to disclose a business case comprising an expandable gusset that allows a user to convert the business case from a low-profile configuration having minimal central volume to an expanded volume for carrying overnight clothing, toiletries and the like.

[0016] Wyant U.S. Pat. No. 6,053,382 discloses a school-use backpack that is similar in styling to conventional school-use backpacks, which can be expanded to increase the interior storage volume of the backpack when additional storage space is required. In particular, the backpack disclosed in Wyant includes front, back, and side panels which define a zippered main storage compartment, two shoulder straps, and a zippered gusset which is sewn into the side

panel of the backpack. However, Wyant is limited to a school-use back pack. Furthermore, Wyant fails to disclose a business case comprising an interior padded computer carrying compartment, a file folio and the like for retaining business related items therein.

[0017] In view of the foregoing, there exists a clear need for an expandable business case for transporting business related items including, but not limited to files, papers, a portable computer, pens, a calculator, note pads and the like. Furthermore, there exists a need to provide a business case which is convertible from a low-profile case of minimal volume for business related items to an expanded volume case for carrying overnight clothing for short-term travel in addition to business related items.

[0018] Therefore, it is an object of the present invention to provide a business case comprising the features of construction, combination of elements and configuration of parts which will be exemplified in the construction of the invention set forth.

[0019] It is a further object of the present invention to provide a device which exhibits strength and durability of use.

[0020] It is still a further object of the present invention to provide a convertible business case that allows the user to expand the interior volume.

[0021] Furthermore, it is an object of the present invention to provide a business case comprising a plurality of expandable internal compartments and an interior padded computer carrying compartment, a file folio and the like.

[0022] Still further, it is an object of the present invention to provide a business case allowing for sufficient expansion for carrying overnight clothing for short-term travel.

[0023] Still further, it is an object of the present invention to provide a business case constructed with internal compartments for carrying business related items in addition to clothing and personal toiletries.

[0024] It is a further object of the present invention to provide a business case that exhibits a low-profile configuration.

[0025] It is still a further object of the present invention to provide a business or carrying case comprising an expansion gusset that allows a user to convert the business case from a low-profile configuration having minimal central volume convertible to a business case having an expanded central volume.

[0026] Other objects, features and characteristics of the present invention, as well as the methods of operation and functions of the related elements of the invention, and the combination of parts and economies of development and performance, will become more apparent upon consideration of the following description with reference to the accompanying drawings, all of which form a part of this specification.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0027] The present invention is directed to a dual purpose business case or briefcase made of suitable material for carrying business related materials, and as having an expandable interior compartment for carrying personal

clothing and travel accessories, such as toiletries. Specifically, a soft-sided business case is provided that is preferably constructed of woven nylon, synthetic or natural leather. The contents of the expandable internal compartment are preferably concealed from view when either of the adjoining compartments adapted for carrying business items is opened. The business case can be constructed in whole or in selected part of a waterproof material or can be treated in a manner to protect one or more of the interior compartments from water.

[0028] In a preferred embodiment, the business case of the present invention comprises a plurality of internal compartments and/or storage pockets. In the preferred embodiment of the present invention, a housing structure is provided including a first exterior sidewall and an opposing second exterior sidewall, each sidewall being fixedly attached to a lower bottom panel and an opposing upper top panel, a first side panel and an opposing second side panel that forms a business case. The first sidewall and the second sidewall are attached to the lower panel, upper panel, first side panel and second side panel by common methods known in the art for attaching the materials together, such as stitching. Further, a plurality of fastening means such as zippers, snaps, hook and loop fasteners and/or buttons are provided to allow the user to access the internal compartments of the business case and subsequently rejoin the members of the case after opening it.

[0029] In one preferred embodiment, the business case includes an first external compartment that can be expandable and serves a variety of functions. This first external compartment is internally separated from the rest of the adjacent compartments of the case. Access to this first compartment can be via a rejoinable opening, such as a zipper, on the top and adjoining sides of the compartment. The first external compartment can provide for storage of various materials, such as pens, papers, computer disks, and the like. Furthermore, the first external compartment can comprise a plurality of specialized storage compartments such as an expandable compartment, pen and pencil sleeves and a pocket member dimensioned to secure memory disks for computers, pocket calculator, and other small stationery items.

[0030] A second outside compartment is provided appropriately padded for use as a storage compartment for a notebook or laptop computer or like device. It is well known in the art to provide such a compartment for securely and safely carrying a portable computer so as to protect it and minimize shock to the device upon impact if the case is mishandled and forcibly comes in contact with a rigid object. An interior dividing wall is provided to separate the second internal compartment from the other internal compartments to insure that the notebook computer is protected from items in the other internal compartments. Specifically, it is well known in the art to provide sufficient padding and cushioning of foam or like material on the interior surface of the second internal compartment to prevent damage to the sensitive electronic equipment carried in the compartment. The computer can be secured in the second outside compartment by means of a fastening strap, hook and loop fastening strap, cradle system, elastic member or other like means known in the art. In addition, additional storage space is provided in the second outside compartment for the storage of other business related items or computer accessories.

[0031] A third internal compartment, intended for use as a storage compartment for clothing and for other personal items, is provided comprising an expansion gusset. A wrap-around zipper, or the like, is provided to secure the third internal compartment in a collapsed position. Thus, in the closed position (i.e., zippered), the wrap-around zipper maintains the business case in a low profile configuration thereby limiting the internal volume of the third internal compartment so that only the expansion gusset is disposed therein. In the open or un-zippered position, the wrap-around zipper permits the expansion of the gusset thereby allowing the expansion of the interior volume of the third internal compartment. The interior volume of the third internal compartment is of sufficient size, when expanded, to provide space for the storage of overnight clothing and personal care products used during travel. Specialized storage compartments can be disposed therein to allow the user to neatly and efficiently store toiletries and the like. A protected, waterproof compartment can be provided to prevent the toiletries from leaking onto the items in the third internal compartment or any of the internal compartments of the business case. In addition, a plurality of elastic bands, buckle-type straps or other retaining means that are well known in the art to facilitate the packing of clothing items and personal toiletries are optionally provided. Once the clothing is removed from the business case, the overall size of the case can again be minimized by securing the wrap-around zipper, thereby, substantially reducing the interior volume and re-establishing the low-profile configuration of the business case. Access to the storage volume is provided through one of the common interior adjoining sidewalls of an adjacent compartment, as will be explained below.

[0032] A fourth outside compartment is provided comprising a zippered second sidewall for enclosing a file folio therein. The file folio, comprising a plurality of pockets, can be of the type commonly used in the art for the storage of file folders, documents and similar materials. The file folio can be attached in the interior compartment of the business case in a permanent manner or a removable manner. A plurality of release straps are provided and affixed to the file folio and to the interior wall of the fourth compartment. The release straps fastened by snaps, hook and loop fasteners, a zipper, or the like, serve to maintain the low-profile configuration. Upon opening of these straps, the file folio is released from a soft interior dividing wall allowing access to the interior of the central expandable volume of the third internal compartment. The soft interior dividing wall is provided to isolate the personal items from view when either the file folio or the other of the adjacent internal compartments is opened. When access to the interior of the third internal compartment is desired, the zipper extending around three sides of the fourth outside compartment is completely opened and the interior straps securing the file folio in place are released, thereby allowing the file folio to be moved away and for the two sections of the case to be laid flat in a joined side-by-side position.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0033] For a more complete understanding of the present invention, reference is now made to the following drawings in which:

[0034] FIG. 1 is a perspective view of the preferred embodiment of the business case with expandable internal for overnight clothing shown in a low-profile closed configuration;

[0035] FIG. 2 is a side view of the preferred embodiment of the present invention, as depicted in FIG. 1, wherein business case is shown in a low-profile closed configuration;

[0036] FIG. 3 is a frontal view of the preferred embodiment of the present invention, as depicted in FIG. 1, wherein the business case is shown in a low-profile closed configuration with the closed first internal compartment in the foreground;

[0037] FIG. 4 is a side view and cross-sectional cutaway of the preferred embodiment of the present invention, as depicted in FIG. 1, wherein the business case is shown in a low-profile closed configuration;

[0038] FIG. 5 is a perspective view of the preferred embodiment of the present invention wherein the business case is depicted in a low-profile configuration with the fourth compartment file folio unzipped and extended outward;

[0039] FIG. 6 is a perspective view of the preferred embodiment of the present invention wherein the business case is depicted in an expanded configuration with the third internal compartment open allowing for overnight clothing and toiletries to be situated and stored therein;

[0040] FIG. 7 is a perspective view of the preferred embodiment of the business case with expandable internal for overnight clothing shown in an expanded configuration;

[0041] FIG. 8 is a side view of the preferred embodiment according to the present invention, as depicted in FIG. 7, wherein business case is shown in an expanded closed configuration; and

[0042] FIG. 9 is a side view and cross-section cutaway of the preferred embodiment according to the present invention as depicted in FIG. 7, wherein the business case is shown in an expanded, but closed configuration.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0043] A further understanding of the present invention will be obtained by reference to the preferred embodiment set forth in the illustrations of the accompanying drawings. Although the illustrated embodiment is merely exemplary of systems for carrying out the present invention, both the organization and method of operation of the invention, in general, together with the further objectives and advantages thereof, may be more easily understood by reference to the drawings and the following description. The drawings are not intended to limit the scope of this invention, which is set forth with particularity in the claims as appended or as subsequently amended, but merely to clarify and exemplify the invention.

[0044] As required, a detailed illustrative embodiment of the present invention is disclosed herein. However, techniques and structures in accordance with the present invention may be embodied in a wide variety of forms and modes, some of which may be quite different from those in the disclosed preferred embodiment. Consequently, the specific

structural and functional details disclosed herein are merely representative, yet in that regard, they are deemed to afford the best embodiment for purposes of disclosure and to provide a basis for the claims herein which define the scope of the present invention. The following presents a detailed description of a preferred embodiment (as well as some alternative embodiments) of the present invention.

[0045] Referring first to **FIG. 1**, depicted is a perspective view of the preferred embodiment of the business case **100** with expandable internal compartment for overnight clothing shown in a low-profile closed configuration. The housing structure of the business case **100** is provided including a first sidewall **104** and an opposing second sidewall **106**, each sidewall being fixedly attached to a lower panel **108** and an opposing upper panel **110**, a first side panel **112** and an opposing second side panel **114** to form said business case **100**. First sidewall **104** and second sidewall **106** are attached to lower panel **108**, upper panel **110**, first side panel **112** and second side panel **114** by common methods known in the art for attaching the materials together, such as stitching. Further, a plurality of fastening means such as a zipper or buttons are provided for allowing the user to access the internal compartment of the business case and allowing the user to subsequently rejoin the members of the business case after opening each compartment of the business case.

[0046] A first external compartment **116** is provided which is slightly expandable and serves a variety of functions. First compartment **116** is internally separated from the rest of the internal compartments of the case. Access to first external compartment **116** can be by a flap, or by a rejoinable opening, such as a zipper, on the top side of the first internal compartment. Other storage compartments can be attached to the exterior side walls for storing a cell phone, billfold or other special-purpose business and personal articles.

[0047] A second outside compartment **118** is provided and appropriately padded for use in stowing a notebook computer or like device. Access to second compartment **118** can be provided by any type of rejoinable means such as zippers, which are commonly used in the art.

[0048] A third internal compartment **120**, or clothing storage compartment, is provided comprising an expansion gusset for the storage of overnight clothing and a wrap-around zipper or like device that is provided to secure the gusset in third internal compartment **120**. When in the closed position, the wrap-around zipper maintains the business case in a low profile configuration thereby limiting the internal volume of third internal compartment **120** to the point where only the expansion gusset is disposed therein. When the zipper is in the open position, thereby providing an increase in storage volume of the third internal compartment **120**.

[0049] A fourth external compartment **122** is provided for enclosing a file folio. The inner sidewall is attached to the file folio by means of a zipper, button snap, hook and loop fastener, or the like. The file folio, comprising a plurality of pockets can be of the type commonly used in the art for the storage of documents and related materials. Furthermore, a plurality of release straps are provided and affixed within the fourth internal compartment **122**. The release straps may be fastened by snaps, hook and loop fasteners, zipper or the like to further maintain the low-profile configuration. Upon unfastening the release snaps, the file folio is released from a soft interior dividing wall allowing access to the central

expanded volume of the third internal compartment. The soft interior dividing wall is provided to isolate the personal items from the file folio when the third internal compartment **120** is opened.

[0050] Handle straps **124** are provided for carrying the business case. Handle straps **124** can be made of material commonly used in the art such as vinyl, nylon, canvas, leather or the like. In addition, handle straps **124** may be attached to the business case by any means commonly known in the art so that they become an integral part of the business case.

[0051] In a preferred embodiment, attachment rings **126** are provided and fitted to opposite ends of the business case. Attachment clips affixed to a shoulder strap (not shown) can be clipped onto attachment rings **126** providing the user an alternate manner for carrying the business case. The shoulder strap can further include a shoulder pad fitted along an intermediate portion of shoulder strap. Additional means for carrying the case can be provided in the construction of the present invention. For example, a wheel-type mechanism may be provided for rolling the business case. In addition, extendable handle means may be provided to facilitate the rolling of the business case across a surface.

[0052] Turning next to **FIG. 2**, there is depicted a side view of the preferred embodiment according to the present invention wherein business case **100** is shown in a low-profile closed configuration. Business case **100** includes a first sidewall **104** opposing a second sidewall **106**, each sidewall being fixedly attached to a lower panel **108** and an opposing upper panel **110**, a first side panel and an opposing second side panel complete the case. The first sidewall **104** and second sidewall **106** are attached to lower panel **108**, upper panel **110**, first side panel and second side panel by methods known in the art for attaching the materials together. Further, a plurality of fastening means such as a zipper or hook and loop fasteners are provided for allowing the user to access the internal compartments and to subsequently rejoin the wall or flap members of the business case **100**.

[0053] In **FIGS. 1 and 3**, the third internal compartment **120** is collapsed (i.e., zippered) and is depicted in an un-expanded configuration, providing the low-profile configuration of business case **100**. As described above, the third internal compartment **120**, or clothing storage compartment, comprises an expansion gusset for the storage of overnight clothing. A wrap-around zipper or like device is provided to secure the third internal compartment **120**. In the closed position (i.e., zippered), the wrap-around zipper maintains the business case in a low profile configuration thereby limiting the internal volume of the third internal compartment to the point where only the expansion gusset is disposed therein. In the open position (i.e., un-zippered), as illustrated in **FIGS. 6-9**, the wraparound zipper permits expansion of the gusset allowing an increase in the storage volume of the third internal compartment. It will be understood that the volume of the clothing storage compartment and the respective gussets can be of any desired size. The drawings depict a relatively large compartment for purposes of illustration only, and the compartment can be of any desired smaller volume. Accordingly, the interior volume of the third internal compartment **120** is of sufficient size, when expanded, to allow for the storage of overnight clothing for

short-term travel. Once the clothing is removed from the business case, the overall size of the case can be minimized by securing the wraparound zipper, thereby, substantially limiting interior volume and re-establishing the low-profile configuration of the business case **100**. On the opposite side of the third compartment is fourth external compartment **122** enclosing a file folio comprising a plurality of pockets of the type commonly used in the art for the storage of documents and related materials.

[**0054**] With reference to **FIG. 3**, business case **100** is shown in a low-profile collapsed configuration with the closed first optional external compartment **106** in the foreground. Handle straps **124** are provided for carrying the business case and can be attached to the business case by any means commonly known in the art, such as stitching, riveting or the like so that handle straps **124** become an integral part of business case **100**.

[**0055**] Turning next to **FIG. 4**, depicted is a side view and cross-sectional cutaway of a preferred embodiment of the present invention wherein the business case **100** is shown in a low-profile closed configuration. First sidewall **104** and opposing second sidewall **106** are attached to lower panel **108** and opposing upper panel **110**, a first side panel in the foreground and an opposing second side panel to form said business case **100**. First compartment **116** is provided which is slightly expandable and serves a variety of functions. First internal compartment **116** is internally separated from the rest of the internal compartments of the business case **100** by an internal wall **404**. An expandable compartment, pen and pencil sleeves **402** and a pocket member dimensioned to secure memory disks or compact disks for computers can be provided.

[**0056**] Second outside compartment **118** is provided and appropriately padded for use as a notebook computer or like device storage compartment. An interior dividing wall **400** is provided to separate the second compartment **118** from first compartment **116**. A second interior dividing wall **404** is provided to separate second compartment **118** from third internal compartment **120**. Furthermore, a plurality of dividing structures **406** can be affixed within the second compartment to separate the sensitive electronic devices from the rest of the items stored herein. An interior cradle system **408** is provided to support the electronic equipment stored in the second internal compartment. A notebook computer can be secured within the second compartment **118** by means of fastening strap, hook and loop fasteners strap, elastic member or other means known in the art. Additional storage space **410** can be provided within the second internal compartment **118** for the storage of other business related items or computer accessories.

[**0057**] A third internal compartment **120**, or clothing storage compartment, is provided comprising an expansion gusset **412** for the storage of overnight clothing. A wrap-around zipper or other means is provided to secure the gusset in a collapsed condition in the third internal compartment. Upon opening the zipper, expansion gusset **412** expands to provide the increased interior volume for third internal compartment **120**. Expansion gusset **412** can be made of any suitable material used in the art; however, it has been found that fabric materials such as nylon blends are satisfactory and accepted by consumers. The interior volume of the third internal compartment is of sufficient size, when expanded, to

allow for the storage of clothing and/or other personal items required for short-term travel.

[**0058**] A fourth external compartment **122** is provided comprising a zippered second sidewall for enclosing a file folio **412** therein. The file folio can be expanded upon the opening of fourth internal compartment **122**. A three-sided zipper or like device is provided to secure fourth compartment **122** in the closed position.

[**0059**] Referring next to **FIG. 5**, the business case **100** is shown in a low-profile configuration with the fourth compartment **122** unzipped and file folio **414** extended outwardly. File folio **414** can be permanently or removably attached to the interior compartment of the fourth internal compartment **122** of the business case. A plurality of release straps **506** are provided for attaching the file folio **414** to a soft interior dividing wall **504** to separate the file folio **414** of the fourth external compartment **122** from third internal compartment **120**. The release straps **506** can be fastened by snaps, hook and loop fasteners, zippers or the like to further maintain the low-profile configuration. Upon unfastening the release snaps **502**, the user can gain access to the central expanded volume of the third interior compartment. In addition, affixed within the third internal compartment **120** are a plurality of elastic bands, buckle-type straps or other like retaining means **506** that are well known in the art to facilitate the packing of clothing items and personal toiletries.

[**0060**] Turning next to **FIG. 6**, the business case **100** is shown in an expanded configuration with the third interior compartment **120** open allowing for overnight clothing and toiletries to be placed and secured therein. As previously explained, the wrap-around zipper is opened allowing the expansion of gusset **412** to provide for the increased interior volume in the third internal compartment **120**. Access to the third internal compartment **120** is through the fourth compartment behind the file folio **414**. A plurality of release straps **506** are provided for attaching the file folio **414** to a soft interior dividing wall **504**. Upon unfastening the release snaps **502** of the soft interior dividing wall **504**, the user can gain access to the central expanded volume of the third interior compartment **120**. In addition, shown affixed within the third internal compartment **120** are a plurality of elastic bands, buckle-type straps or other like retaining means **502** that are well known in the art to facilitate the packing of clothing items and personal toiletries. Additional specialized storage compartments can be located in the third internal compartment **120** to allow the user to neatly and efficiently store personal toiletries. Protected, waterproof compartments can also be provided to prevent the toiletries from leaking onto the items in third internal compartment **120** or any of the other internal compartments of the business case.

[**0061**] Turning next to **FIG. 7**, depicted is a perspective view of the preferred embodiment of the business case **100** with expandable internal compartment for overnight clothing shown in an expanded configuration. Housing structure **102** is provided including a first sidewall **104** and opposing second sidewall **106**, each sidewall being fixedly attached to lower panel **108** and opposing upper panel **110**, first side panel **112** and opposing second side panel **114** to form said business case **100**. The relationship of the elements comprising this embodiment are again clearly shown.

[0062] With reference to **FIGS. 8 and 9**, there are depicted side views of the business case **100** of the invention in its expanded configuration.

[0063] In the cross-sectional view of **FIG. 9**, the case **100** is illustrated as containing the business and personal items as would be typically required for an overnight business trip, including a laptop or notebook computer in the first outside compartment **118**, papers in third outside file folio compartment **122**, and clothing and other personal items in third internal compartment **120**.

[0064] While the present invention has been described with reference to one or more preferred embodiments, which embodiments have been set forth in considerable detail for the purposes of providing a complete understanding of the invention, such embodiments are merely exemplary and are not intended to be limiting or represent an exhaustive enumeration of all aspects of the invention. Further, it will be apparent to those of skill in the art that numerous changes may be made in such details without departing from the spirit and the principles of the invention. The scope of the invention, therefore, shall be defined solely by the following claims.

I claim:

1. A soft-sided expandable business case, providing zippers for accessing the internal compartments, having a first sidewall, opposing second sidewall, each sidewall being fixedly attached to a lower panel and an opposing upper panel, a first side panel and an opposing second side panel, constructed of a fabric secured to a rigid frame, said business case comprising:

- a first compartment padded for carrying electronic devices and related accessories;
- a second internal compartment comprising a central zipper, said central zipper extending around the periphery of the case, and an expansion gusset formed in the bottom, top and end walls of the case for selectively increasing the internal volume of said second compartment;
- a third compartment comprising a file folio secured to the interior, the folio extending substantially between the lower panel, upper panel, first side panel and second side panel; and
- a means for carrying said business case,

whereby the expansion gusset is maintained on the interior of the case in a collapsed condition when the central zipper is closed and said gusset forms a portion of the lower panel, upper panel, first side panel and second side panel in an expanded position when the central zipper is opened.

2. The business case of claim 1, wherein an interior wall of the file folio is maintained in a first retained position with respect to the end walls of the case by at least one releasable fastener and moveable to a second free position away from the end walls upon release of said at least one fastener for accessing the internal compartment of the third interior compartment.

3. The business case of claim 2 where the at least one releasable fastener is selected from the group consisting of snaps, hook and loop fasteners, clips, toggles and slot fasteners.

4. The business case of claim 3 where the at least one releasable fastener is attached to a strip of flexible material.

5. The business case of claim 2 where the closed bottom portion of the file folio is secured to the business case proximate the juncture of the lower panel and first and second side panel of the business case.

6. The business case of claim 5 where the first side wall forms the front wall of the file folio, whereby the file folio is movable with the unzipped side wall to provide access to the interior of the case.

7. The business case of claim 1 wherein said second compartment comprises restraining means for restricting the movement of stored items.

8. The business case of claim 1 wherein said second compartment is provided with means for retaining items of clothing when placed in position in said expanded compartment for storage during travel.

9. The business case of claim 1 wherein said second internal compartment comprises form-fitting, water-proofing compartments for personal toiletries.

10. The business case of claim 1 wherein said means for carrying said business case comprises a plurality of straps.

11. The business case of claim 10 wherein said means for carrying said business case comprises a shoulder strap.

12. The business case of claim 1 wherein a plurality of wheels are mounted to the exterior lower panel of said business case for rolling the business case across a support surface.

13. The business case of claim 12 further comprising a telescoping handle assembly secured to said business case extendable above the top panel and provided with a handle grip.

14. The business case of claim 1 wherein said first compartment comprises means for cushioning and positioning an electronic device.

15. The business case of claim 14 wherein said means for cushioning an electronic device comprises impact resistant members and stiffening inserts.

16. The business case of claim 1 wherein said expansion gusset is composed primarily of a woven nylon fabric.

17. The business case of claim 1 further comprising an auxiliary storage pocket attached to at least one of said first and second sidewalls.

18. A soft-sided business case that is expandable to convert said case to an overnight travel and business case, said business case comprising a pair of opposing side walls, opposing lower and upper panels and first and second opposing side panels, said case further comprising an expansion gusset secured to the interior of the case around the lower panel, opposing upper panel, first side panel and opposing second side panel of the business case, and a continuous zipper extending around the exterior of the lower panel, opposing upper panel, first side panel and opposing second side panel, of the business case, whereby the central zipper when closed maintains the expansion gusset in a collapsed position and when opened allows the expansion gusset to expand to provide an interior central storage compartment of increased volume between opposing storage volumes.

19. A soft-sided business case containing a plurality of internal compartments having at least one expansion gusset for increasing the interior storage volume of said business case, said expansion gusset accessible by a closure having a zipper, which, when closed collapses the gusset and when opened allows expansion of the gusset, whereby the volume defined by the expansion gusset is increased.

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