



UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

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Budget function

FEDERAL PERSONNEL AND
COMPENSATION DIVISION

NOV 6 1978

B-192053

The Honorable James T. McIntyre, Jr.
Director, Office of Management and
Budget

Dear Mr. McIntyre:

Over the past few years bulletins from your office have instructed Federal agencies to take several steps to reduce travel costs. We believe that additional benefits could be gained if the bulletins were clarified to make them applicable to travel aboard Government aircraft as well as commercial carriers. Although the bulletins state that they apply to the travel of all personnel whose travel costs are borne by the Government, it appears these instructions have not been construed to apply to administrative flights on Government-owned aircraft. As a result unnecessary travel is occurring.

We recently completed a limited review of certain trips made last year by senior uniformed officers aboard Government-owned aircraft. A copy of that report is enclosed. The concerns that are sometimes raised over such trips are essentially the same as those addressed in the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) bulletins--limiting the duration of travel, the number of travelers and points visited, and, in general, elimination of travel that is not essential to mission accomplishment. While agencies have controls over the use of administrative flights, the criteria for authorizing passengers varies and do not necessarily parallel Federal travel regulations pertaining to travel by commercial carrier or the policies expressed in the OMB Bulletins 78-13 and 78-18. For example, spouses or guests often accompanied travelers on these administrative trips which is not permitted at Government expense when commercial carriers are used.

In the case of Government aircraft it may be claimed that if the plane is going anyway there is no extra cost in having extra travelers aboard. Nevertheless, regardless of the traveler's intent, these practices have been susceptible to criticism that such trips are for the benefit of the travelers rather than the Government--especially when the principal traveler is the one who authorizes the trip and decides who will be aboard.



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Travel costs
Fed. Govt.
Milit. Officers
Admin. costs

In several of these same cases the purpose of the trip was for attendance at local civic events and related public relations purposes not essential to mission accomplishment. Had the necessity of the trips been evaluated in accordance with OMB's restrictions on such travel, several of them probably would not have been made.

Reviews done by the Department of Defense also indicate that unnecessary costs are incurred when Government aircraft are regularly used for passenger traffic. The Defense Audit Service reported in 1977 that military aircraft were routinely used to carry passengers in a manner that was not efficient or cost effective, and that costs and the number of aircraft and personnel could be reduced if more use were made of commercial carriers. Other reviews by military department audit organizations cited questionable uses of military aircraft to transport personnel who were carrying out administrative duties. In fiscal year 1976 the services had over 11,000 aircraft capable of passenger transportation, therefore application of OMB guidance in this area has significant savings potential.

Our main concern is that all official travel, whether by commercial or Government means, is consistent with the Administration's policies as expressed in OMB bulletins 78-13 and 78-18. Accordingly, we think it would be appropriate to clarify the bulletins so that they also cover administrative travel via Government transportation.

We would be happy to meet with your staff to discuss this matter further and invite your comments on action you plan to take.

Sincerely yours,

H. L. Krieger

H. L. Krieger
Director

Enclosure



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FEDERAL PERSONNEL AND
COMPENSATION DIVISION

B-192053

AUGUST 18, 1978

The Honorable Les Aspin
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Aspin:

In your November 8, 1977, letter you expressed concern over certain travel throughout the Pacific in mid-August 1977 by high-ranking Coast Guard officials, some accompanied by their wives. You asked that we address the application of the Joint Travel Regulations to this travel, assess the adequacy of existing rules and regulations governing spouse travel, and determine whether they invite abuse. You also included correspondence alleging that travel to Goose Bay, Labrador, by several Air Force generals was illegal.

TRAVEL BY COAST GUARD
OFFICIALS AND THEIR SPOUSES

The Joint Travel Regulations state that written orders by competent authority are required for official travel and that no reimbursement for travel is authorized unless such orders have been issued. In addition, members of the uniformed services are entitled to travel and transportation allowances, as authorized, only while performing travel away from their permanent duty station, upon public business, pursuant to competent travel orders. These conditions were met for the August 1977 trip--the travel was performed under competent orders and on official business.

In the Coast Guard, travel may also be authorized for a

"dependent wife accompanying a person on an administrative flight in an aircraft assigned for the use of a senior officer. The circumstances must be limited to those in which the travel of the wife is in the national interest, essential to mission accomplishment, or desirable for diplomatic or public relations reasons."

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A District or Area Commander^{1/} can approve such authorizations or, under certain conditions, delegate the responsibility to a subordinate commander on an individual basis. However, the regulations require that, if granting such a request raises a question of propriety, the request should be submitted to a higher command for approval.

In the instant case, the Area Commander did not formally submit a written request to a higher authority for approval of his wife's travel. However, he did submit the trip and his intention to have his wife accompany him in personal conversation with the Coast Guard Commandant, in advance. The Area Commander approved travel of the spouse of the District Commander and the spouses of two other Coast Guard officers of the official party in consideration of the diplomatic and public relations impact. Spouses of other members of the official party were authorized on a space available basis.

We reviewed the 1977 travel aboard Coast Guard aircraft of the 12 Coast Guard District and Area Commanders to determine (1) the extent of accompanying spouse travel, and (2) the frequency at which approval for spouse travel was provided at a higher command level. The District and Area Commanders made a total of 74 trips in 1977 and their spouses accompanied them on 24. For 18 of the trips, spouse travel was approved for diplomatic or public relations purposes. The basis for approval of the other trips included intraservice relations in 1 case, mission accomplishment in another case, and for both mission accomplishment and public relations in the remaining 4 cases. For only 6 of the 24 trips were spouse travel authorizations approved at a higher level. This includes the instant case which, because of circumstance, might be categorized as tacitly approved. The other 18 trips were approved by the District or Area Commanders--the travelers--themselves.

As a result of your correspondence with Secretary Adams, the Department of Transportation reviewed the instant case and concluded that authorization for spouse travel should have been referred to a higher level. The Department also concluded that its regulations clearly regulate the use that can be made of aircraft and provide adequate instructions on the availability of seats on a space available basis. It perceives the problem to be the need to fully comply with these regulations. Accordingly, the Secretary has directed the Assistant Secretary for Administration to periodically audit use of aircraft.

1/ There are presently 10 District Commanders (Rear Admirals) and two others who are Area and District Commanders (Vice Admirals).

Requiring high level authority to make exceptions to normal travel practices tends to discourage marginal or questionable travel. The policy of requiring a high level authorization for exceptions was recently emphasized by a Presidential directive concerning first class air travel. It requires that the authority for authorizing and approving such accommodations is to be retained by the agency head or his deputy, and not redelegated.

Austerity has been the Government's stated policy on official travel for some time. A 1975 bulletin from the Office of Management and Budget called for stringent measures to minimize Government travel costs. Among the restrictions that were to be implemented were (1) not permitting travel when the matter in question could be handled in other ways, and (2) limiting the number of individuals traveling, the number of points visited, and duration of trips.

Since that time other supplemental directives were issued containing additional controls on travel, including periodic cost reporting, limiting travel to conferences and, as indicated above, strictly limiting the use of first class travel. In part, these restrictions were prompted by a provision enacted in December 1975--Section 205 of the Supplemental Appropriations Act, 1976 (Public Law 94-157)--expressing the views of the Congress that Government travel should be reduced as a step toward reducing inflation and conserving energy.

The Coast Guard trip in question was aboard a Government plane, and thus it could be claimed that no significant additional cost was incurred by having guests and spouses accompanying the principal travelers. Nevertheless, we feel that the perceived possibility of having spouses accompany a trip at little or no extra cost could influence, or at least give the appearance of influencing the decision as to whether the trip should be made. We believe that the authority for approving spouse travel should be retained by the head of an agency or the deputy, and not redelegated.

We provided the Coast Guard with a copy of our draft report for their informal review. The Coast Guard does not agree with GAO that the level of approval for spouse travel should be restricted to the head of an agency or the deputy. Nonetheless, spouse travel at Government expense, like first class travel, is a practice that can be particularly susceptible to criticism as to whether it is

done primarily for the benefit of the employee or the Government. Accordingly, it should also receive the personal attention of heads of agencies.

TRAVEL BY AIR FORCE OFFICERS

You also included correspondence from a member of the Air Force who alleged that certain travel by high-ranking Air Force officers was illegal. Our review of the case, which had been earlier investigated by the Military Airlift Command (MAC) Headquarters Judge Advocate's Office, indicated that some of the travel did in fact take place without the proper documentation required by MAC regulations. A summary of the case follows.

At various times during the period July 19 to August 3, 1977, 13 Air Force generals traveled to Goose Bay, Labrador. Similar trips have been made in previous years by senior Air Force officers at the invitation of officials of the Royal Canadian Air Force. The purpose of the visits has been the discussion of subjects of mutual interest combined with recreation, including fishing. A list of the 1977 travelers is included as Enclosure 1.

Nine of the generals flew to Goose Air Base and return from Dover Air Force Base in Delaware on MAC aircraft. One of them, a retired general, flew on a space available basis; the others flew as MAC Mission Observers (MMO) on a space required basis. MMO status allows general officers (and their accompanying executive officers) to fly on scheduled military airlift missions at no charge to their own organization. The Air Force has been utilizing these flights for its transportation requirements since 1975. The other four generals traveled to Goose Bay on Canadian aircraft from Ottawa where they had been meeting with Canadian Air Force officials. Three of them returned to Ottawa on Canadian aircraft and the fourth went to Dover on MAC aircraft.

MAC Regulation 55-1 states that Mission Observers will be issued travel orders citing the MMO authority, or the authority may be issued by letter or message and attached to previously published orders. Also required for this travel is the MAC Transportation Authorization. The MMO authority is granted by the MAC Director of Operations. The decision to grant the authority is usually arrived at by phone about a month before travel is to take place; however, the Air Force was unable to provide documentation as to when the decision was made in this specific case.

Dover Air Force Base received written MMO authority, in a message format, for only one general prior to his travel. MMO authorizations for the other generals, in letter format, were not received at Dover until after travel had taken place. In addition, the MAC Transportation Authorization forms were not completed until all travel had taken place because the required back-up documentation was not available at Dover.

The Air Force member also alleged that mission destinations were changed and that other passengers were "bumped." We reviewed MAC flight data and found that Goose Air Base is a frequent stop for overseas flights. During 1977, about 750 MAC flights stopped there. While some of the flights supplied the base, most, including all of those on which the generals traveled, were cargo flights on their way to and from Europe. In its investigation, the Air Force found no evidence that any passengers had been bumped from the flights used by the generals.

We believe that the air of secrecy and high priority special handling given this travel at the terminal level, along with delays in the preparing and transmitting of required documentation, justifiably caused terminal operating personnel to question the legality of the situation. However, none of the active generals involved claimed per diem or travel expenses for their trips, and all of them took leave during this period, except one--an oversight on his part, we were told. The Air Force has recognized that a communications problem exists and hopes to improve communications at the terminal level in the next year.

We also provided the Air Force with a copy of our draft report for their informal review. They had no comments.

We hope that this information satisfies your request. We plan no further distribution of this report until 30 days from the date of the report, unless you publicly announce its contents. At that time we will send copies to interested parties and make copies available to others upon request.

Sincerely yours,

H. L. Krieger

H. L. Krieger
Director

Enclosure

Personnel on 1977 Flights
to Goose Bay, Labrador

Via MAC Aircraft

<u>Date</u>	<u>Flight</u>	<u>Passengers</u>	<u>Cargo</u>
<u>OUTBOUND</u>			
19 Jul	ABA 04W5 Charleston-Dover Goose-Ramstein- Dhahran	Gen. David C. Jones, Chief of Staff, USAF Lt. Gen. Lee M. Paschall, Director, Defense Communications Agency Lt. Gen. Andrew B. Ander- son, Jr., Deputy Chief of Staff, Plans and Operations, USAF Maj. Gen. Henry J. Meade, Chief of Chaplains, USAF 5 others	15.3 tons
25 Jul	ABA Y715 McGuire-Dover-Goose- Torrejon-Naples-etc.	Gen. John W. Roberts, Commander, Air Training Command 5 others	11.4 tons
28 Jul	ABA 07K5 McGuire-Dover-Goose- Keflavik	Lt. Gen. James A. Hill, Commander in Chief, Pacific Air Forces Lt. Gen. Arnold W. Bras- well, Director for Plans and Policy, Joint Chiefs of Staff Lt. Gen. Duward L. Crow, USAF (Retired) 5 others	14.1 tons
31 Jul	ABA 04W1 Charleston-Dover- Goose-Ramstein- Dhahran	Lt. Gen. Abbott C. Green- leaf, Deputy Chief of Staff, Programs and Resources, USAF	18.9 tons
<u>INBOUND</u>			
22 Jul	ABA 0430 Mildenhall-Goose- Dover-Charleston	Jones, Paschall, Anderson, Meade 4 others	14.5 tons
25 Jul	ABA 0430 Mildenhall-Goose- Dover-Charleston	Hartinger 5 others	10.0 tons

<u>Date</u>	<u>Flight</u>	<u>Passengers</u>	<u>Cargo</u>
28 Jul	ABA 0430 Mildenhall-Goose- Dover-Charleston	Roberts 15 others	13.5 tons
1 Aug	ABA 454X Europe shuttle hauler depositioning home Torrejon-Goose- Dover-Charleston	Hill, Braswell, Crew	0.1 tons
3 Aug	ABA 0430 Mildenhall-Goose- Dover-Charleston	Greenleaf 8 others	16.9 tons

Via Canadian Aircraft

Gen. George S. Brown,
Chairman, Joint Chiefs
of Staff
Gen. Robert J. Dixon,
Commander, Tactical Air
Command
Gen. Felix M. Rogers,
Commander, Air Force
Logistics Command
Lt. Gen. James V. Har-
tinger, Commander, 9th
Air Force, Tactical Air
Command (one way)