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[Travel by Coast Guard Officials, Their Wives, and Air Force Officers]. PPCD-78-59; B-192053. August 18, 1978. 5 pp. + enclosure (2 pp.).

Report to Rep. Les Aspin; by H. I. Krieger, Director, Federal Personnel and Compensation Div.

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Congressional Relevance: Rep. Les Aspin.

Authority: Supplemental Appropriations Act of 1976 (P.L. 94-157). MAC Regulation 55-1.

Concerns were expressed about travel throughout the Pacific in mid-August 1977 by high-ranking Coast Guard officials, some of whom were accompanied by their wives. Travel regulations state that written orders by competent authority are required for official travel and that travel may be authorized for spouses only under certain limited circumstances. Coast Guard District and Area Commanders made a total of 74 trips aboard Coast Guard aircraft in 1977, and their spouses accompanied them on 24 trips. For only 6 of the 24 trips were spouse's travel authorizations approved at a higher level. Although the trip in question was aboard a Government plane and it could be claimed that the presence of guests and spouses did not add to the cost, the possibility of having spouses accompany a trip at little extra cost could influence the decision as to whether the trip should be made. The authority for approving spouse travel should be retained by the head of an agency or the deputy. A review of allegations of illegal travel by high-ranking Air Force officers indicated that some travel did take place without the proper documentation as required by Military Airlift Command regulations. (BTW)



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UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

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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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(363093)**

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

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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.

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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

ENCLOSURE 1

ENCLOSURE 1

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 |

ENCLOSURE 1

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| <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, Crow | 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)