

**DECISION****THE COMPTROLLER GENERAL  
OF THE UNITED STATES  
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20548**

FILE: B-185160

DATE: JAN 2 1976

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MATTER OF: Walter Alt - Reimbursement of real estate expenses - telephone call, telegrams, and photographs

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## DIGEST:

Employee who departed old official station prior to sale of residence is entitled under the miscellaneous expenses provisions of the FTR to reimbursement of expenses incurred for long-distance telephone call and telegrams which were directly related to the sale of the residence at his old duty station. He is not entitled to reimbursement of expenses for photographs of the new residence based on information of local office of the Department of Housing and Urban Development that such photographs were not customarily required and were not customarily paid by the purchaser of a new residence.

This matter is before us on a request for an advance decision from an authorized certifying officer of the Internal Revenue Service concerning the propriety of certifying for payment the reclaim voucher of Mr. Walter Alt for real estate expenses incurred in connection with his transfer of official station from Louisville, Kentucky, to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where he reported for duty on November 26, 1973.

The record shows that Mr. Alt's voucher for the expenses of the sale of his residence at his old duty station was allowed as claimed with the exception of \$14.45 covering a long-distance telephone call and two telegrams. The record further shows that Mr. Alt's voucher incident to his move, including the expenses of the purchase of a residence at his new duty station, was allowed as claimed with the exception of \$10 for photographs of the new residence. This exception was taken by the administrative office on the ground of information received from the area office of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) that the charge for photographs was not customarily paid by Pittsburgh area home buyers.

Mr. Alt has reclaimed both items previously disallowed. In support of his reclaim voucher Mr. Alt has stated, and the record supports such statements, that the \$14.45 expense for a long-distance telephone call and telegrams to a real estate broker in Louisville was necessitated by the negotiation of the contract of sale since he had already moved

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from Louisville. On previous occasions we have been called upon to decide whether long-distance calls in connection with the employee's relocation were reimbursable expenses. Our past decisions have primarily concerned the purpose of the call and have allowed or disallowed the expenses depending on the purpose of the call, i. e., whether it concerned an item which would constitute an allowable expense. B-163107, May 18, 1973. Under the circumstances of this case, it appears that the expenses for the telephone call and telegrams were directly related to the sale of the house and may be reimbursed under the miscellaneous expenses provisions of the Federal Travel Regulations (FPMR 101-7) (May 1973).

The record shows that the employee has already received \$200 for miscellaneous moving expenses under section 2-3.3a(2) of the FTR. Since the additional allowance will be in excess of the \$200 provided in section 2-3.3a(2), the employee must support the entire miscellaneous expense allowance with evidence as required by section 2-3.3b of the FTR.

As to the reclaim of expenses covering the photographs of his new residence purchased in Pittsburgh, Mr. Alt has stated that the Housing Mortgage Corporation has advised him that it customarily charges buyers for photographs which they require from the independent appraisers with whom they have contracted for the appraisal of the house. In this regard the fact with which we must concern ourselves is not what the Housing Mortgage Corporation customarily charges its customers but what the prevailing custom in the area is. To that effect, the local office of HUD has advised the administrative office that such charges were not customarily required and such fees were not customarily paid by Pittsburgh area home buyers. See section 2-6.3c of the Federal Travel Regulations. In view thereof this expense is not allowable.

Accordingly, the reclaim voucher may be processed in a manner consistent with the above findings and conclusions.

PAUL G. DEMBING  
~~Acting~~ Comptroller General  
of the United States