

**DECISION**

19094 Kirkpatrick  
**THE COMPTROLLER GENERAL  
OF THE UNITED STATES  
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20548**

**FILE:** B-199462**DATE:** August 12, 1981**MATTER OF:** Billy W. McDonald - Temporary duty  
lodging - Rental cost of camping vehicle

**DIGEST:** Employee of National Park Service is entitled to a per diem rate based on the lodging-plus method for the rental cost of a camping vehicle used as lodging during a temporary duty assignment (TDY). Although a depreciation charge for use of employee's own camping vehicle as lodging on TDY may be considered a nonreimbursable personal cost, rental of camping vehicle for lodging is direct cost of TDY and is allowable as a lodging expense in the computation of per diem.

Mr. J. L. Loucks, Chief, Division of Finance, National Park Service, U. S. Department of the Interior, has requested an advance decision on the claim of Captain Billy W. McDonald of the National Park Police. The claim is based on the agency's denial of Captain McDonald's expenses in renting a camping vehicle for temporary duty travel.

Captain Billy W. McDonald, Regional Law Enforcement Specialist, National Park Service, stayed in a rented camping vehicle while temporarily assigned at various locations in the National Park Service's Southwest Region during the period of June 7-13, 1978. Mr. McDonald has provided a receipt showing that he paid \$225 for use of the camping vehicle for the period in question. He was authorized per diem under the lodging-plus method of computation, i.e., average lodging cost plus \$16 per day for meals not to exceed \$35 daily. See paragraph 1-7.3 of the Federal Travel Regulations (FTR) (FPMR 101-7, May 1973).

The Division of Finance denied payment of the entire rental cost of the camping vehicle because there are no provisions for paying rental for a motor home when used for lodging. The agency supported its denial by citing our decision in Jerry G. Witherspoon, B-189392, August 23, 1977, where we disallowed reimbursement for depreciation on an employee's own recreational vehicle.

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Captain McDonald appealed the denial of his claim for the rental cost to our Claims Group. By letters of April 26, 1979, and June 26, 1979, the Claims Group determined that reimbursement for lodging cannot include any amount that the employee had paid for rental of the vehicle itself (Claim No. Z-2806768).

Captain McDonald asked Claims Group to reconsider based on several Comptroller General decisions which, in his view, supported his claim for reimbursement of the rental cost as a lodging expense. On June 4, 1980, our Claims Group (formerly Claims Division) reversed its earlier determination and, citing decision B-178310, June 6, 1973, found that rent for the use of a motor home is a proper element of lodging costs. However, payment of the claim has been held up because Mr. Loucks, the Regional Finance Division Chief, and an authorized certifying officer, by letter of May 19, 1980, strongly objected to payment based on all of the circumstances involved. The Claims Group submitted the claim file, including Mr. Loucks' letter, to this Office for an advance decision.

Mr. Loucks presents a number of reasons why the rental cost should be disallowed. We have considered his arguments, but we conclude, for the reasons stated below, that the rental cost should be allowed.

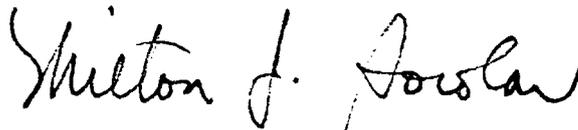
Para. 1-7.6b of the FTR states that per diem may be allowed when a travel trailer or camping vehicle is used on temporary assignments away from an employee's official station. In applying that paragraph to specific cases, we have held that the rental cost of a motor home or recreational vehicle is a proper lodging expense which may be viewed as within the regulations for the purposes of a per diem allowance. B-178310, June 6, 1973. See also 50 Comp. Gen. 647 (1971). The cost of depreciation on a recreational vehicle owned by an employee has been disallowed. Witherspoon, supra. We believe the distinction is reasonable, since payment of rent covering days on temporary duty is a direct lodging cost specifically associated with official duty, while depreciation and general upkeep of the employee's own vehicle used as a lodging can be considered a personal expense.

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Under the circumstances of the present case, we see no rational basis for excluding the rental cost of the camping vehicle from a per diem rate. We have held that such rental expenses are allowable, and Mr. McDonald's travel order shows that he was authorized a daily per diem allowance of \$35 based on the lodging-plus method of computation. In addition, Mr. McDonald's supervisors have stated that the use of a camping vehicle was suitable for this assignment.

Mr. Loucks suggests that the camping vehicle and per diem rate were excess to Mr. McDonald's needs for official travel since his family accompanied him and the extra expense should be borne by the traveler. However, there is no specific information in the file that the \$225 rental was greater than would have been reasonable for Mr. McDonald alone, particularly when reimbursable per diem is limited to \$35 daily. Further, before the travel commenced, the Finance Division agreed that \$16 per day would be reimbursed for meals and miscellaneous expense.

Accordingly, our Claims Group settlement of June 4, 1980, allowing Mr. McDonald the rental cost of the camping vehicle as a proper lodging expense is sustained.



Acting Comptroller General  
of the United States