



UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

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LOGISTICS AND COMMUNICATIONS
DIVISION

B-133025

MAY 28 1974

The Honorable
The Secretary of Defense



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Dear Mr. Secretary:

We have reviewed DOD's automated Worldwide Household Goods Information System for Traffic Management (WHIST). Although the concept of an automated system is sound, the information WHIST has provided has been incomplete, inaccurate, and untimely. Consequently, WHIST reports have been of limited value to management personnel. Officials at Headquarters, Military Traffic Management and Terminal Service (MTMTS), agreed with our evaluation and they are taking action to revise the system.

BACKGROUND OF SYSTEM

MTMTS, as manager of DOD's worldwide personal property moving and storage program, is responsible for periodically evaluating the program's overall efficiency, economy, cost effectiveness, and adequacy. Installation transportation officers are responsible for continually evaluating individual carriers' performance.

Before WHIST was established, information which MTMTS and the transportation officers required was gathered manually. In 1966, WHIST was established as an automated system which would provide the required performance and statistical data. Since its beginning, WHIST has evolved through several developmental stages, including changes in sources of input data, computer programing, and the numbers and types of reports produced. The system became operational in fiscal year 1970.

At the time of our review, WHIST was receiving input data from the military members, installation transportation officers, military service finance centers, and judge advocate generals' offices. Output from the system included 11 different reports, printed quarterly, containing general statistical information and information on carrier and transportation officer performance. All of these reports were distributed within MTMTS. Six of the reports were also distributed to other military commands and/or installation transportation officers.

We made no attempt to determine the cost of developing WHIST; however, we estimate it costs \$400,000 annually to operate the system.

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WHIST REPORTS ARE UNTIMELY,
INCOMPLETE, AND INACCURATE

Although WHIST has been operational since 1970, the installation transportation officers we visited during 1973 generally were not using the reports provided to them. They said that the information in the reports was incomplete and untimely and that they had enough information in their own files to evaluate carriers' performances. Regulations indicate that transportation officers were to use WHIST reports in evaluating carrier performance, but we found that the officers were given little guidance on how to use the reports.

At the time of our review, four WHIST reports were being distributed to the transportation offices. One report, the "Public File," was a list of shipments which had been paid for during the quarter. The primary purpose of this report was to provide carriers with information on the distribution of traffic at each installation.

The other three reports contained statistical and performance evaluation information. They were published quarterly and included data on shipments that both originated and were paid for during a 12-month period.

These reports, however, were incomplete because some shipments made in one period were not paid for until a later period. Also, some shipments paid for in one period actually originated in a prior period.

We compared the number of shipments included in the February 28, 1973, WHIST report with the totals which personnel compiled at one of the joint household goods shipping offices. Only about 65 percent of the shipments which moved during the period covered in the February report were included in the report.

With respect to timeliness of information, we noted that MTMTS had instructed transportation officers to evaluate carrier performance at least quarterly. The transportation officers were to base these evaluations on performance data for the current quarter and the preceding quarter. In view of the omission of unpaid shipments from the WHIST reports and because of the time required to process the information and distribute it to the transportation officers--in some cases as much as 6 weeks--it appears that little information on the carriers' current performance is available from WHIST reports.

In accordance with MTMTS instructions, the transportation officers were maintaining detailed carrier performance files. These files, compiled manually, contained a variety of information on carrier performance, including copies of most of the documents used for WHIST input and delivery information received directly from the destination transportation officer. Transportation officers used the files--not WHIST reports--as the basis for evaluating carrier performance. The officers generally expressed the opinion that the data in the files was much more complete than that in the WHIST reports and that it was more current.

Officials of one MTMTS area command said that, in the past, they had tried to evaluate the performance of transportation officers in their area by using the six reports they received but, because the data was inaccurate, they had not been able to do so. As a result area personnel no longer tried to use the WHIST reports on a systematic basis.

MTMTS Headquarters personnel have put WHIST data to some use, particularly in evaluating carrier performance. In the past personnel generally made such evaluations in response to transportation officers' recommendations for carrier disqualification. However, more recently, MTMTS, using data from the WHIST system, has started a systematic quality control program which includes ongoing evaluation of carriers who perform poorly. Although WHIST should be able to make such evaluations, it has not been completely effective because of the incompleteness of its data and certain programing deficiencies.

Some information taken from WHIST reports could have been misleading. For example, in preparing carrier disqualification cases for consideration by the Personal Property Panel of the MTMTS Carrier Review Board, staff members extracted performance data from a WHIST report. This data included information on the number of shipments moved by the various carriers as well as the number of letters of warning and suspensions issued by transportation officers in connection with these shipments.

A review of the report from which this data was obtained and discussions with data processing personnel showed that the number of suspensions included in the report was understated. The report included only suspensions still in effect at the end of the reporting period. Suspensions which had been fulfilled or terminated during the period were reported in an adjoining column as "reinstatements." Although we cannot say with certainty that this understatement of suspension actions affected the Review Board's decisions, it does raise questions about the reliability of WHIST reports.

We also observed that the \$4.1 million in claims shown as paid in the WHIST report for the period ending May 31, 1973, was only a fraction of the \$32.2 million cost of claims paid by the Government and reported by the military services for fiscal year 1973. MTMTS personnel agreed that the WHIST claims information was inaccurate, and we found that the information had been presented for the Carrier Review Board's consideration and might have been misleading.

AGENCY COMMENTS AND ACTIONS

MTMTS officials agreed with our findings and said that they had recently solicited data from the various management levels on their information needs. The officials said that when this information has been received and analyzed they will attempt to redesign WHIST to provide useful management information in a usable format.

The officials also said that, if it were not possible to develop a worthwhile system, WHIST would be discontinued.

CONCLUSIONS

Household goods carriers can and do perform their services on a nationwide and worldwide basis. Therefore, while the records maintained at individual shipping organizations or transportation offices may be useful in evaluating carrier performance at a single location, such data is not adequate to evaluate carrier performance or transportation officer performance for DOD as a whole. Because of the geographic range of carrier operations, DOD's management information system should be designed to

- identify the best performers on a worldwide basis,
- provide a data base useful in managing a reward system for top-quality service and a penalty system for inferior performance on a DOD-wide basis, and
- identify the specific shipping or receiving points where the best overall carriers are not performing adequately so that actions can be taken to bring the best-quality service to all points.

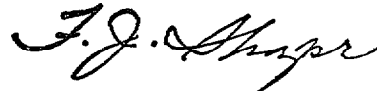
An accurate, centralized source of DOD-wide data can be a useful management tool for accomplishing the above objectives. We believe that MTMTS should consider these objectives in evaluating WHIST.

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In view of actions taken or planned by MTMTS, we are making no recommendations at this time. However, we plan to follow up on this matter to determine if the problems noted in this report have been corrected.

If you have any questions regarding our observations, we will be happy to discuss them with you or members of your staff.

Sincerely yours,



F. J. Shafer
Director