



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

B-178383

June 6, 1973

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Captain G. D. Troxel
Accounting and Finance Officer
Defense Contract Administration Services
Region, Atlanta
Defense Supply Agency
3100 Maple Drive, N.E.
Atlanta, Georgia 30305

Dear Captain Troxel:

This refers to your letter of March 2, 1973, reference DCRA-FA, forwarded to this Office on April 4, 1973, by the Per Diem, Travel and Transportation Allowance Committee, PDTATAC Control No. 73-17, in which you request a decision as to the entitlement of Mr. Robert E. Bardin, Sr., to reimbursement of expenses of a househunting trip incident to a change of permanent station from Gadsden, Alabama, to Bay St. Louis, Missouri. You have expressed doubts as to payment of the claim since Mr. Bardin made only a one-way trip and remained in Bay St. Louis where he entered on duty at his new station.

Under Travel Authorization DCRA-2963, issued October 3, 1972, Mr. Bardin was instructed to report for duty at his new station on October 16, 1972. The travel order authorized various allowances including a round trip of up to 5 days for purposes of seeking a permanent residence at the new official station. On October 10, 1972, Mr. Bardin left his old station by privately owned automobile, arriving in Bay St. Louis approximately 10 hours later. He remained in Bay St. Louis through October 15 and reported for duty there on October 16. Mr. Bardin claims per diem for the period October 10 through October 15 that he spent searching for housing.

You point out, however, that the law and regulations governing househunting trips authorize a "round trip" and have questioned the legality of payment of expenses incident to househunting when the employee does not return to his former duty station. You also state that Mr. Bardin would not agree to extending his temporary quarters allowance to cover that period or to any charge to annual leave for the period.

Under 5 U.S.C. 5724a(a)(2) and paragraph C4107 of Volume 2, Joint Travel Regulations (JTR), an employee and his spouse may be authorized one round trip between his old and new duty stations for the purpose of

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seeking a residence at the new duty station. The cited Code section states that payment of expenses for such a trip "may be allowed only for one round trip in connection with each change of station of the employee." That language clearly places a maximum limit on agency payments of house-hunting expenses. There is no indication, however, that Congress intended for an employee in all cases to have to return to his old station in order to be entitled to a househunting trip. Normally an employee will use the trip to find a residence and then return to his old station to move his family and household goods. Occasionally, though, circumstances will be such that it would mean an undue hardship on the employee as well as an additional expense to the Government to require him to return to his old station and then again to commence travel to his new station.

In this case Mr. Dardin's travel orders were issued October 3, 1972, requiring him to report for duty at his new station on October 16, less than 2 weeks later. It is administratively noted in a memorandum from the Office of the Comptroller, Defense Supply Agency, that after allowing 2 or 3 days for receipt of the travel orders by mail there may not have been sufficient time available for Mr. Dardin to make a 5-day househunting trip. We believe that because of the short period of time between the issuance of the travel orders and the date Mr. Dardin was to report for duty at his new station it was not unreasonable for him to make the authorized househunting trip at the time he did, and that under these circumstances he should not have to forfeit his entitlement to per diem for such trip only because he didn't return to his old station.

Accordingly, Mr. Dardin may be paid per diem for 5 days in accordance with the provisions of JTR applicable to househunting trips and since such trips are considered as official duty no charge to annual leave should be made for that time. His travel on October 10, 1972, should be regarded as travel incident to a permanent change of station.

The voucher, which is returned herewith, should be paid in accordance with the foregoing.

Sincerely yours,

Paul G. Domkine

For the Comptroller General
of the United States