



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

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D-139416

September 5, 1973

The Honorable
The Secretary of the Navy

Dear Mr. Secretary:

This is in reference to a letter to this Office, dated May 2, 1973, from the Assistant Secretary of the Navy requesting a decision as to whether the definition of "household goods" contained in paragraph H8000-2 of the Joint Travel Regulations may be revised to include boat components and accessories as acceptable items for shipment as household goods. This request was assigned Control No. 73-26 by the Per Diem, Travel and Transportation Allowance Committee.

In his letter the Assistant Secretary of the Navy refers to our decision, 44 Comp. Gen. 65 (1964), indicating that although pertinent statutory authority governing the transportation of household goods excludes an automobile, nevertheless, we said we would not object to the inclusion in an amendment of the Joint Travel Regulations, of automobile spare parts, tires, etc., as acceptable items in household shipments. It was stated further that it was common knowledge that such items, when not in use on the member's automobile, are usually kept in the house or garage along with other household goods and generally are treated by the member as household goods. A decision is requested, based upon this rationale, as to whether paragraph H8000-2 of the Joint Travel Regulations may be revised to include boat components, such as outboard motors, seat cushions, life jackets, and other boat gear, as acceptable items for shipment as household goods.

Under the provisions of 37 U.S.C. 406(b), in connection with a change of temporary or permanent station a member is entitled to transportation at Government expense of baggage and household effects or reimbursement therefor, subject to the provisions of section 406(c), to such conditions and limitations as the Secretaries concerned may prescribe. Promulgated pursuant thereto, paragraph H8000-2 of the Joint Travel Regulations currently in effect, defines the term "household goods" as furniture and furnishings or equipment, clothing, baggage, personal effects, professional books, papers and equipment under the conditions described in subparagraph 3, and all other personal property associated with the home and person. Based upon

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our decision in 44 Comp. Gen. 65, supra, beginning with change 145, effective November 19, 1964, the term has also included spare parts for a privately owned motor vehicle (extra tires and wheels, tire chains, tools, battery chargers, accessories, etc.). The term "household goods", however continues to exclude, among other things, privately owned motor vehicles and boats.

Our decision, B-139416, dated June 1, 1959, to the Secretary of the Air Force, concerned the shipment of outboard motors under the provisions of paragraph M8000-2 of the Joint Travel Regulations. We pointed out in that decision that "baggage" and "household effects" are general terms, not lending themselves to precise definition, but varying in scope depending upon the context in which they are used. We said further that in ordinary and usual usage, however, they refer to particular kinds of personal property associated with the home and the person, and notwithstanding the lack of preciseness of the terms, it long has been held under various statutes that certain items, including boats in whole or in part, must be considered beyond their scope. We concluded that the exclusion of boats from shipments of household effects at Government expense was to be regarded as excluding the motor as well.

Reaffirming this principle, we stated in our decision, 44 Comp. Gen. 65, supra:

"As generally understood, the term 'household goods' refers to furniture and furnishings or equipment--articles of a permanent nature--used in and about a place of residence for the comfort and accommodation of the members of a family. Thus, notwithstanding the lack of preciseness of the term, it long has been considered that various items, such as boats, airplanes and house trailers do not come within its scope." (Emphasis supplied.)

In decision 52 Comp. Gen. 479, B-174946, dated February 5, 1973, we considered a request for decision from the Assistant Secretary of the Navy (Manpower and Reserve Affairs) as to whether the term "household goods" as defined in paragraph M8000-2 of the Joint Travel Regulations, might be redefined to include all personal property associated with the home and person which would be accepted and shipped by a carrier at the rates established in the appropriate tariffs for household goods. In denying such change in the definition of household goods, we pointed out that the comparable lists of excluded items in paragraph C1100, Volume 2, Joint Travel Regulations and in section 1.2h Office of Management and Budget Circular A-56 Revised,

August 1971 (currently contained in paragraph 2-1.4h, FPMR 101-7, Federal Travel Regulations, May 1973) pertaining to civilian employees closely parallel paragraph H8000-2 of the Joint Travel Regulations, previously referred to. We pointed out that in view of the small number of requests for advance decisions received in recent years as to whether certain items might be shipped at Government expense, it would seem that neither undue hardship nor significant administrative problems had been generated by current definitions. It was suggested that the Department of the Navy in cooperation with the General Services Administration, the Department of State and our Office, give consideration to a more detailed review of this matter to establish a basis to support modifications of existing definitions.

In defining the term "household goods" in paragraph H8000-2, Joint Travel Regulations, relating to members of the uniformed services, the regulation expressly excludes "boats." Also, paragraph C1100, Volume 2, Joint Travel Regulations, relating to civilian employees of the Department of Defense, expressly excludes "boats" and "outboard motors" as not coming within the definition of household goods.

While there may be some basis for following the rationale in 44 Comp. Gen. 65 (1964), cited above, so as to include, in the definition of household goods, items such as outboard motors, etc., for shipment as household goods, it is our view that it would be inappropriate at this time to authorize such an amendment to the JTR. As indicated above, we have taken the view that boats, including outboard motors, are excluded as household goods. B-139416, June 1, 1959. Moreover, in our decision of February 5, 1973, B-174946, 52 Comp. Gen. 479, cited above, we said that the question of redefining the term "household goods" to include all personal property associated with the home and person which would be shipped by a household goods carrier requires a more detailed review and study of the matter before further broadening the definition of household goods. As suggested in that decision, we will be glad to cooperate with the Department of the Navy, General Services Administration and the Department of State concerning this matter. At that time, consideration can be given to the advisability of including items such as outboard motors, etc., as coming within the scope of the definition of household goods.

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Accordingly, for the reasons indicated, the question presented must be answered in the negative.

Sincerely yours,

R.F.KELLER

Deputy

Comptroller General
of the United States