

Botsford



The Comptroller General
of the United States

Washington, D.C. 20548

Decision

Matter of: Robert F. Stott - Shipment of Non-Household Goods
Items
File: B-226589
Date: June 7, 1988

DIGEST

1. A transferred employee who included a canoe in his shipment of household goods by a Government Bill of Lading must bear the expense of that shipment since boats are expressly excluded by the Federal Travel Regulations from the definition of "household goods" which may be shipped at government expense. There is no authority to base the employee's liability on the actual weight of the canoe rather than on the carrier's weight additive prescribed by the applicable rate tender.

2. A transferred employee included a "farm type tractor" in his shipment of household goods on a Government Bill of Lading. Since farming vehicles are excluded by the Federal Travel Regulations from the types of household goods that may be shipped at government expense, the employing agency should determine whether the tractor was properly shipped as household goods. If the tractor does not qualify as household goods, the employee should be assessed for its shipment in the same manner as for the canoe.

DECISION

This decision is in response to a request from the Director, Office of Budget and Finance, Veterans Administration (VA), for our opinion concerning Mr. Robert F. Stott's request that he be charged for shipping and storing a canoe at its actual weight of 80 pounds, rather than at the carrier's weight additive of 600 pounds. Additionally, our examination of the shipping documents forwarded with the claim indicates that he also shipped a "farm type tractor." For the reasons explained below, Mr. Stott's request with regard to the canoe may not be granted, and a determination should be made by the agency as to whether the tractor was properly included in the shipment as an item of household goods.

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In December 1985, Mr. Stott was transferred from Madison, Wisconsin, to Houston, Texas, at government expense. His household goods were shipped on a Government Bill of Lading (GBL) dated November 26, 1985, and he included a canoe in that shipment. The invoice from the carrier was paid and Mr. Stott was sent a collection voucher totaling \$340.21 for shipping and storing the canoe, based on the carrier's weight additive and bulky article charges. The VA based its collection action on paragraph 2-1.4h of the Federal Travel Regulations (FTR) FPMR September 1981, incorp. by ref., 41 C.F.R. § 101-7.003 (1987), which excludes boats from the definition of "household goods" which can be shipped at government expense.

Mr. Stott had his canoe weighed at an official weight station and submitted a certificate showing its actual weight to be 80 pounds. He is requesting that he be charged for shipment and storage of the canoe at its actual weight rather than at the carrier's weight additive of 600 pounds. He states that he could have sold his canoe and bought a new one for less than he will have to pay if his request is denied.

Reimbursement to transferred employees for the transportation and temporary storage of household goods is governed by FTR paragraph 2-8.1. Paragraph 2-1.4h of the regulations defines "household goods" for purposes of the FTR to include personal property associated with the home and personal effects belonging to the employee which can be legally accepted and transported by an authorized commercial carrier. As stated earlier, however, that paragraph specifically excludes boats from the definition of household goods. In Jay Johnson, B-215629, Nov. 27, 1984, we held that a canoe was a boat excluded from the definition of household goods and, therefore, an employee who shipped a canoe as part of a household goods shipment made in connection with a transfer of duty station must bear the expense of that shipment. See also Jan C. Penhallurick, B-223809, Dec. 24, 1986, 66 Comp. Gen. ____, and Constance Hoops, B-225839, May 6, 1987.

As stated above, Mr. Stott recognizes his liability for the canoe, but he questions the amount of the charge. However, the carrier's weight additive was properly applied in

accordance with the provisions of Rate Tender No. 1-N.1/ As a result, his request must be denied.

We do, however, question the calculation of Mr. Stott's indebtedness made by the Veterans Administration.

In our decision James Knapp, B-216723, Aug. 23, 1985, we concluded that an employee's liability for shipment of an unauthorized item should include only charges directly attributable to its shipment if they can be identified and established. We are unable to ascertain from the documents forwarded with Mr. Stott's claim whether the VA computation includes only charges directly attributable to the shipment of the canoe. The computation of the employee's liability should be reexamined on this basis.

Additionally, we note that while the weight additive for the canoe based on the carrier's tender appears to be proper, the Bulky Article charge of \$32.40 appears to be improper. Note 7 of Item 130, Rate Tender No. 1-N provides that either a Bulky Article Charge or a Weight Additive will apply for a number of items, including boats. The listing of Bulky Article Charges in Item 130, found at 2nd revised page 64 shows no amount for boats but instead provides "See Weight Additives below." Accordingly, Mr. Stott should not be charged for a Bulky Article on the shipment or the storage of the canoe.

The documents submitted with the request for decision also show that Mr. Stott included in the shipment a farm type tractor. Paragraph 2-1.4h(1), FTR, Supp. 4, effective Oct. 1, 1982, specifically excludes farming vehicles from the definition of household goods that may be shipped at government expense.

Accordingly, it is our view that Mr. Stott's liability for the canoe should be recomputed on the basis of the foregoing and a determination made by the VA as to whether the tractor was authorized to be shipped as household goods. If the tractor did not qualify as household goods, Mr. Stott should reimburse the government for its shipment, liability being

1/ Household Goods Carriers' Bureau, Domestic Household Goods Government Rate Tender No. 1-N. (Effective May 12, 1985.)

assessed under Rate Tender No. 1-N and in accordance the
formula set out in Knapp.

for Milton J. Fowler
Comptroller General
of the United States