

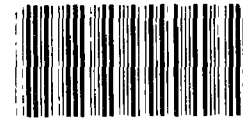
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Briefing Report to the Chairman,
Subcommittee on Environment, Energy,
and Natural Resources, Committee on
Government Operations, House of
Representatives

August 1987

FOREIGN TRAVEL

Expenditures and Controls of the Corps of Engineers and Selected Other Agencies



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General Government Division

B-227351

August 11, 1987

The Honorable Mike Synar
Chairman, Subcommittee on Environment,
Energy, and Natural Resources
Committee on Government Operations
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This briefing report responds to your March 10, 1987, request and subsequent discussions with your office asking us to provide information on expenditures for, and controls exercised over, foreign travel by civil works employees of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps). As agreed with your office we also obtained information, for comparative purposes, from the Bureau of Reclamation, the U.S. Geological Survey, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Details on our objectives, scope, and methodology are on page 4 of appendix I.

Information developed by the Corps shows that nonreimbursable foreign travel expenditures increased from \$276,662 in 1983 to \$406,638 in 1985 and declined to \$305,373 in 1986. In fiscal year 1986 the Corps instituted several new procedures and controls, including centralized approval authority for nonroutine foreign travel. The decline in foreign travel expenditures during fiscal year 1986 compared to the prior 2 years is attributable to the Corps' new centralized approval procedures, which were established because of the concern of the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works about increases in foreign travel expenditures and congressional inquiries about these increases. The Corps' current procedures and controls over foreign travel are consistent with the guidelines for issuing travel authorizations contained in the Federal Travel Regulations and are similar to the procedures and controls of the three other federal agencies we examined. We briefed Subcommittee representatives on May 8, 1987, on the details of these matters.

As agreed with your office, we limited our work to a description of the Corps' and the selected agencies' procedures and controls and the pertinent sections of the Federal Travel Regulations. Accordingly, we did not verify (1) the accuracy of any agencies' reported travel expenditures for 1983 through 1986, (2) compliance with their travel controls and procedures, or (3) the necessity for any of the foreign travel undertaken during these periods. As you requested, we did not obtain official comments on this report from any of the agencies from which we obtained data.

B-227351

As arranged with your office, unless you publicly announce its contents earlier or authorize its release sooner, we plan no further distribution of this report until 30 days from the date of this letter. At that time we will send copies to the Corps of Engineers, the Bureau of Reclamation, the Geological Survey, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and other interested parties. We will also make copies available to others upon request.

If there are any questions regarding the contents of this document, please call Joseph M. Kelly on 535-7550 or me on 275-8676.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "L. Nye Stevens". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "L" and a long, sweeping underline.

L. Nye Stevens
Associate Director

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	<u>ABBREVIATIONS</u>	
BOR	Bureau of Reclamation	
FTR	Federal Travel Regulations	
NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration	
OASA(CW)	Office, Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works	
USGS	U.S. Geological Survey	

INTRODUCTION

The civil works functions of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are concerned with the design, construction, operation, and maintenance of projects related to rivers, harbors, and waterways in the United States and foreign countries. The Corps also responds to requests for assistance for emergency relief activities directed by other federal agencies. To perform these civil works functions the Corps received an appropriation of about \$2.7 billion for fiscal year 1986. The Corps' civil works foreign travel is financed through a Corps revolving fund.

Civil works foreign travel is performed by military and civilian personnel assigned to the Corps' 13 divisions located in the United States and 1 division located in Europe. Accounting for this travel is accomplished at 26 accounting stations located throughout the country. Civil works foreign travel includes travel by Corps representatives related to such matters as (1) treaties between the United States and foreign governments; (2) participation on behalf of the U.S. government in various international organizations; (3) attendance at professional meetings, conferences, and workshops; and (4) assistance to foreign governments or to other federal agencies with projects located in foreign areas.

In some instances the Corps is reimbursed for some of its foreign travel by other federal agencies or by other governments. For example, in 1986 personnel from the Corps' Middle East Division traveled to Morocco and Puerto Rico and provided technical engineering assistance to the Voice of America. The Corps was reimbursed by the Voice of America for this travel.

Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

You requested that we examine and provide information on the civil works foreign travel expenditures of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. On the basis of your March 10, 1987, request and subsequent discussions with Subcommittee representatives, we agreed to provide information on the following matters:

1. Why did Corps' expenditures for foreign travel by civil works employees increase during fiscal years 1983 through 1985 and decline in fiscal year 1986?
2. What procedures and controls were in effect during fiscal years 1983 through 1985 for the approval and management of foreign travel by Corps civil works employees, and how did these compare with governmentwide travel regulations and policies as well as the procedures and controls of comparable agencies, including the Bureau of Reclamation?

3. Have Corps' procedures and controls been changed since fiscal year 1985 to improve the Corps' management of foreign travel, and if so, what are the reasons for the change?
4. What procedures and controls does the Corps have to assure that the expenses of foreign travel to assist other federal agencies and foreign governments are reimbursed by those agencies and governments when appropriate?

We conducted our work primarily at the Corps' headquarters in Washington, D.C., and the Corps' Water Resources Support Center at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. We also visited the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) in Washington, D.C.; the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) in Reston, Virginia; and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in Rockville, Maryland. At each of these locations, we interviewed officials familiar with the agencies' foreign travel management and obtained and examined pertinent documents. As agreed with your office we did not verify the accuracy of any of the agencies' travel expenditures for 1983 through 1986. We used data submitted by the Corps to a House Appropriations Subcommittee and data developed at our request by the BOR, USGS, and NOAA. Also, we did not verify the agencies' compliance with their travel controls and procedures or evaluate the necessity for any of the travel expenditures. Subject to the limitations noted above our review, which was made between March and June 1987, was conducted in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

CORPS OF ENGINEERS' CIVIL WORKS EMPLOYEES
FOREIGN TRAVEL EXPENDITURES FOR FISCAL
YEARS 1983 THROUGH 1986

On the basis of information developed by the Corps and provided to the Chairman of a House Appropriations Subcommittee, it appears that the Corps' civil works foreign travel expenditures increased from fiscal year 1983 to fiscal year 1985 and declined in fiscal year 1986. Foreign travel expenditures reported by the Corps for fiscal years 1983 to 1986 are shown in table II.1. These amounts do not include reimbursable travel expenditures, which are discussed in appendix V.

Table II.1:
Corps of Engineers' Civil Works Employees
Nonreimbursable Foreign Travel Expenditures
for Fiscal Years 1983 Through 1986

<u>Fiscal year</u>	<u>Amount</u>
1983	\$276,662
1984	410,826
1985	406,638
1986	305,373

Source: Data furnished by the Corps of Engineers

The Corps told us that the difference between 1983 expenditures and those reported for 1984 and 1985 may not actually be as large as these figures indicate. According to Corps officials, the amounts reported to the Subcommittee in March 1986 for the years 1983 to 1985 were compiled in a short period of time from records located at the Corps' field offices and may not have been complete because some records, especially those for fiscal year 1983, may not have been included. The time available for preparation of this information seems also to have affected the original amount reported for 1985. After its initial report to the Subcommittee on 1983 to 1985 data, the Corps revised the reported 1985 amount of \$513,437 downward to \$406,638. The Corps said that some 1985 nonreimbursable expenditures were reclassified as reimbursable.

Corps civil works headquarters representatives said they could provide no other explanation for the apparent increase of foreign travel expenditures from 1983 to 1985. However, as described in appendix III, control over foreign travel was considerably more decentralized before fiscal year 1986 than after the fiscal year began. Corps representatives said there were more restrictions on foreign travel expenditures beginning in fiscal year 1986 than during fiscal years 1983 through 1985.

In fiscal year 1986, the office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works introduced revised procedures for the approval of foreign travel. These were intended to restrict the amount of foreign travel occurring for the remainder of fiscal year 1986.

CHANGES TO PROCEDURES AND
CONTROLS SINCE 1985

Before fiscal year 1986, the Corps' civil works funded foreign travel approval authority was more decentralized. Commanders of division offices and directors of separate field offices had greater authority. They could approve all foreign travel, although nonroutine foreign travel, such as travel to attend international conferences, required the further approval of the office of the Chief of Engineers. (Routine foreign travel is operational travel related to the Corps' basic mission, such as travel to ongoing projects and activities in support of U.S. forces.)

In March 1986 the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works began a number of initiatives to improve control over foreign travel expenditures in the Corps. Approval authority for all nonroutine foreign travel (examples cited by the office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army were "participation or attendance at professional association or interest group conferences, meetings, or workshops") was elevated to the office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army. More detailed procedures were initiated to justify the need for travel. Trip reports were required for all foreign travel; these were submitted to the office of the Assistant Secretary, and pertinent information was extracted for periodic dissemination to Corps organizations.

Table IV.1 summarizes the current foreign travel procedures and controls of the Corps, USGS, BOR, and NOAA. Table IV.2 shows travel authorization provisions as they are addressed in the Federal Travel Regulations.

PROCEDURES AND CONTROLS
FOR THE APPROVAL AND MANAGEMENT
OF FOREIGN TRAVEL

As stated above, the Corps' procedures and controls for the approval and management of foreign travel were more decentralized prior to fiscal year 1986. During the 1983 to 1985 period, foreign travel could be approved by any of the commanders of the Corps' 14 divisions or by the directors of the Corps' separate field offices. But nonroutine travel also required approval from the office of the Chief of Engineers. Routine mission-related foreign travel (regularly scheduled travel to fulfill a standing mission responsibility of the Corps) did not require approval of the office Chief of Engineers. For example, travel by the Corps' North Central Division to Canada in connection with the Corps' standing mission responsibilities to the International Joint Commission concerned with the boundary waterways between the U.S. and Canada would be mission-related travel not requiring approval by the office of the Chief of Engineers.

The Corps' regulations on travel management (Engineer Regulation 55-1-2) in effect during fiscal years 1983 to 1985 required officials to approve travel for only that minimum amount necessary to accomplish the assigned mission. When approving travel, officials were required to consider the duration of travel, the number of persons traveling, and the benefits to be derived. The regulations also specified that annual leave used in conjunction with foreign travel should be critically reviewed.

The Corps' regulations in effect prior to fiscal year 1986 are still in effect. The major change in the Corps' management of its travel, which occurred in March 1986, raised the level of approval for nonroutine foreign travel to the office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works and introduced certain new management controls.

The procedures and controls contained in the Corps' travel regulations are consistent with the provisions for authorization of travel contained in the Federal Travel Regulations (see table IV.2). The Corps' procedures and controls are summarized in table IV.1 along with the procedures and controls contained in the regulations of the three other agencies (BOR, USGS, and NOAA) included in our review.

Table IV.1:

Agencies' Foreign Travel Procedures and Controls

	<u>Advance approval and justification</u>	<u>Level of approval</u>	<u>Review for length of trip</u>	<u>Review to determine number of travelers</u>	<u>Leave in conjunction with travel</u>	<u>Trip report requirements</u>
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	45 days for all travel.	OASA (CW) for nonroutine foreign travel.	Period of travel shown on travel order.	Number of travelers to same location disclosed and approved at the same time.	Leave must be requested at time of travel order approval. No limit on the number of days.	Trip report to Chief of Engineers 15 days after completion of travel; copy to the OASA (CW) for nonroutine foreign travel.
The Department of the Interior's foreign travel policies apply to the U.S. Geological Survey and the Bureau of Reclamation	10 days in advance of all foreign travel except in an emergency. 30 days for conferences and meetings.	Office of the Assistant Secretary of Interior.	Period of travel shown on travel order.	Orders for all travelers to one location are submitted as a package.	Leave must be requested at time of travel order approval. No limit on the number of days.	Trip report required 10 working days after traveler's return.
National Oceanic And Atmospheric Administration	6 weeks prior to all travel.	Administrator of NOAA.	Period of travel shown on travel request.	Travel request for foreign conferences or meetings to indicate number of persons attending.	Leave must be requested at time of travel order approval. No limit on the number of days.	Trip report is required of traveler or senior official (for group travel) within 15 calendar days of return.

Source: Travel regulations and procedures of the Corps, Department of the Interior, BOR, USGS and NOAA

Table IV.2:

Federal Travel Regulations Authorization Provisions

<u>Advance approval and justification</u>	<u>Level of approval</u>	<u>Review for length of trips</u>	<u>Review to determine number of travelers</u>	<u>Leave in conjunction with travel</u>	<u>Trip report requirements</u>
Ordinarily, travel authorization shall be issued before the incurrence of the expenses.	Foreign travel for all employees shall be authorized on a trip-by-trip basis at as high an administrative level of authority as practical, to provide policy approval.	Agencies shall authorize only that travel necessary to accomplish the purposes of the government effectively and economically.	The approving official for conferences, meetings, and training sessions shall ensure that the number of attendees from the agency is necessary and justified.	Authorizing officials should be aware of travel plans, including plans to take annual leave in conjunction with travel.	(Not addressed in FIR)

Source: Federal Travel Regulations

REIMBURSEMENT OF CORPS' CIVIL WORKS
FOREIGN TRAVEL EXPENDITURES BY
OTHER AGENCIES AND GOVERNMENTS

Some of the Corps' civil works foreign travel expenditures during the period 1983 through 1986 were reimbursed by other federal agencies or by other governments. Reimbursement usually occurs when the Corps provides assistance or a service to another agency or government. The Corps' fiscal years 1983 through 1986 reimbursable and nonreimbursable travel expenditures are shown below.

Table V.1:

Corps' Reimbursable and Nonreimbursable
Foreign Travel Expenditures for Fiscal Years 1983 Through 1986

	1983	1984	1985	1986
Reimbursable	\$ 72,458	\$ 29,096	\$213,153	\$103,567
Nonreimbursable	276,662	410,826	406,638	305,373
Totals	<u>\$349,120</u>	<u>\$439,922</u>	<u>\$619,791</u>	<u>\$408,940</u>

Source: Data furnished by the Corps of Engineers

The Corps' reimbursement procedures and controls are partially contained in Engineer Regulation 1-1-23. This regulation describes the kinds of assistance and service that are usually covered by reimbursement and how approval, coordination, and reimbursement of assistance and service are to occur. For example, it establishes procedures whereby the Corps can provide assistance and service to foreign governments working in cooperation with the Agency for International Development under the authority contained in the Foreign Assistance Act. It also requires foreign governments to provide funds before the start of any Corps work and states how those funds are to be transferred to the Corps.

Reimbursement of the Corps' travel expenses in connection with any assistance or service the Corps is to provide is checked at the time travel requests are submitted for approval. Part of the justification accompanying the request is information on whether any or all of the costs of the travel are to be reimbursed by another federal agency or by a foreign government.

For comparison purposes table V.2 shows the reimbursable and nonreimbursable foreign travel expenditures of BOR, USGS, and NOAA for the years 1984 through 1986. We were unable to obtain this information for 1983.

Table V.2:

Reimbursable and Nonreimbursable Foreign Travel
Expenditures for Fiscal Years 1984 Through 1986
for BOR, USGS, and NOAA

	<u>1984</u>	<u>1985</u>	<u>1986</u>
<u>BOR</u>			
Reimbursable	\$312,935	\$409,403	\$280,535
Nonreimbursable	104,701	74,316	98,215
Totals	<u>\$417,636</u>	<u>\$483,719</u>	<u>\$378,750</u>
<u>USGS</u>			
Reimbursable	\$1,273,050	\$ 866,289	\$1,252,252
Nonreimbursable	648,619	727,056	847,282
Totals	<u>\$1,921,669</u>	<u>\$1,593,345</u>	<u>\$2,099,534</u>
<u>NOAA</u>			
Reimbursable	\$ 248,900	\$ 335,800	\$ 340,600
Nonreimbursable	1,701,300	1,397,700	1,540,200
Totals	<u>\$1,950,200</u>	<u>\$1,733,500</u>	<u>\$1,880,800</u>

Source: Data furnished by BOR, USGS, NOAA

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