

CAPT. CONNER DOUBTS POWER IN TAWES CASE

Uncertain Of Jurisdiction As Mileage Adminis- trator For State

Comptroller Gets Hearing Tonight In Crisfield For Georgia Trip

Capt. Andrew T. Conner, of the State police, who is in charge of rationing the mileage of all State-owned automobiles and preventing their use for personal driving, said last night that he doubted whether his jurisdiction over publicly owned vehicles extended to the State cars furnished elected officials.

He expressed doubt as to his powers when asked whether the State automobile used by J. Millard Tawes, State Comptroller, for a trip from Crisfield to Georgia, came under his supervision and also was subject to the ban on personal use of State automobiles imposed last December.

Doubts Authority

As to whether it would be within his province to call a halt on such a trip, Captain Conner said:

"I don't think I would have the right to do it. The answer as to whether I could do it would have to come from the Governor. After all, Mr. Tawes is an elected official."

Captain Conner, who was appointed "mileage administrator" last December by Governor O'Connor as the result of complaints about personal use of State-owned cars by departmental employes, supervises the operation of all departmental cars and passes on their applications for gasoline rations.

His first act was to ban private use of State cars.

Comment Not Available

Governor O'Connor was not available last night for comment on the propriety of using State automobiles for extended personal trips.

Mr. Tawes, who will be given a hearing tonight by the Crisfield rationing board on charges of violating the pleasure ban on the Georgia trip, was asked his views
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Conner Uncertain Of Jurisdiction As Head Of Gas Rations For State Cars

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on using the State-owned car for such a jaunt. He said:

"My reply to that is this: A State car is assigned to me as a constitutional officer of the State. Many times I use my personal car for State business; I used it continuously for three weeks for State business before this trip.

"I consider that as just compensation for the use of the State car on the trip.

Tawes' Explanation

"I feel that I've used my personal car for State and official business far more than I've used the State car for personal business. I never hesitate to take my personal car to go here or there on State business if I am going by myself. If I want to go in a little more comfort, so to speak, I use the State car. When I come to Crisfield on week ends, I put the State car in the garage and use my own. Just before this trip the State car was laid up in the garage for ten days without going a mile."

Mr. Tawes' hearing before the Crisfield War Price and Rationing Board at 7 o'clock tonight will be public.

J. S. Holland, chairman of the board, announced this last night.

"We're not having anything behind closed doors," he said. "This is public business and will be public."

Drove To Georgia

Mr. Tawes, with members of his family, drove to Camp Wheeler in Georgia to attend his son's graduation as an officer and his wedding, leaving Crisfield on the trip three days after the pleasure ban had been reinstated by the OPA.

The new pleasure ban was announced on the night of May 19, published in the morning papers on May 20 and became effective at noon on that day. The State Comptroller and his family started for Georgia on May 23.

The charges that Mr. Tawes had violated the rationing regulations by making the trip were filed with the OPA by Rewes Matthews, publisher of the *Somerset News*, a county newspaper.

Investigation Held

After an investigation by the OPA enforcement division, the Crisfield ration board was instructed to summon Mr. Tawes before it for a formal hearing.

Admitting that he used the State's 12-cylinder automobile assigned to him, Mr. Tawes said he interpreted the pleasure-driving regulations as permitting use of an automobile to attend a wedding if no other means of transportation is available.

He also said that the Crisfield rationing board had not been notified officially that the ban again had been imposed until the evening of May 22—the night before he left on the trip—although the ban had been officially announced three days before by the OPA in Washington.

"Insufficient Time"

He said this did not give him time—the official announcement not having arrived in Crisfield until the night before he left—to make arrangements to go to Georgia by train.

Mayor McKeldin said last night that a long-standing city policy had restricted department automobiles strictly to use on official duties.

He explained that he had not been in office long enough to have made any changes in the policy, or establish a new policy for his administration, but added that the existing policy imposes rigid regulations on the use of city cars.

Close Tab On Mileage

All city-owned cars are returned to the municipal garage after use for business by department heads and employes, the Mayor said, and a close tab is kept on their mileage. Special reports must be turned in for cars kept out after business hours.

As for the Mayor's car, he said, he is following the practice of Mayor Jackson. Due to the irregular hours at which the car is used, it is kept in a garage at the home of the Mayor's chauffeur, Joseph Addison.

The Mayor explained that he, as does his predecessor, lives in the northern part of the city. After leaving the Mayor at his home, his chauffeur has only a short drive to his home on the Falls road, eliminating a long trip downtown

to the municipal garage and then a trip up town again in the morning to pick him up.

Rules Established

The State-car regulations—the first on the subject—promulgated by Captain Conner last December, after imposing a blanket ban on private use, established the following rules for publicly owned vehicles.

Only department heads and officials subject to twenty-four-hour call for emergency operations are permitted to take State-owned cars home with them at night.

State automobiles taken home by individuals must be stored in garages at the expense of the individuals.

All other departmental cars were to be stored at a central location and pooled and assigned to individuals for necessary business use.

Under special conditions employees were to be granted permission to take a car home with them for an *early morning* assignment, or in the event of a night assignment. Special reports were to be demanded for each such assignment.

A special report was to be made on each vehicle—places visited and miles operated.

Trips in excess of fifty miles could be made only with permission of a department head. This restriction was not to apply, however, to department heads.

Under this plan, Captain Conner was to arrange for pooling rides for necessary extended trips into the State and was to attempt to have departments arrange such trips for employees so that a single car could be used.