

GOVERNMENT CHARGED TO SETTLE DISPUTE

Free Bridge Tolls for Army Forces Referred to U. S. War Department.

COUNTIES CANNOT AGREE

Clarke Commissioners Vote to Uphold Attorney-General and Refuse to Intercede in Behalf of Fighting Men.

From the office of Colonel Disque, of the Spruce Production Division, there was dispatched yesterday a telegram to the Secretary of War requesting the head of the National Army forces to direct the Interstate Bridge Commission to issue free tolls to men in Government uniform and all Government transports across the Interstate bridges.

This action, which is essentially commandeering of the bridge so far as the Army service is concerned, was made necessary by the deadlock which developed early in the meeting of the Interstate Bridge Commission yesterday afternoon. The telegram was dictated by Major Stearns, representing Colonel Disque.

In view of a recent opinion issued from the office of the Attorney-General of the state of Washington, the three Clarke County members of the commission refused to support any measure which would lead to the reduction of tolls for officers and men of the Army. The Clarke County Commissioners even refused to subscribe to a statement of facts relative to the toll dispute, which it was suggested, should be forwarded to the Secretary of War.

Commissioners in Deadlock. In view of this deadlock, which could not possibly be broken, Major Stearns took the initiative and framed a telegram to the Secretary of War which he said would be sent at once. If the Secretary of War directs the discontinuance of tolls for the Army and naval forces, it was agreed by the commission that such action would be made at once without further parley.

The telegram reads: "To the Secretary of War, Washington, D. C. Request instructions to send Interstate Bridge Commission, Multnomah County Courthouse, Portland, Or., that you direct free tolls for men in Government uniform and Government transportation over Interstate bridge between Portland, Or., and Vancouver, B. C. This matter has been up by County Commissioners of Clarke County, Washington, for reason that Attorney-General of Washington has asserted that they have no authority to remove tolls. Commissioners from both counties agree that order from you will be all sufficient for them to comply with our request for free tolls."

Tolls Debate Spirited. Bitter feeling developed at the meeting of the commission yesterday between Commissioner Muck, of Multnomah, and the three Clarke County members. Commissioner Muck insisted that the Oregon law gave Multnomah County full authority to regulate tolls, regardless of the desires of the Clarke County members, and he suggested that Governor Withycombe, seventh member of the board, be urged to attend the meeting in order that the tolls might be eliminated for soldiers, regardless of the protest of the Clarke County members.

Clarke Commissioners Defiant. "We have gone as far as we possibly could to eliminate these tolls, but have reached our limit," asserted Commissioner Kiggins.

Major Stearns then suggested that the Commission submit the statement of facts to the Secretary of War, stating that it was on record as favoring free tolls, but could take no definite action because of the opinion of the Washington Attorney-General. Commissioner Carson objected to taking any such step or submitting his name to any statement to the Secretary of War, and his two fellow-commissioners agreed with him.

"It seems to me that this request for Governmental intervention should come from the office of Colonel Disque, who is seeking to have these tolls eliminated," he said.

District Attorney Evans suggested that the Multnomah commissioners have Governor Withycombe vote with them to eliminate tolls for soldiers, and then have Clarke County file injunction proceedings in the Federal Court. This suggestion was frowned upon by the Clarke County members, who said, though, that if such action should be taken by the Multnomah board, they would give positive assurance that injunction proceedings would be started at once.

Telegram May Bring Relief. Major Stearns called upon the commission to do everything within its power to eliminate tolls from a patriotic standpoint. He said it was costing the Government in excess of \$50 a day for bridge tolls between Portland and Vancouver. All members assured the Major that they desired to do everything within their power to assist the Government, but insisted that they would be compelled to follow the law in every respect.

Major Stearns said the spruce production division had been making every effort to reach an amicable adjustment of the controversy without being compelled to carry the matter to the Secretary of War, but inasmuch as there was no other alternative, he agreed to have the telegram asking for proper authority dispatched to the Secretary of War at once.

Members of the board expressed the belief that a reply could be expected from Washington within a few days. If the Secretary of War takes no step to eliminate the tolls, it was understood that plans will be completed to carry the question into the Federal courts for final adjudication.

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