

WATER-BORNE TROOP MOVEMENT COULD SAVE MILLIONS

An idea hatched in the Tulsa District is being tested with great success.¹⁵

Although the U.S. navigation system was first developed by the Corps of Engineers for swift military mobilization, the waterway system has been rarely used for military deployment since World War II. Since that war, the nation has relied on rail and the interstate highway system for its extensive and expensive military training and troop deployment exercises.

But since the 1960s, half the U.S. railroad lines have been dismantled. And urban growth and traffic congestion make it more and more difficult for convoys to travel by roadway.

So the idea was born: Why not go back to waterway transport for mobilization? After all, the nation today has 25,000 miles of inland and intercoastal waterways, touching 30 states and 80 military installations. One-sixth of all intercity cargo is transported by water. And military movements are high-cost items today: the Military Traffic Management Command has an annual budget of \$3 billion.

Serious discussions about a test began between the Tulsa District and the Oklahoma National Guard in late 1985.

On June 4, 1987, the Guard moved a trial 34 pieces of equipment 89 miles along the Arkansas River from Camp Gruber, Oklahoma, to Fort Chaffee, Arkansas, for its scheduled annual training there. The heavy equipment was loaded on five deck barges moved by the towboat Elizabeth Lane. When the trip was completed, it was pronounced a success. Going back to the river route saved over half the cost of a similar movement by truck.

On June 7 the second leg of the trip began, with planning assistance of the Tulsa District. The Arkansas National Guard loaded 164 pieces of equipment on seven barges that were moved from Fort Chaffee to Camp Grayling, Michigan, for



mobilization training exercises. This trip took eight days and covered 1,450 miles over four waterways. Again, the savings were considerable: \$135,600 — an estimated 45 percent of the cost that would have been incurred by rail travel.

"This is a reawakening of military transportation on the inland waterways," said Maj. Gen. Jerome Hilmes, Corps' Southwestern Division Commander.

After seeing the savings in time and money from waterway use for military movements, the Military Traffic Management Command has officially informed commanders of the available savings and ordered them to inform all units under their command of the possibilities, reported the Tulsa World on May 22, 1988. The idea, born in the Tulsa District Economic Analysis Office, holds "great promise," the World said.⁶