

Comparative studies made
by the U.S. Army Ordnance
Transport project.

7. OPERATIONS

The performance of the various types of motor equipment listed above is one of the chief points of interest to the Ordnance Department, inasmuch as it affords a most excellent opportunity for making valuable comparisons as to the ability and reliability of the several makes of motor vehicles and trailers. Practically all of the equipment was new when the Convoy left Washington, the exceptions being the Miller and the 5-ton Artillery tractor, so that insofar as the condition of the vehicles was concerned, all had an equal chance of successfully completing the long journey across the continent.

While the cargoes carried varied somewhat from day to day, it may be said that in general the trucks hauled heavy loads. The most uncertain factor in the operation of these motor vehicles especially during the first few weeks of the trip was the inexperience of the drivers, all of whom were new to convoy work. Even during the first half of the trip where the roads were generally good, some drivers had considerable difficulty in keeping their trucks on the road, while others fell asleep at the wheel and ran their trucks into the ditch, over-turning several with slight damage. On the fourth day out, in a terrific mountain thunder storm one G.M.C. cargo truck (medium) slipped over the road on the Laurel Hill descent near Ligonier, Pa., and was lost down the mountain side beyond hope of recovery.

In consideration of these facts, it is a truly noteworthy achievement that there were no trucks lost on the very dangerous mountain grades of the Rockies and Sierras, and that the final objective was successfully reached.

After the Train Officers had had ample opportunity to observe the comparative ability of the men for a few weeks, the best drivers were each assigned to one of the motor vehicles with an assistant driver and made fully responsible for the operation of their equipment. Immediately upon arrival at the control point for the night, it was the duty of the driver to see that his truck was at once filled with gasoline, oil and water, cleaned, and any needed adjustments or repairs made. Three officers of the Motor Transport Corps inspected each vehicle every morning before the Convoy left camp, to see that this work had been properly done. This resulted in a very marked lessening of mechanical troubles on the road, and a much more efficient operation of the entire equipment.

As the Convoy proceeded across the country, the men gained experience with their trucks and confidence in themselves so that by the time the mountains and deserts were reached, most of them were equal to the difficult tasks encountered there, and when the train reached San Francisco many of the men were really competent drivers and their development as such is deserving of favorable comment.