

Ice dusting pioneer leaves service

The man who pioneered "ice dusting" to prevent ice jams on Alaskan rivers has left federal service after 30 years with the Army Corps of Engineers. Mason D. Wade Jr. was Chief of Flood Plain Management Services for the Corp's Alaska District at the time of his retirement.

In the late 1960's, Wade developed a procedure to coat frozen river surfaces with sand to alleviate ice jams and the floods they cause. He identified problem spots along the rivers of interior and western Alaska where ice jams are known to be a recurring threat. Experiments were conducted in which World War II vintage bombers would swoop low over the frozen rivers just before break-up, spreading a blanket of sand on the problem spots.

As expected, the darkened surfaces absorbed more the sun's radiation than the naturally white surfaces of snow-covered ice. The dusted areas melted faster during the spring thaw—lessening the danger that ice



MASON WADE

would collect and jam at those locations.

Following the success of the experiments, the Corps began a program to dust a number of sites where ice jams pose a frequent hazard to Alaskan villages. Ice dusting is now an annual project at 18 sites along the Tanana, Kuskokwim, and Yukon Rivers. In recent years, the Corps of Engineers has relin-

ished most of the responsibilities for the work to the Alaska Division of Emergency Services, but the operation continues in much the same way as it did when Wade conceived it 15 years ago.

Wade began his career with the Corps in uniform, commanding combat engineer units in the Philippines during World War II and the Korean War. After attending the University of Florida where he received a bachelor of science degree in civil engineering in 1956, Wade returned to the Corps as a civilian. He worked as a hydraulic design engineer in Jacksonville, Florida and later in Walla Walla, Washington. He moved to Anchorage in 1961 to coordinate Corps investigations of the hydropower potential of streams throughout the state, and in 1967 he was named Chief of Flood Plain Management Services.

Wade has opened an engineering consulting firm, Wade and associates.