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TRANSPORTATION CORPS REGIMENT

HISTORY OF THE 181ST TRANSPORTATION BATTALION AND RED BALL EXPRESS

1943 UNTIL 1957



FACTS ABOUT THE RED BALL EXPRESS:

1. The mission lasted 83 continuous days, August 25 – November 16, 1944, operating with two vehicle operators per truck.
2. Seventy-five percent of the truck units and drivers (two per vehicle) were African American
3. Truck support numbered 5,958.
4. Twelve thousand five hundred tons per day transported.
5. Eight hundred thousand gallons of petroleum used daily. Three hundred thousand gallons of petroleum used daily just in the convoy vehicles.
6. Two drivers per vehicle system implementation.
7. Gun-truck escorts were Jeeps, one in front and one to the rear of the convoys with mounted M2s with 2.5-Ton cargo trucks with ring mounts and M2 every fourth vehicle.
8. The original cargo truck used most in the Red Ball Express operation was the GMC CCKW, 2.5 Ton, 6X6. The European battlefield was mostly GMC CCKW.
9. Nearly 600 DUKWs aka Ducks 2.5-Ton, 6X6 amphibious trucks were used.
10. Introduction of the use of blackout lights during night operations.
11. The United States Army used the Advanced Service Rating (ASR) scoring system during the World War II demobilization effort. It was designed to return troops back to the U.S. based on the length of time served, family status and honors received in battle.
12. The 3rd Army offensive forces were so far ahead of the projected mission by phase lines and out pacing the logistic support lines that it was determined that equative to 200 days or 350 miles causing the addition of the "RED BALL EXPRESS".

13. Establish petroleum pipeline systems, across the English Channel into and across France.



The 181st Transportation Battalion was originally constituted on 23 February 1943 in the Army of the United States as Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 3rd Battalion 520th Quartermaster Truck Regiment. It was activated on 25 June 1943 at Camp Ellis, Illinois. The unit was reorganized and re-designated on 25 January 1944 as Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 181st Quartermaster Battalion (Mobile) and its three lettered companies, G, H, and I. Units were re-designated the 4007th, 4008th, and 4009th all African American line units, Quartermaster Transportation Companies. While in England and driving on the left side of the roads, the unit supported new servicemen arrival and shuttled them to assigned units while maintaining the highest level of maintenance posture.

The 181st Quartermaster Battalion (Mobile) was pre-staged at Bovey Tracey, Devonshire, United Kingdom on April 29, 1944:

In May 1944 the units marshaled at Shepton Mallet for embarkment staged with the 6th Engineer Brigade. Line unit pre-deployment stations:

- 4007th QM TC at Coypool, Devonshire, United Kingdom on August 1, 1944.

- 4008th QM TC at Bovey Tracey, Devonshire, United Kingdom on May 14, 1944
- 4009th QM TC at Preston, Lancashire, United Kingdom on March 13, 1944

The line units move to Shepton Mallet, United Kingdom to stage for vessel voyage across the English Channel. Days prior to departure the unit turned in all vehicles and was replaced with cab-over-engine vehicles. The operators and maintenance Soldiers were not familiar with operations nor maintenance issues.

Departing from the Port of Liverpool, England. Landing on Omaha Beach D+5, working directly for the 13th Main Port, 1st Army. The units reached Grandcamp-Maisy, there the vehicles were loaded with POL and dispatched to Cherbourg on the Red Ball express highway. The three units were joined by eight other truck companies in support of the mission. The halfway point along the route was Gisors, 75 kilometers from North of Paris, France. When the Red Ball Express route closed the 4007, 4008 and 4009th QM Transportation Companies moved back to the Normandy Beach area. There they moved Engineer dumps to the main train station at Le Molay-Littry railhead where supplies were moved to forward combat areas. Le Molay-Littry was a V-Rocket location on the German front. Launching as many as 100 missiles per day against the allied forces.

At Saint Lo, the hillside became flooded with spring and summer rains. On June 6 and 7, 1944 the allied bombed the town. Taking the railhead and power plant.

Returning to Paris for Military Police and replacement companies' shuttle of men to the front lines. By October 1945 the three-line units had their hands full of POL, ammo, food, and clothing shuttling these items to front line units.



Ninety percent of the town of Saint Lo was bombed on 6 and 7 June 1944. Allied forces focusing on overtaking the railhead and power plant.

December 1944, the units were supporting in the Ardennes sector with the 101st Airborne Division trapped in Bastogne. The loss of 21 men had been taken as POWs with their eighteen vehicles from the 4009th Trans CO. These men would be recovered at the end of the war on the Czechoslovakian border some 750 miles in distance from the capture point.

The three-line units were then assigned to Paris, in support of the XXII Corps of the 15th Army. Taking supplies to the Ruhr Valley in Düsseldorf, Hamburg and Essen. Traveling by blackout conditions, and innumerable missions into the terror which was more often in enemy hands than allied.

The 4007, 4008 and 4009th QM Transportation Companies were then reassigned to XXII Corps to relocate the Headquarters to the Czechoslovakian border. The route was 580 miles round trip. Their mission lasted until the unit's inactivation ceremony in June 1946.

XXII Corps was activated on January 24, 1944, at Fort Campbell, Kentucky and inactivated in 1946.

Unit Soldiers listed below were assigned to the 4009th QM Transportation Company:

1SG, John A. Boyde

Technical Sergeant (Motor Platoon), John W. Brown

Staff Sergeant (Supply SGT), George W. Wright

Staff Sergeant, Robert Simkins

Staff Sergeant, Charles Hill

Staff Sergeant, Robert West

Sergeant (Mess Sergeant), Pratt L. Hubbard

Corporal (Company Clerk), John H. Render

The 181st QM TRANS BN supported the breakout from Normandy and earned served in five World War II campaigns: Normandy, Northern France, Rhineland, Ardennes-Alsace, and Central Europe. It was then inactivated in Germany on 25 June 1946. REF A: [Back to Normandy.com](http://BacktoNormandy.com)

The Battle of Normandy, which lasted from June 1944 to August 1944, resulted in the Allied liberation of Western Europe from Nazi Germany's control. Codenamed Operation Overlord, the battle began on June 6, 1944, also known as D-Day, when some 156,000 American, British, and Canadian forces landed on five beaches along a 50-mile stretch of the heavily fortified coast of France's Normandy region. The invasion was one of the largest amphibious military assaults in history and required extensive planning.

Sea transport ships were primarily responsible for placing troops and military vehicles on the five beach heads known as Utah, Sword, Juno, Gold, and Omaha Beach, the latter being the most famous. After that, various army transport vehicles were essential for moving and protecting troops on land. REF B: HistoryDDay.com



In this rare color photograph an LST (Landing Ship Tank) is unloading a GMC 6x6 2-1/2-Ton truck modified to carry fuel, which is one of the many configurations it was converted to. Each of the two trucks is pulling fuel trailers. The Checker Car Company, known for its taxicabs, built fuel trailers during the Second World War. Also, on the beach is the ubiquitous Jeep. Between Ford Motor Company and Willis-Overland 641,000 of the versatile vehicles were manufactured during the war. A third company, American Bantam built 2,400 of the type.

1,051 LSTs were constructed during WWII, half of which had two 12-567 900 hp diesel engines built by the Electro-Motive Division (EMD) of General Motors. The US Navy in WWII was big on dual sourcing of engines, so it would split the procurement of engines between two companies. The EMD engines were the same type it manufactured for powering what at the time were the new diesel-electric locomotives.

Notice the courier bicycles on lead truck, one in cargo bed and two more mounted on the sides of the trailers.



In this aerial photo shows what appear to be mostly GMC trucks exiting nine LSTs to carry the proverbial beans, bullets and bandages to the front-line troops. The infantry, tanks and halftracks have moved on. Now it is time to supply the prodigious amount of material it takes to fight a modern war. There are also eight or more M4 Sherman tanks in two rows between two columns of trucks in the center of the photo. It appears that an LCT and several other landing craft are waiting for the tide to come back in to be refloated. The LSTs will also need a high tide to back off the beach.

REF D: <http://usautoindustryworldwartwo.com/normandyinvasion.htm>

THE RED BALL EXPRESS AUGUST 25, 1944:

When the Normandy Base Section (NBS) was organized, there were two (Quartermaster Groups, eight Quartermaster Battalions, Mobile (TC), and 84 Truck Companies assigned for duty within its limits in addition to those assigned to Red Ball. The 1383rd and 388th Engineer General Service elements, while in the United Kingdom, formed seven truck companies each, within their respective organizations in NBS these were under Transportation Corps control. Each element was divided into two battalions. Another battalion was added when the 25th

Chemical Smoke Generating Battalion was reorganized into a truck battalion, while maintaining its original identity, and its four companies were equipped with 2 ½-ton standard cargo 6x6 vehicles. When the Red Ball program vehicles were established in the latter part of August, many truck companies were taken away from other Base Section operations. To help offset the shortage thus created, ten truck companies were organized from Anti-Aircraft Battalions in the Normandy Base Section area and these were assigned to NBS. Additional vehicles were furnished 10 September when 1750 men from Replacement Pools were organized into provisional units and given a pool of 1000 trucks. These trucks were then divided into five groups or units and distributed to Utah and Omaha Districts, and to the 4th and 11th Ports, in proportion to the work required.

The Red Ball Express was a famed truck convoy system that supplied Allied forces moving quickly through Europe after breaking out from the D-Day beaches in Normandy in 1944. To expedite cargo shipment to the front, trucks emblazoned with red balls followed a similarly marked route that was closed to civilian traffic. The trucks also had priority on regular roads.

Conceived in an urgent 36-hour meeting, the convoy system began operating on August 25, 1944. Staffed primarily with African American soldiers, the Express at its peak operated 5,958 vehicles that carried about 12,500 tons of supplies a day. It ran for 83 days until November 16, when the port facilities at Antwerp, Belgium, were opened, enough French rail lines were repaired, and portable gasoline pipelines were deployed.

R E S T R I C T E D

HEADQUARTERS
MOTOR TRANSPORT BRIGADE TC (PROV)
ADVANCE SECTION C2

18 September 1944

Numerical listing of Groups, Battalions and Companies (including assignments and attachments) in accordance with Ltr. Order # 188 dated 18 September 1944, this headquarters.

Groups		Com	Bns	Com	Bns	Com	Bns
27		645	174	3611	466	3904	103
467		660	174	3612	470 Gp	3951	470 Gp
470		661	238	2613	467	3992	519
513		662	104	3614	163	3983	104
520		751	238	3617	171	3984	476
	Grp	3342	8	3618	163	3985	103
	Atchd	3343	476	3621	466	3986	519
	to	3323	174	3622	476	3997	239
Bns		467	3304	470 Gp	3623	476	3988
8		27	3393	103	3625	175	3999
104	520	3394	519	3627	152	3990	476
152	467	3395	238	3628	175	3991	157
157	470	3397	520	3629	152	3992	520
163	513	3398	174	3630	175	4001	520
171	467	3400	103	3631	470 Gp	4002	520
174	27			3632	171	4008	470 Gp
175	513	3413	157	3631	157	4004	520
181	520	3417	181			4006	104
238	27	3419	181	3583	157	4007	104
466	513	3420	103	3584	157	4008	104
467	470	3433	238	3689	238	4009	174
476	-	3453	520	3690	157	4010	103
519	27	3478	470 Gp	3691	181	4011	519
520	520	3543	174	3691	103	4351	104
		3544	467	3692	181	4252	519
	Bns	3549	470 Gp	3694	181	4253	519
	Atchd	3552	103	3696	174	4254	470 Gp
	or	3572	467	3697	181	4255	181
	Asgn'd	3574	476	3698	181	4256	466
Com	to	3575	163	3690	238	4257	466
134	470 Gp	3578	8	3691	174	4258	466
141	157	3580	163	3692	181	4259	175
146	163	3582	152	3692	152	4260	175
147	157	3584	476	3693	175	4261	175
168	466	3593	470 Gp	3694	467	4262	8
378	476	3594	467	3695	152	4263	8
399	174	3595	152	3696	171	4264	8
400	104			3697	8	4265	171
401	520	3602	175	3698	466	4266	171
541	104	3602	171	3699	157	4267	171
543	137	3609	163	3901	467	4268	157
644	238	3610	466	3903	519	4269	467
						4270	520
						4271	174
						380	104

26th Prov. Trk. Regt.

- 1 Bn-Co's 7100, 7101, 7102, 7103, 7104
- 2 Bn-Co's 7105, 7106, 7107, 7108, 7109
- 3 Bn-Co's 7110, 7111, 7112, 7113, 7114

35th Prov. Trk. Regt.

- A Bn-Co's 951, 952, 953, 954, 955
- B Bn-Co's 956, 957, 958, 959, 9510
- C Bn-Co's 9511, 9512, 9513, 9514, 9515

104th Prov. Trk. Regt.

- A Bn-Co's 1, 2, 3, 10, 13
- B Bn-Co's 4, 5, 6, 11, 14
- C Bn-Co's 7, 8, 9, 12

The 470 QM Group TC is located at Reims; 476 QM Bn (M) TC at Domfront; 467 QM Bn (M) TC at Reims; 157 QM Bn (M) TC at Rosay.

C C R E S T R I C T E D

The 181st QM Transportation Battalion and 4007th, 4008th and 4009th QM Transportation Companies listed on Order #188, SEP 18, 1944

The need for such a priority transport service during World War II arose in the European Theater following the successful Allied invasion of Normandy in June 1944. To hobble the German army's ability to move forces and bring up reinforcements in a counter-attack, the Allies had preemptively bombed the French railway system into ruins in the weeks leading up to the D-Day landing.

After the Allied breakout and the race to the Seine River, some 28 Allied divisions needed constant resupply. During offensive operations, each division consumed about 750 tons of supplies per day, totaling about 21,000 tons in all. The only way to deliver them was by truck – thereby giving birth to the Red Ball Express.

At its peak, it operated 5,958 vehicles and carried about 21,500 tons of supplies per day. Two drivers for every truck, obtaining special equipment, and training port battalion personnel as drivers for long hauls. Able-bodied soldiers attached to other units whose duties were not critical were made drivers.

Almost 75% of Red Ball drivers were African American. Through attrition replacement drivers came from all kinds of units becoming an overnight vehicle operator.



When the 3rd Army reached the “Northern France Campaign” target area across the Moselle River at Metz and Nancy, France they had outrun all logistic support and supplies which at this

period was 200 days ahead of the battle schedule, Classes III, V and IX. Nearly 53 million 5-gallon jerricans were utilized during the campaign.



Commemorative stone in the village of La Queue-lez-Yvelines

To keep supplies flowing without delay, two routes were opened from Cherbourg to the forward logistics base at Chartres. The northern route was used for delivering supplies, the southern for returning trucks. Both roads were closed to civilian traffic.

The highways in France are usually good but are ordinarily not excessively wide. The needs of the rapidly advancing armies, consequently, promptly put the greatest possible demands upon them. To ease this strain, main highways leading to the front were set aside very early in the advance as "one way" roads from which all civil and local military traffic were barred. Tens of thousands of truckloads of supplies were pushed forward over these one-way roads in a constant stream of traffic. Reaching the supply dumps in the forward areas, the trucks unloaded and returned empty to Arromanches, Cherbourg and the lesser landing places by way of other one way highways. Even the French railroads were, to some degree, operated similarly, with loaded trains moving forward almost nose to tail.



Only convoys of at least five trucks were allowed, escorted in front and behind by an escort jeeps. It was common for individual trucks to depart Cherbourg as soon as they were loaded. It was also common to disable the engine governors to travel faster than 56 miles per hour (90 km/h).

Convoys were a primary target of the German Luftwaffe but by 1944 German air power was so reduced that even these tempting and typically easy targets were rarely attacked. The biggest problems facing the Express were maintenance, finding enough drivers, and lack of sleep for the overworked truckers.

To control traffic and provide security for the route, the 793rd Military Police Battalion, activated December 1942, was sent to the Red Ball from August through December 1944. The early beginnings of the battalion are commemorated on the distinctive unit insignia, with two red balls on a diagonal line of yellow, with a field of green behind (green and gold are the colors of the U.S. Army Military Police).



The truck most used in the Red Ball Express operation was the GMC CCKW, 2.5 Ton, 6X6

The Red Ball Express was the codename for one of World War II's most massive logistic operations, namely a fleet of over 6,000 trucks and trailers that delivered over 412,000 tons of Class I, III, V and IX and some to the Allied armies in the European Theatre of Operations (ETO) between August 25 and November 16, 1944. For the 225th AAA Searchlight Battalion, which was a semi-mobile outfit, being a "Red Ball" trucker meant that you were charged with driving battalion trucks to the Red Ball depots and picking up supplies, especially Class III, V, and then ferrying them back to the 225th's positions at forward airfields along the West Wall. Though you didn't make the long hauls from Normandy into eastern France and Belgium, you kept the battalion supplied as a last, vital hop in the supply chain.



The introduction of motorized vehicles and equipment at the beginning of the 20th Century has forever changed the face of the battle. Since the time of Alexander the Great, large armies have crossed the world's military landscape with ponderous difficulty, their seemingly endless lines of animal-drawn carts and wagons trailing far behind. How different this is from the pace and dimension of modern warfare.

The highly mechanized U. S. Army of WW II had the ability to cover vast distances at speeds unimagined by even the greatest of the Great Captains of old. That speed brought with it a need for new forms of fuel — in prodigious amounts to keep the engines of war running. Quartermasters who for centuries gathered huge stockpiles of hay, barley, and oats to "fuel" past armies on the move, were now required to supply the Petroleum, Oil and Lubricants (POL) that make up the U.S. Army's logistical lifeblood.

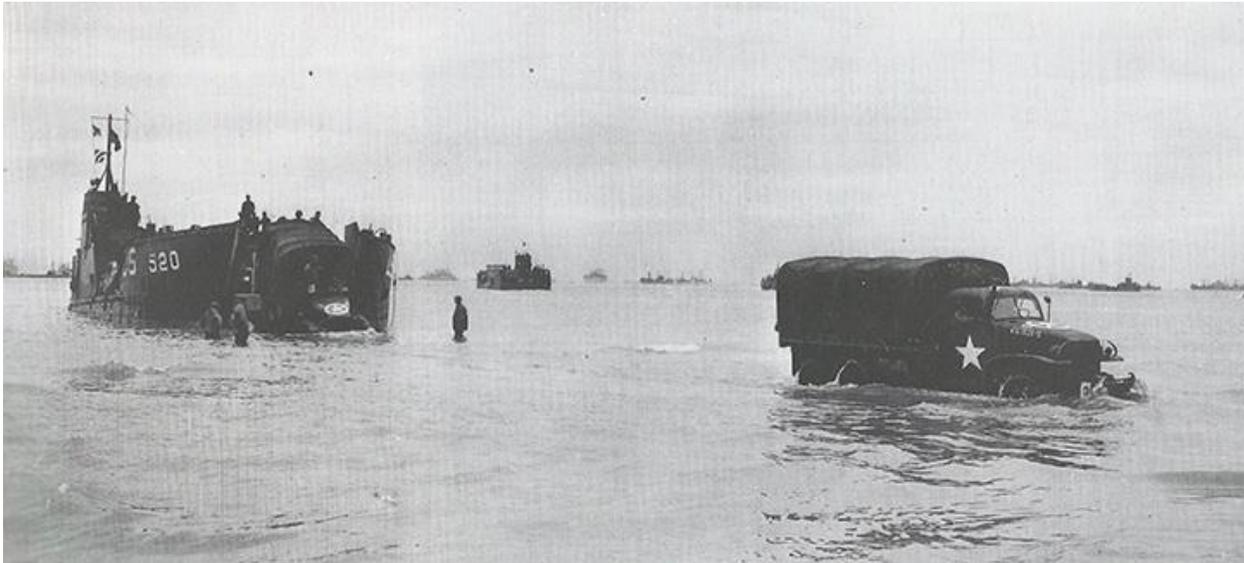
The Army had begun serious experimentation with gasoline-driven trucks and automobiles as early as 1911. In 1916, during the "Punitive Expedition" to Mexico, trucks were first used in a tactical setting by American troops abroad. When the United States declared war on Germany the following year, General Pershing took hundreds of motorized vehicles and equipment with him to France. This action spawned a huge, new appetite for POL.



Jerrican petroleum depot, Northern France Campaign, 1944

Though the fighting on the Western Front was relatively static, petroleum played a decisive role. It was, according to Clemenceau, "as necessary as blood." The French expression "*le sang rouge de guerre*" "the red blood of war," captures the significance of gasoline in modern war fighting. Said Churchill afterwards, we (the Allies) floated to victory "on a sea of oil." All told, the American Expeditionary Force consumed nearly 40 million gallons of gasoline in World War I. This was an immense amount for the time, a mere fraction of what it would take to defeat Hitler's Germany a generation later.

World War II was the first truly mechanized war, or as one observer put it, a "100 percent internal combustion engine war." It placed unprecedented demand on Army Quartermasters for POL support around the world. Even the relatively small North African campaign of (code-named Operation TORCH) required no less than 10 million gallons of gasoline. Allied logisticians pushed the red stuff forward over the beaches and across parched deserts using five-gallon "blitz" cans, tanker trucks, and miles of newly designed portable pipelines. This experience, coupled with the Sicilian and Italian campaigns that followed, served as a warm-up for the Normandy Invasion of June 1944.



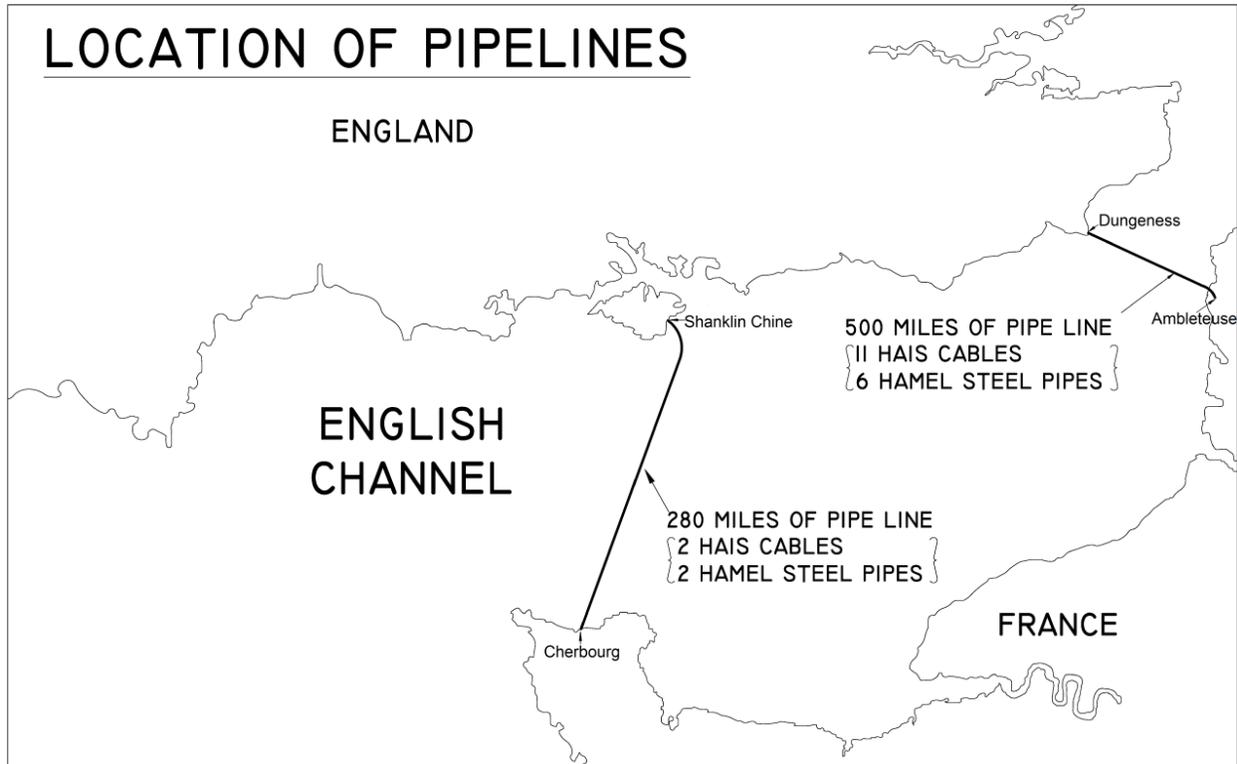
Pictured above a Landing Craft Tank (LCT) is landing GMC 2.5-ton 6x6 trucks. Four companies built the 2-1/2-ton 6x6 truck during the Second World War; GMC and Chevrolet Divisions of General Motors, International-Harvester, Studebaker and Reo. The International trucks went to the USMC in the Pacific, and Studebaker and Reo trucks went to the Russians and Australians through Lend-Lease. The US Army in Europe was completely GMC. Two of the tens of thousands of the type that were used in Europe starting at Normandy are unloaded.

REF E: <http://usautoindustryworldwartwo.com/normandyinvasion.htm>

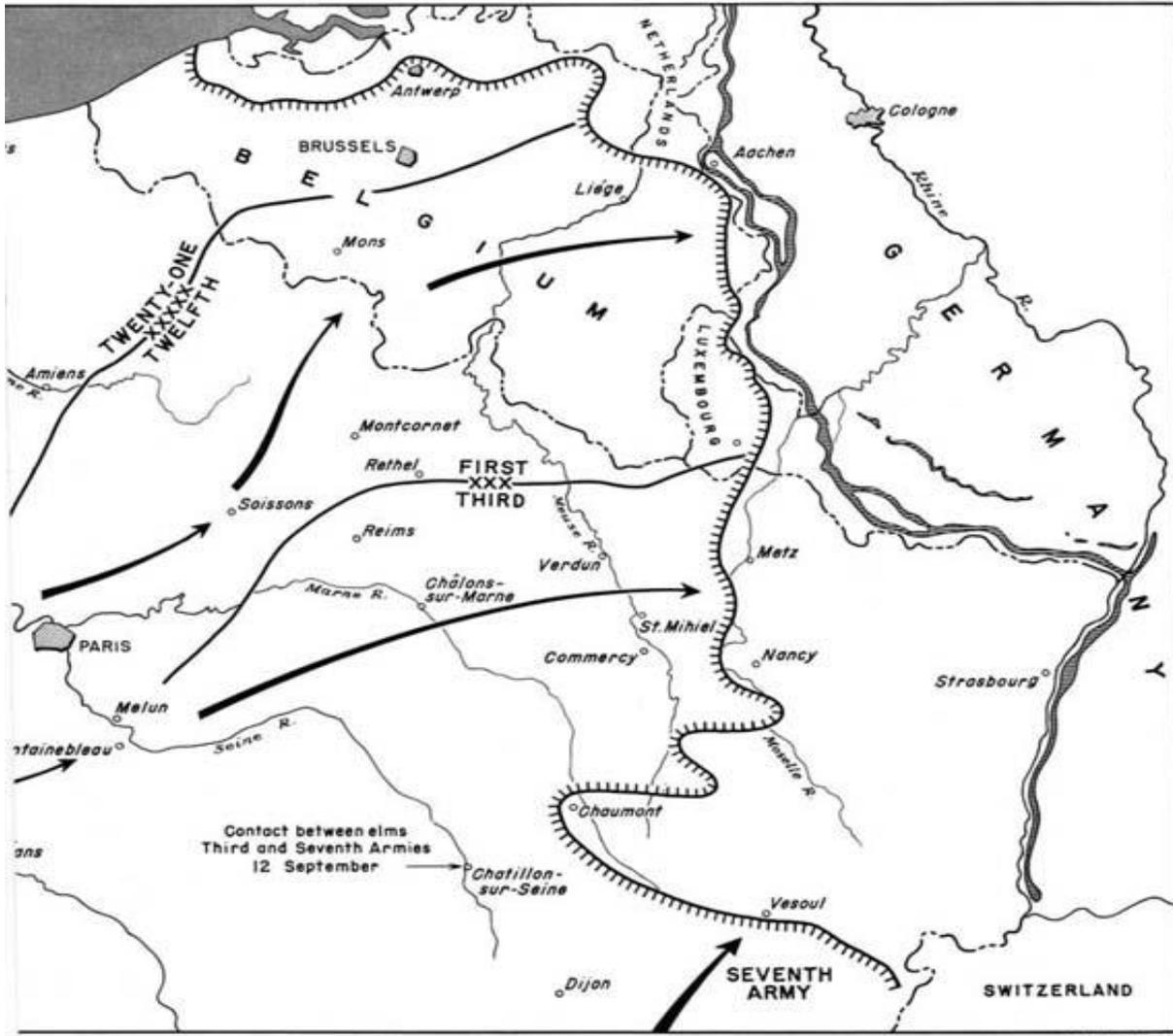
The cross-channel invasion known as Operation OVERLORD followed months of intensive preparation. During that time Allied logisticians in England worked out a detailed plan for POL support on the continent. All vehicles in the assault were to arrive on the beachhead with full tanks, carrying extra gasoline in five-gallon jerricans. Packaged distribution was to continue throughout the operation's initial phase (D-Day to D+41). Planners predicted a slow-paced offensive, thereafter, allowing for systematic construction of base, intermediate, and forward area depots. In the meantime, it was hoped that the early capture and development of Cherbourg's port facilities (by around D + 15) would enable combat engineers to begin laying three six-inch pipelines inland toward Paris.

- Base Depots were located along the beach head plus 10 to 20 miles.
- Intermediate Depots were located at 150 to 200 miles in land. In areas of Mons, Belgium; Chambios, Orleans, Rotan, and Saint Lo, France.
- Forward Depots were at 300 to 350 miles forward at Cambrai, Metz, Nancy and Paris, France. Factories were rebuilt, maintained, and operated from 1951 until the US and NATO Forces departed France in 1966 supplies occupied forces in Holland, Germany, and Belgium.

The first petroleum pipeline spanned was the Shankin Chine, Isle of Wight, United Kingdom across the English Channel to Cherbough, France, completed on August 14, 1944. The second pipeline was at Durgeness, United Kingdom to Ambleuse, France. Another 17 pipelines supplied thousands of gallons of petroleum to Boulogne. By March 1945, one million gallons of fuel were being delivered each day and Allied success was assured.



The Pluto pipeline pump system.



3rd Army pushes thru Metz and Nancy then onward to Kaiserslautern, Germany, 1944

Much depended upon the success of this operation. Pipelines were expected to eventually move about 90 percent of all POL entering the European Theater quickly and efficiently to forward area terminals or transfer points. Operation OVERLORD was officially scheduled to terminate on D + 90 with the forward line hopefully anchored on the banks of the Seine. The post-OVERLORD period (D + 91 to D + 360) would have the Army pushing steadily eastward to the Rhine, where it was assumed, a final showdown would take place. From start to finish, planners expected well-placed bulk maintenance facilities to carry the lion's share of POL support.

On D-Day itself events occurred much as planned from a POL perspective. The first assault vehicles rolled ashore and immediately began stacking their cargoes of five-gallon cans. They were placed in small, widely scattered dump sites throughout the lodgment area. This simple

method of open storage made Class III supply easily accessible. At the same time, this storage method rendered Class III supplies less vulnerable to enemy attack. By the end of the first week (D + 6) Quartermaster petroleum supply companies were on hand to begin moving these stores away from Omaha beach as the buildup continued.

German defenders fought tenaciously but failed to turn back the Allied assault. By the end of June, the beachhead had expanded considerably. Allied combat units were rushing headlong in the infamous hedgerows some 25 miles beyond to engage in a bloody slugfest that lasted several weeks. The Allies' inability to score a quick breakthrough anywhere along the line had both positive and negative effects on the supply situation. Since there was so little forward movement, reserve stockpiles grew at an accelerated pace. Approximately 177,000 vehicles and more than half of a million tons of supplies came ashore by D + 21. POL reserves at that time topped 7.5 million gallons. On the other hand, failure to capture Cherbourg as early as planned meant that the proposed pipeline schedule had to be voided. For weeks to come, all POL requirements would have to be met solely by packaged distribution.

A breakout finally occurred the last week of July. Following a massive aerial bombardment on the 25th, General Bradley's First Army managed to rupture German lines to the right of St. Lo. The next day, three armored divisions poured rapidly through the gap and moved 25 miles south near the base of the Contentin Peninsula. With the door forced wide open, new opportunities for early tactical success abounded. There was a chance that if the Allies moved fast, struck hard and pressed the fight, they might quickly defeat the entire German Army in France. Considering this largely unforeseen possibility, many of the pre-invasion plans were summarily scrapped. First and Third Armies joined forces on 1 August (to form the U.S. 12th Army Group) and at once began exploiting the principle of maneuver warfare to the fullest.

The Germans offered even lighter resistance than expected. Success followed success in the Allied pursuit across France. As Third Army swept westward into Brittany and south to Le Mans, it burned up an average of more than 380,000 gallons (76,000 jerricans) of gasoline per day. By 7 August (a week after becoming operational) its reserves were completely exhausted. Patton had to rely on daily truckloads of packaged POL from the rear. Nevertheless, he managed to continue this highly mobile type of warfare, driving eastward for another three weeks, before being halted by critical shortages of gasoline.

Logistically speaking, the real turning point in the campaign came during the week of 20 – 26 August. At that time, elements of both the First and Third Armies were simultaneously engaged in rapid pursuit. They developed an insatiable thirst for Class III and consumed more during this one week than any time previously. Average consumption was well over 800,000 gallons per day. The First Army alone (with about 60 percent of its total supply allocations made up of Class III type items) used 782,000 gallons of motor fuel on 24 August. The next day Allied forces closed in on the Seine and columns of U.S. And French troops entered Paris.

The decision to cross the Seine and immediately continue eastward, without waiting to develop lines of communication more fully, constituted a major departure from the OVERLORD plan. It

posed serious difficulties for the theater logisticians but was a gamble senior commander were willing to risk. "The armies," said General Bradley, on 27 August, "will go as far as practicable and then wait until the supply system in rear will permit further advance." Once across the Seine, forward divisions not only extended their lines, but fanned out in every direction creating a front twice as broad as previously. The strain on the supply system was immediately noticed as deliveries slowed to a trickle. The late August – early September operations were described by war correspondent Ernie Pyle as "a tactician's hell and a quartermaster's purgatory."

Indeed it was both. Believing victory to be firmly within their grasp, the fast-moving armies had outrun their supply lines and were forced to live hand-to-mouth for several days. Ninety to ninety-five percent of all supplies on the continent still lay in base depots. Near Normandy, the First Army had in effect "leaped" more than 300 miles from Omaha beach in a month's time. The Third Army had done likewise. With the situation becoming daily more critical, it was time to begin what one historian labeled 'frantic supply.'

In a desperate effort to bridge the gap between user units at the front and mounting stockpiles back at Normandy a long distance, one-way, "loop-run" highway system — dubbed the Red Ball Express — was born. Since circumstances allowed little time for advance planning or preparation, Red Ball was, as one observer noted, "largely an impromptu affair." It began on 25 August, with 67 truck companies running along a restricted route from St. Lo to the North and Chartres, just south of Paris; and reached a peak four days later with 132 companies (nearly 6,000 vehicles) assigned to the project. Communications Zone (COMMZ) and Advance Section (ADSEC) transportation officials were responsible for overseeing Red Ball activities, but it required the support and coordination of many branches to succeed.

- Red Ball Express Class III depots issued petroleum in 5,000- gallon increments: 5-gallon jerricans were issued two high X 25 cans long X 20 cans wide = 5,000 gallons per stack or 39,000 LBS. or 19,500 Tons.
- Other commodities such as lumber were issued by rail car X 15 rail cars per stop to provide solid fuel for wood burning stoves during the fall and winter months.
- Return vehicle operations included the processing of human remains with Casualty Collections Points with the Graves Registration Service, Mortuary Affairs or Field Hospital locations.
- On June 9, 1944, General Dwight D. Eisenhower finally signed Standing Operating Procedure No. 26 Governing Army Burials, Graves Registration and Disposition of Effects, immediately effective in the European Theater of Operations.



Saint Lo to Chartres then later onward to Brittany photograph in August 1944

While the Engineers were busy maintaining roads and bridges, MPs were on hand at each of the major check points to direct traffic and record pertinent data. Colorful signs and markers along the way — not unlike the old Burma Shave signs that covered America's own countryside — kept drivers from getting lost, and at the same time publicized daily goals and achievements. Quartermaster truck drivers, materiel handlers, and petroleum specialists were ever present both along the route and at the forward-area truck-heads. Disabled vehicles moved to the side of the road, where they were either repaired on the spot by roving Ordnance units or evacuated to rear-area depots.

Round-the-clock movement of traffic required adherence to a strict set of rules. For instance, all vehicles had to travel in convoys and maintain 60-yard intervals. They were not to exceed the maximum speed of 25 mph and no passing was allowed. After dark, Red Ball drivers were permitted the luxury of using full headlights instead of "cat eyes" for safety reasons. At exactly ten minutes before the hour each vehicle stopped in place for a 10-minute break.

Bivouac areas were set up midway on the roads so exhausted drivers could get some rest and a hot meal. (Incidentally, most drivers soon picked up on handy tricks that come from living on the road, such as how to heat C-rations on the manifold or make hot coffee in a number-10 can using a bit of gasoline.) At its height the Red Ball saga captured the media's attention and had the effect of placing supply and service personnel in the spotlight for a change. Still, the job was hardly glamorous, involving as it did endless hours of dull, hard, and sometimes dangerous

work, POL occupied prominent space on the Red Ball Express.

In late August, General Eisenhower decided to forward most petroleum supplies to the First Army (LT General Hodges) and the British 21st Army Group (LT General Montgomery). This action was to come at the expense of Third Army to the South. On August 31, 1944, the 3rd Armies daily allotment of gasoline dropped off sharply from 400,000 to 31,000 gallons. This placed a virtual strangle hold on the fiery commander, who fumed, pleaded, begged, bellowed, and cursed accordingly — but to no avail. "My men can eat their belts," he was overhead telling Ike at a meeting on September 2, "but my tanks got to have gas." The logistical crisis threatened to halt the Allies where the enemy could not.

Fortunately, that crisis proved to be short-lived. It would only be a slight exaggeration to say that Red Ball saved the day. The hastily conceived system served as a useful expedient for bringing Class III items, especially gasoline, quickly to the fuel-starved front. Even though First and Third Army supply officers would continue bemoaning the Class III shortage, the situation got markedly better. By the end of the first week in September, forward area truckers were issuing POL as soon as it came in, and consumption rates were once again hitting the 800,000-gallon-a-day mark. The worst of the 3rd Armies Class III woes ended almost as quickly as they had begun. Mid-September saw the two American Armies issuing more than one million gallons of Class III daily — enough to meet the immediate needs and begin building slight reserves.

Red Ball Express was scheduled to run only until 5 September but continued through mid-November. In all, it transported more than 500,000 tons of supplies. The system moved Class III quickly, if not always efficiently, to where it was most needed to keep the drive alive. Most importantly, the Red Ball Express brought precious time for the rear echelon support team, allowing it to complete its task of building up the railroads, port facilities, and pipelines needed to sustain the final drive into Germany.

For over two months, the Red Ball Express did a magnificent job transporting petroleum over distances up to 400 miles. Quartermasters did their part by operating effectively as retailers of this product. However, success came with a price tag. Round-the-clock driving strained personnel and equipment. Continuous use of vehicles, without proper maintenance, led to their rapid deterioration and ultimately to a drain on parts and labor. Tire replacement alone nearly doubled from 29,142 just before Red Ball Express was launched to 55,059 in September. The situation was aggravated by driver abuse, such as speeding, and habitual overloading. Extreme fatigue also led to increased accidents, and even a few instances of sabotage, where drivers disabled their vehicles to rest.

Red Ball Express proved beyond a doubt the versatility and convenience of transporting gasoline in small five-gallon containers. Jerricans required no special handling apparatus and were amenable to open storage without harmful effects. However, at the very height of Red Ball activities the forward movement of POL was threatened by a severe shortage of jerricans. The cans were carelessly discarded from the beachhead area and littered the route all the way to the front. The Chief Quartermaster's highly publicized propaganda blitz and cash incentive

program prompted local civilians to help round up "AWOL" jerricans." Still a jerrican shortage remained in effect until more cans were manufactured on the home front.

Finally, the Red Ball Express had an inherent problem in that it was fast approaching a point of diminishing returns. As the route got longer and longer, the Red Ball required more Class III — ultimately as much as 300,000 gallons per day — just to keep the Red Ball vehicles themselves moving. REF F: Olivedrab.com



The truck operation included the return of brass, human remains to collection points, and empty jerricans.

MAINTENANCE:

One of the greatest difficulties experienced in Normandy Base Section (NBS) in using these provisional companies was the lack of tools for proper vehicle maintenance. Those tools already in use by regular trucking units had to meet this need. In addition to this drawback, the personnel drawn from Replacement Pools were not accompanied by officers and this resulted in an extreme shortage of supervisory personnel. These two factors contributed greatly to the high mortality rate among vehicles.

Maintenance units reported the following types of maintenance deficiencies, which stemmed primarily from inexperienced drivers:

- Dry batteries
- Motors and differentials burned out for lack of grease and oil
- Lack of effort to keep nuts and bolts tight, resulting in drive shafts falling off, transfer cases loosening, wheels coming off, fenders and bodies breaking up
- Lubricating with too-light oil
- Under-inflation of tires
- Lack of valve caps (usually only one or two per vehicle found)

Vehicle repair along the road was endless. Over 1500 repairs were being made daily by Ordnance pit-stops. More than 600 of the vehicles under repair were being replaced with exchange vehicles.

Most of the vehicles brought in for repair were the result of wrecks and not mechanical failures, primarily from driving too fast, not staying with convoys, and improper maintenance.

In 1952 until 1962 established the following commands and locations.

1st Logistical Command

Headquarters are at Poitiers, France. The organization is responsible for the operation of all supply depots in western France.

Port Area Command

Port Area Command, headquartered at La Rochelle, is a subordinate command of the 1st Logistic Command. The command receives incoming supplies through French Ports at St Nazaire, La Pallice and Bassens. From there the supplies are shipped to widely separated depots in France and Germany for storage and issue to troops.

Port of Embarkation, Bremerhaven

POE, Bremerhaven is under the direct control of HQ Com Z.

4th Logistical Command

Headquarters area at Verdun, France. The command operates all the Com Z supply depots in

eastern France and Germany. It furnishes direct supply for tactical units further forward.

Seine Area Command

SAC provides logistical support for major US headquarters in the Paris area, including the US elements of EUCOM, SHAPE and NATO.

Orleans Area Command

OAC provides logistical support for US units in the Orleans area, including Headquarters Communications Zone.

In 1956 the 181st Transportation Battalion Organization:

181st Transportation Battalion, Turley Barracks --

MAJ, John L. Buckley, Commanding
CPT, Robert F. Eisenhower, Executive Officer
CPT, Francis L. Grice, Adjutant
CPT, David L. Davis, S-3.
CPT, Walter E Krause, ASST S-3
CWO, Jack Smith, Motor Officer

84th Transportation Company (Medium Truck), Turley Barracks -

CPT, Harry E Jones, Jr. Commanding
2LT, John T Mulgrew, Executive Officer
CWO, Norman Rentz, Motor Officer

108th Transportation Company (Light Truck) Patton Barracks, Heidelberg-

CPT, Aden L Barnes, Commanding
2LT, James F. Kilcoyne, Executive Officer
CWO, William E Ray, Motor Officer

503rd Transportation Company (Light Truck) Patton Barracks, Heidelberg-

1LT, James H. Weisflog, Commanding
2LT, Ralph P. Gentile, Executive Officer
CWO, Thomas F. Anderson, Maintenance Officer

519th Transportation Company (Car) Patton Barracks, Heidelberg-

1LT, Kenneth H. Griffith, Commanding
2LT, William H Fischer, Executive Officer

1LT, Roland J. Sheret
2LT, Cleo F. Miller, Mess Officer
2LT, Henry G. Moore, Supply Officer
CWO, Robert P. Mills, Maintenance Officer

In March 1956-57, the four Truck Companies (84th, 108th, 503rd and 519th Trans Co) were transferred to USAREUR COMZ, assigned to the Transportation Division, stationed in and around Orleans, France and with logistic support from Toul, Metz, Orleans, Verdun, and Nancy Depots to Germany. These four-line units were also issued new modern cab-over-trucks or M52 5-Ton vehicles.

The 181st Transportation Battalion did not transfer with them. Rather, the 181st Transportation Battalion was reassigned to the USAREUR and 7th Army and was assigned four new companies - the 40th, 41st, 51st and 342nd Transportation Companies at Turley Barracks, Mannheim, Germany.

The 7th Army's Project MASS (Modern Army Supply System). Three light transportation truck companies using 180 M34 2 1/2-Ton vehicles are involved in the MASS operation -- the 41st, 51st and 342nd Transportation (Light Truck) companies. In addition, the 40th Transportation Company (Medium Truck) (Petroleum) provided 10 petroleum tankers for the operation while the remaining 50 POL tankers were dispatched to various fuel depots within Occupied Germany (Cold War).

Designed to speed up the provision of repair and replacement parts to front line units, Project MASS has been in the experimental stage with 7th Army in Europe for more than six months.

Although the supply items involved make up only 20 percent of the overall Army supply system, parts ranging from transistors to tank treads are essential to the effective operation of a field army. Formerly, the bulk stockage of these items resulted in the need for large warehouse space and in a certain amount of loss of equipment through deterioration.

The 181st Transportation Battalion delivered technical services maintenance orders from warehouses primarily in the Mannheim area to direct support units anywhere in southern Germany between the French and Czech borders. When MASS orders are placed with a storage depot, warehouse personnel "flash" a message to the Operations Room of the 181st Trans BN. Then, vehicle operators (2) of the subordinate 40th, 41st, 51st or 342nd Transportation Companies received a route order with issued taskings and dispatched. Vehicle operators of the 181st Transportation Battalion traveled on an average of 250,000 miles a month.



Truck Boneyard, 1947



Jeep Boneyard, 1947

To process a RED BALL EXPRESS personal report, you must have your WD AGO 53-55, (prior version of the DD214) displaying the name and unit assignment. You may contact the War Library with request/questions at 1.562.422.4100, located in the Pacific Time Zone.

The 181st Transportation battalion was re-designated on December 3, 1954, as Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 181st Transportation Battalion, and allotted to the Regular Army.

Activated January 28, 1955, at Turley Barracks, Mannheim, Germany and attached to 10th Transportation Group, 7th Army.

In 1956, was then assigned to the 37th Transportation Command, USAREUR and 7th Army.

In 1957, the 84th, 108th, 503rd and 519th Transportation Companies were reassigned back to USAREUR.

ORIGINAL SIGNED ON 2 June 2023

Everette F. Coppock III

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Transportation Corps, 1977-2007

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