



## RED BALL EXPRESS



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### SETTING UP A STRATEGIC HIGHWAY

During the preparatory phases of Operation Overlord (code name for the Normandy Landings) the Allies knew that victory would depend on getting a constant supply of food, fuel and munitions to the units at the front. As they advanced across France and Belgium, each of the 28 divisions of General Patton's Third Army needed 700 tonnes of supplies per day.

At the outset, the railway lines in Normandy were under constant bombardment, crippling the German army but also preventing the transport of supplies by train from the Landings beaches to the front line.

In the period before repairs to the railways could be completed, road transport was the only means of delivering supplies to the front. So on 21 August 1944 the Americans decided to set up a road supply route. Large numbers of vehicles were requisitioned and marked with a red ball. Drivers were selected: 73% of them were African-Americans.

The initial goal was to transport 72,000 tonnes of equipment and fuel from Cherbourg to the towns of Dreux and Chartres between 25 August and 5 September 1944.

This route was nicknamed the Red Ball Express.

### ORGANISATION AND STRUCTURE OF THE RED BALL EXPRESS

The Red Ball Express, running between Saint-Lô (in Manche) and Chartres (Eure et Loire), formed a route consisting of two parallel roads, each going one way and in opposite directions. The highway was for the exclusive use of truck convoys and was in operation 24 hours a day.

*"When General Patton said for you to be there, you were there if you had to drive all day and all night. Those trucks just kept on running. They'd break down, we'd fix them and they'd run again."*

James D. ROOKARD,  
Truck driver with the Red Ball Express

## RED BALL EXPRESS

The trucks would leave from depots at Cherbourg, Bricquebec and Montebourg and join the convoys leaving Saint-Lô.

The convoys themselves were split into series. The maximum permitted speed was 25 miles per hour (40 km/h).

No stops were allowed except during the "specified break" of 10 minutes, scheduled exactly 10 minutes before each fixed hour.

A distance of 70 yards between each vehicle was mandatory.

### RESULT

The Red Ball Express operation was a success. 74,585 tonnes of equipment were transported to the American troops in the space of 10 days.

The average was 899 trucks per day. On 29 August 1944 records were broken, with 12,342 tonnes of equipment carried by 5,958 vehicles.

As a result of this feat, the organisation would remain in operation until 13 November 1944. Between 25 August and 13 November 1944 **412,193 tonnes** of military equipment and fuel were transported.

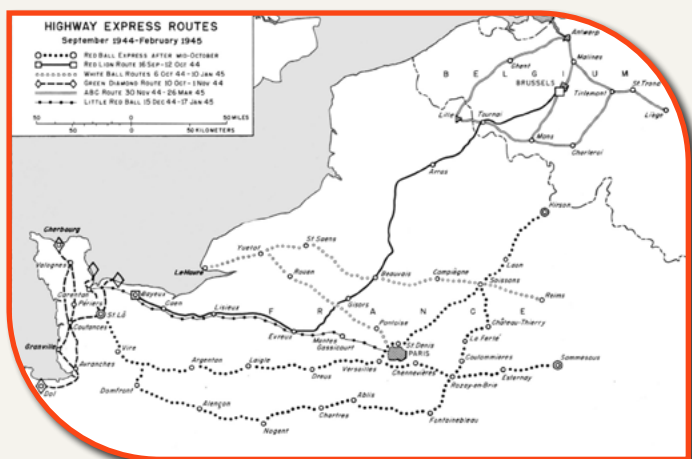
**General Eisenhower thanked the officers and men of the Red Ball Express in October 1944**

*"In every war there are two overriding missions. The first is for troops to fight the enemy. The second is to support the troops by providing the equipment they need to secure victory. The faster and further the troops advance against the enemy, the more getting supplies to them becomes essential.*

*Greater and greater quantities of materials are being landed on the Continent. And the battle to get these goods to the front is becoming more important with every passing day.*

*The Red Ball Express is the essential link between supplies and the front. To it falls the tremendous task of getting vital supplies from ports and depots to the combat troops, when and where such supplies are needed, material without which the armies might fail. To you drivers and mechanics and your officers, who keep the 'Red Ball' vehicles constantly moving, I wish to express my deep appreciation. You are doing an excellent job.*

*But the battle is not yet won, and the Red Ball Express must continue the fight and remember that every truck that reaches the combat troops brings us closer to victory."*



The priority routes (September 1944 - February 1945)

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