Indeed, a U.S. infantry division had 2,300 vehicles—nearly as many as a German panzer division. It took about 22,000 tons of shipping to move it across the ocean, triple that if its vehicles were pre-assembled. Once ashore, it consumed supplies at a prodigious rate. The Americans planned on using 45 lbs. of cargo a day to keep a single soldier fighting (a figure that would have flabbergasted the Axis). The majority of this was not represented by food (6lbs.) or even ammunition (9.5lbs), but rather by the fuel (10.5lbs) and construction materials (12lbs) needed to keep the GIs fighting.

For Operation OVERLORD (the invasion of France), the U.S. Army assembled 300,000 vehicles, 1,800 train locomotives, 20,000 rail cars, 2.6 million small arms, 2,700 artillery pieces, 300,000 telephone poles, and 7 million tons of gasoline, oil, and lubricants. Everything—tanks, trucks, bombs, bullets, K-rations, and chewing gum—had to be shipped from America. Yet OVERLORD’s logistical requirements were just a down payment on what was being consumed by the end of 1944. Now, with the bulk of the Army’s ninety-odd combat divisions busy fighting in Europe, supply requirements exploded beyond all expectations. Instead of requiring 45 lbs. per soldier, the Army now realized that it needed more like 66 lbs.—nearly a 50% increase. A single armored division, it was found, burned 100,000 gallons of gas every 24 hours in combat. Even excluding those troops in southern France, the Army was now using more than a million gallons a day. Every month, 36,000 small arms, 700 mortars, 500 tanks, and 2,400 vehicles had to be replaced, and 8 million artillery and mortar shells replenished.

By the time the Allies began approaching the German frontier, serious logistical problems were beginning to undermine the entire campaign. There simply was not enough gas and supplies to support both British Gen. Montgomery’s 21st Army Group, and Gen. Bradley’s 12th Army Group. Unsurprisingly, both men (and their subordinates) began bombarding the supreme Allied commander, General Eisenhower, with arguments as to why their offensive should be kept going at the expense of the other guy’s. In the end, there was no truly satisfactory answer. With the railroad system in France still devastated from the Allied aerial assault that preceded OVERLORD, the bulk of the logistical work had to be taken up...
by improvised systems based on trucks. This led to the creation of the famous Red Ball Express, which moved supplies from the beaches and ports of France hundreds of miles up to the front. While somewhat successful in keeping Allied armies moving, the Red Ball Express alone burned 300,000 gallons of critically-needed gas daily, and vastly accelerated wear and tear on the American motor fleet. As one general lamented, “It was the greatest killer of trucks that I could imagine.”

Presiding over the entire American logistical effort was Lt. Gen. John C. H. Lee, head of the European Theater’s Communications Zone, or COMZ. Lee commanded half a million troops—one in four GIs on the Continent. He was a controversial figure: highly religious, a stickler for rules and regulations, and not shy about using his clout for “rewarding friends, of whom he had few, and punishing enemies, of whom he had many.” Once Paris was liberated, and despite Eisenhower’s orders that the French capital’s accommodations be reserved for combat troops on leave, Lee abruptly abandoned his pre-fab HQ in Cherbourg for the attractions of the City of Lights, commandeering 315 hotels for his hordes of clerks and functionaries, and reserving the entirety of the sumptuous Hôtel George V as his personal residence. He traveled in a red leather-upholstered limousine, or aboard a private railcar, along with a retinue of forty-odd personnel, including movie mogul Samuel Goldwyn’s former publicist. Not surprisingly, combat generals and troops alike both despised him. “Jesus Christ Himself”—a play on Lee’s initials—was a common epithet. Gen. George Patton, who had known Lee since West Point, was more direct, referring to his classmate as “a glib liar,” and “a pompous little son-of-a-bitch.” But few dared openly cross COMZ’s overlord for fear of their supplies suddenly running dry.

FURTHER READINGS:
David Colley, The Road to Victory: ... Red Ball Express.
Carl Gray, Railroading on Five Continents.

Announcements:
Vietnam War Roundtable - 15 Apr. 2019 - Reporting on the War - Impact o the News Media - mnvietnam.org - rldieitrich@mnmilitarymuseum.org
Twin Cities Civil War Round Table -21 May 2019 - Kentucky Raider: Pvt Commodore Perry Snell - www.tccwrt.com - info@tccwrt.com
St. Croix Valley Civil War Round Table - 22 apr. 2019 - Wisconsin in the Civil War - 715-386-1268 - rossand-

We need volunteers to drive our veterans to and from meetings. Please contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or coldpatton@yahoo.com

R. G. Rupenthal, Logistical Support of the Armies, 1, map 17.