
The Round Tablette

Founding Editor: James W. Gerber, MD (1951–2009)

Thursday, 11 April 2019

32:11 Volume 32 Number 11

Published by WW II History Round Table

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www.mn-ww2roundtable.org

Welcome to the April session of the Dr. Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Round Table. Tonight's speaker is Hank Cox, author of *The General Who Wore Six Stars: The Inside Story of John C. H. Lee*. Veterans of the U.S. Army join him to retell the value of logistics in the European Theater.

The United States was unique among the major combatants of WWII in being proximate to none of the battlegrounds on which it would have to fight. Instead, it was forced to transport all the matériel for its war making efforts across two giant bodies of water—the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Given this, the Americans had little choice but to develop the world's most sophisticated supply system to support their military. Indeed, as U.S. Army historians noted, by the time of WWII, logistics had “grown from the comparatively humdrum, routine activity it once was into a very complex ‘Big Business,’ embracing a considerable part, some would say the greater part, of all the business of modern war.”

The mere suggestion that logistics was somehow on par with conducting combat would have been considered the vilest sort of heresy in either the German or Japanese armies. For them, war making was seen as an art form practiced by great captains, with the quartermaster little more than a lackey. But for the Americans, warfare in World War II had a distinctly managerial quality. The keys to success lay in ensuring that the right stuff, and plenty of it, was delivered to the right spot at the right time. Referring to its logistical tendencies, one American general noted, “The American army does not solve its problems. It overwhelms them.” Unsurprisingly, of the 80 volumes of the WWII U.S. Army histories, seven of them—comprising a staggering 5,500 pages—are devoted to the topic of logistics.

At the root of the matter was the U.S. determination to equip its entire army on a lavish scale, with extensive mechanization, numerous heavy weapons, and firepower deluxe. Unlike the German Army, where three-quarters of its divisions were dependent on horse-drawn transport, every U.S. division was fully motorized. Indeed, a U.S. infantry division had 2,300 vehi-

cles—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

If you are a veteran, or know a veteran, of one of these campaigns – contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or coldpatton@yahoo.com

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:

Robert Coakley and Richard Leighton, *Global Logistics and Strategy, 1943-1945*.

Roland Rupenthal, *The European Theater of Operations, Logistical Support of the Armies, Vol. II, September 1944-May 1945*.

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 of the News Media* - mnvietnam.org - rldietrich@mmilitarymuseum.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-

haines@comcast.net

Civil War Symposium - Apr. 2020 - info@tccwrt.com

Minnesota Military Museum, Camp Ripley, 15000 Hwy 115, Little Falls, MN 56345 - 320-616-6050 - <http://www.mmmilitarymuseum.org/>

Minnesota Air Guard Museum - 612-713-2523 - www.mnangmuseum.org

8th AF Historical Society of MN, KC Hall Bloomington, Wednesdays at 1130 - <https://www.8thmn.org>.

Friends of Ft. Snelling - www.fortsnelling.org

World Without Genocide - 651-695-7621 - <http://www.worldwithoutgenocide.org/>

Fagen Fighters WWII Museum, Granite Falls, MN - Air show - 20 June 2020 - 320-564-6644 - <http://www.fagenfighterswwiimuseum.org>.

Wings of the North Airshow - Eden Prairie - 13-14 July 2019 - 952-746-6100 - www.wotn.org

Military History Book Club, Har Mar Barnes & Noble - 27 Feb. 2019 - Gaudi, *African Kaiser: General Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck ... 1918* - sdaubenspeck52@gmail.com

Winston Churchill Book Club - lin.hopkins@hotmail.com

Alliance Francaise 612-332-0436 - www.afmsp.org -

Honor Flight - Jerry Kyser - 651-338-2717 - crazyjer-ry45@hotmail.com

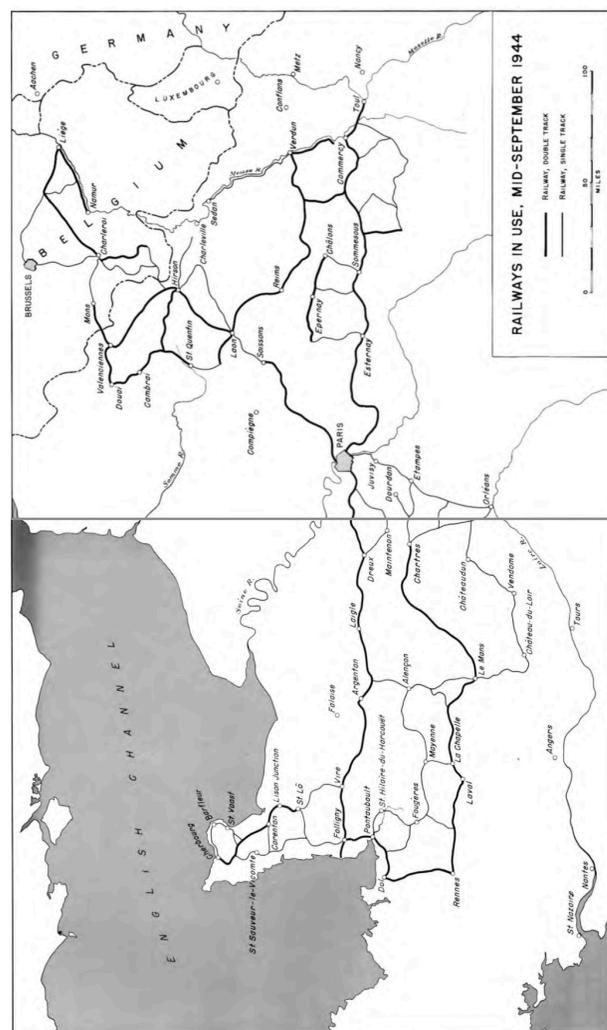
CAF - Commemorative Air Force - 651-455-6942 - www.cafmn.org

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

Round Table Schedule 2019

9 May D-Day

**The Round Table is a 501.c.3 non-profit.
We would greatly appreciate your supporting the HCDWW2RT!**



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